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## 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



## Sunday, July 27

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

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

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.

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

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

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

## Monday, July 28

Senior Menu: Sloopy joe on bun, oven roasted potatoes, winter blend, apricots.

Senior Citizens meet at the Groton Community Center, with Potluck at noon.

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

Jr. Legion Baseball Tournament in Groton

Jr. Teeners Regional TBD

Groton Soccer Camp

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

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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.**

## AI Action Plan

President Donald Trump unveiled his administration's AI policy yesterday. The 23-page framework outlines actions the government will pursue across dozens of federal agencies to promote its AI goals and outpace China on development.

The policy broadly seeks to accelerate AI innovation in the US. That includes loosening environmental regulations to speed up the construction of data centers. The government will also invest in training efforts for high-demand positions like electricians and HVAC technicians. In all, there are over 90 federal policy actions the government aims to take within one year.

Trump signed three executive orders yesterday to kick-start the policy effort—one on fast-tracking permits for data centers, one to promote exporting AI tools to friendly nations, and one restricting federal contracts to AI chatbots the administration deems to be free of ideological bias.

## Idaho Murder Sentencing

Former criminology student Bryan Kohberger was sentenced yesterday to four consecutive life sentences without the possibility of parole for the murders of University of Idaho students in 2022. He was also sentenced to 10 years in prison for burglary. The sentencing caps a yearslong case that had puzzled investigators.

In mid-November 2022, the four victims were found stabbed to death in an off-campus home in Moscow, Idaho. After weeks without an arrest, police matched Kohberger's vehicle to surveillance footage of a white sedan near the victims' home. DNA on a knife sheath at the crime scene matched samples recovered from Kohberger's parents' trash.

Kohberger, who was pursuing a doctorate in criminology at a nearby university, originally pleaded not guilty. He changed his plea earlier this month, avoiding a trial carrying a potential death sentence. Neither he nor investigators have publicly revealed a motive, despite calls for an explanation by the victims' family members.

## Global Climate Ruling

The United Nations' top court ruled yesterday that failing to combat climate change could violate international law. Though nonbinding, the opinion asserts a sustainable environment as a human right, laying a foundation for global agreements and future lawsuits.

The decision, by the International Court of Justice's 15 judges, follows a campaign by Vanuatu to clarify countries' climate obligations. The 83-island archipelago in the South Pacific ranks as the 20th most climate-vulnerable nation, partly due to rising sea levels and poor infrastructure. Over 130 countries backed Vanuatu; top polluters China and the US argued existing climate agreements were sufficient.

The court said failure to adopt ambitious climate plans would breach international law. The opinion applies to all UN member states and allows developing nations to seek compensation from major emitters for climate-related damages.

The ICJ's ruling follows similar opinions by Latin America's top human rights court this month and Europe's last year.

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## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Matthew Perry's former doctor, Salvador Plasencia, pleads guilty to four counts of ketamine distribution related to Perry's October 2023 fatal overdose.

Venus Williams, 45, becomes the second-oldest woman in history to win a tour-level singles match with first-round victory at Citi Open in Washington, DC.

Kansas City Royals pitcher Rich Hill, 45, becomes oldest player since 2012 to start an MLB game.

ESPN and NFL close to signing deal for ESPN to purchase NFL Network and RedZone for a reported \$2B.

## Science & Technology

Google DeepMind releases AI tool that fills in missing words and phrases in ancient Latin texts, predicts date and location of writing.

Physicists demonstrate gold can be superheated to 14 times its melting point while remaining solid; results challenge longstanding theory of how materials behave under extreme temperatures.

Researchers use CRISPR to prevent mosquitoes from transmitting malaria; replacing a single molecule that stops the disease-causing parasite inside the insects from spreading.

## Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +0.8%, Dow +1.1%, Nasdaq +0.6%) after the US strikes a trade deal with Japan.

Tesla reports 16% quarterly drop in auto revenue, marking the second consecutive quarter of revenue declines.

Alphabet tops Q2 earnings estimates, raises spending forecast to roughly \$85B.

Chipotle shares fall 9.8% in after-hours trading after the chain trimmed its forecast for same-store sales growth.

US existing home sales fall 2.7% month over month in June, marking a nine-month low; median home price of \$435,300 is up 2% from a year ago and the highest median home price for any June on record.

## Politics & World Affairs

National Intelligence Director Tulsi Gabbard releases previously classified report, alleges Obama-era intelligence officials overemphasized evidence Russia preferred a Trump win in 2016.

Florida judge denies Justice Department's request to unseal grand jury transcripts from the investigation into Jeffrey Epstein.

Columbia University agrees to pay \$200M to settle federal allegations the school failed to protect Jewish students; university also agrees to oversight of its hiring and admissions process, will share some information with immigration authorities.

State Department opens investigation into Harvard University's participation in foreign visa program.

Ukrainian activists protest Zelenskyy-backed law weakening anticorruption watchdogs in first major antigovernment demonstrations since Russia-Ukraine war.

Over 100 aid organizations warn of mass starvation in Gaza, accuse Israeli government of restricting, delaying food deliveries.

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**Work on the new media center at Dolney Field has been progressing very quickly (until the rain!)**



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## South Dakota Mosquito



SD WNV (as of July 23):

3 human cases (Brookings, Marshall, Spink) and 1 death

1 human viremic blood donor (Brown)

7 counties with positive mosquito pools (Beadle, Brown, Brookings, Codington, Hughes, Lincoln, Minnehaha)

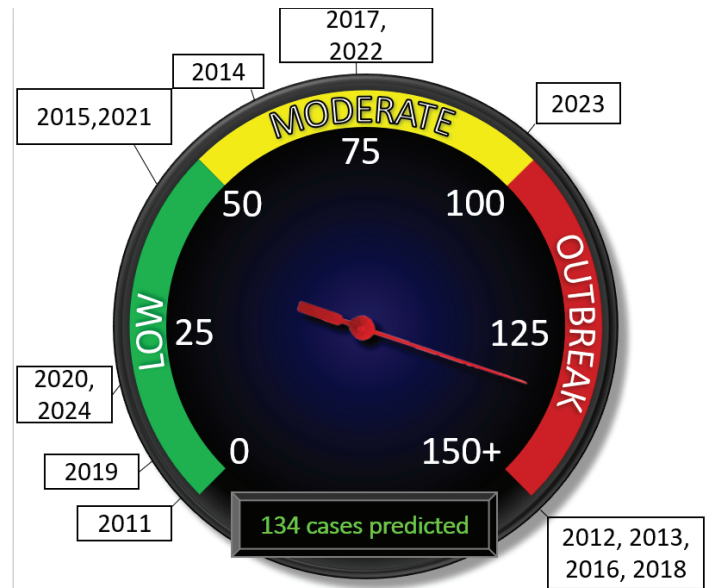
US WNV (as of July 15): 49 cases (AL, AZ, CA, GA, KS, LA, MS, ND, NE, OH, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA)

WNV Prediction Model – Total Number of Cases Projected for 2025, South Dakota (as of July 23)

Total sites collecting mosquitoes: 54

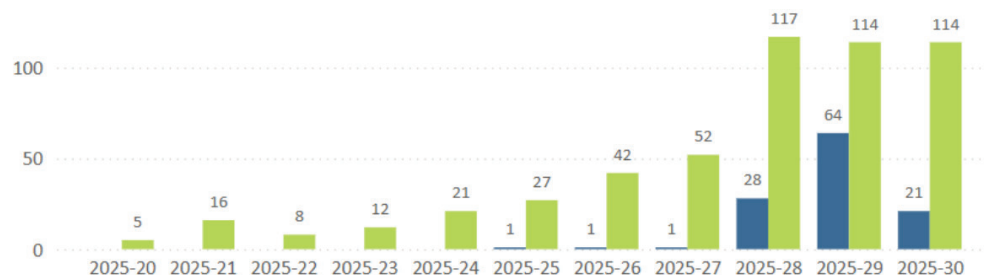
Total mosquito pools tested: 644

% positivity: 18.01%

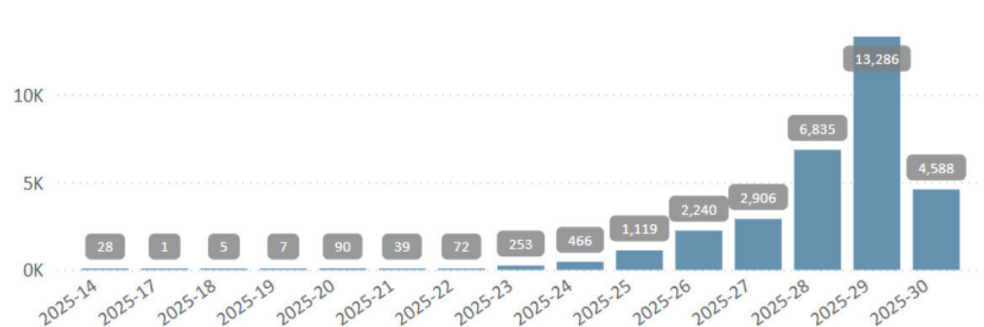


Number of Mosquito Pools Tested by MMWR Week and Status

Test Status: ● Positive ● Negative



Culex Mosquitoes Collected by MMWR Week







## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### **Coke's cane sugar announcement bugs some farmers, but is unlikely to impact South Dakota corn prices**

**State lacks refineries for production of high-fructose corn syrup**

**BY: JOHN HULT - JULY 23, 2025 5:10 PM**

Very little of South Dakota's corn is used to produce sweetened beverages, but the crop's boosters in the state say a nationwide shift toward cane sugar is an unwelcome sign for corn farmers.

Coca-Cola announced its intention to offer cane sugar-sweetened beverages this week. The company said its new beverages are "designed to complement the company's strong core portfolio," rather than replace its regular products, which are sweetened by high-fructose corn syrup.

The announcement during the company's second-quarter earnings report confirmed a decision President Donald Trump talked about on Truth Social, his own social media platform. Robert F. Kennedy Jr., Trump's secretary of Health and Human Services, has blamed the widely used corn-based sweetener for contributing to a U.S. obesity epidemic.

Cane sugar and high-fructose corn syrup are nutritionally interchangeable, according to the American Medical Association and most scientific studies on the topic. But concerns about the syrup's status as a processed food product from high-profile advocates, including from Kennedy during his former career as an author and activist, have helped push consumer sentiment toward cane sugar.

Mexico, the United Kingdom, Spain and France are among the countries where Coca-Cola is sweetened with cane sugar.



**Corn grows in a field in southeastern South Dakota in August 2023.**

(Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

### **Syrup's place in the corn market**

Farmers in the U.S. plant more than 90 million acres of corn a year, but only 3-4% is refined to produce

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high-fructose corn syrup for use in everything from beverages to breads.

That's significant enough to rankle corn groups nationally. The Corn Refiners Association responded to Trump's announcement by saying the move would hurt U.S. farmers and lead to a loss of manufacturing jobs.

South Dakota produced the sixth-largest corn harvest in the U.S. in 2024, but its corn crop is less likely than most to be turned into syrup. Most South Dakota corn is used for ethanol and livestock feed. There are no "wet mills" in the state for syrup production, said DaNita Murray, executive director of the trade group South Dakota Corn.

Even so, Murray calls the move from Coca-Cola "a marketing decision" that throws the health value of her organization's commodity into question, and potentially pushes down demand for it.

"We firmly believe that demand is demand, and we don't like the accusation that we're raising poison," Murray said.

Changes to demand could ultimately impact South Dakota producers, Murray said, particularly if the U.S. were to follow the lead of some other countries and restrict the use of high-fructose corn syrup. Congresswoman Anna Paulina Luna, R-Florida, introduced legislation last year that would ban the product.

Murray pointed to industry-funded research from North Dakota State University that concluded such a scenario would lead to a price decline for corn of between 15 and 34 cents per bushel, with associated reductions in corn cash receipts estimated between \$2.2 billion and \$5.1 billion.

Under that hypothetical scenario, South Dakota's local corn prices would suffer, Murray said.

## **South Dakota immediate impacts: Perception more than prices**

That's an important point for Doug Sombke of the South Dakota Farmers Union. He's not so sure a dip in demand for corn from a loss of corn syrup production would make much of a difference.

The price of corn is always a concern, Sombke said, but he doesn't see corn syrup usage as making even a penny's difference per bushel unless something radical happens.

"Really, in the grand scheme of things, for the family farmer, it's so small," Sombke said.

Sombke would like to see more ethanol production and more diversity in farm operations and crops in the field. The price of corn hasn't kept pace with the cost of doing business, he said, even as high fructose corn syrup has proliferated across the U.S. food system.

Sombke sees the fight over cane sugar as one focused more on the commodity than the producer. In the U.S., cane sugar production is centered in southern states like Florida, Georgia and Louisiana.

"This is cane versus corn," Sombke said.

Corn has advantages in that fight, according to Jim Ketelhut, president of the South Dakota Corn Utilization Council. He isn't worried about an immediate impact to prices, but said it's unfortunate that corn has "gotten a black eye" in the public consciousness.

The switch from cane sugar to corn syrup decades ago was a matter of price and utility, he said. If "sugar is sugar," as Ketelhut put it, there's little but extra cost to be gained by a shift away from corn syrup.

"The reason it's used so much is that it's highly available, and it's economical for the end users," Ketelhut said. "Those are the good things nobody talks about."

*John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux Falls Argus Leader.*



## Passage of federal Medicaid work requirements leads SD to withdraw its own proposal

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JULY 23, 2025 3:16 PM

South Dakota will withdraw its Medicaid expansion work requirements proposal now that President Donald Trump has signed federal requirements into law, state Department of Social Services Secretary Matt Althoff told South Dakota Searchlight.

"We don't have the choice," Althoff said.

States have to apply for a federal waiver to impose their own requirements. The new law, passed earlier this month, "constricts any waivers" more lenient than the federal requirements, Althoff added.

The state's proposal would have implemented fewer paperwork and tracking requirements than at the federal level, officials said during a public hearing process. Althoff called the waiver application a potential "exercise in futility" shortly after it became clear that federal requirements could be adopted.

The department proposed its work requirements this spring after South Dakota voters passed a constitutional amendment in November allowing the state to seek work requirements for the federal-state program.

Medicaid is government-funded health insurance for people with low incomes. South Dakotans voted in 2022 to expand Medicaid to adults with incomes up to 138% of the poverty level, a decision that allowed the state to capitalize on a 90% federal funding match.

The federal work requirements will mandate that those between the ages of 19 and 65 who rely on the program work, volunteer or go to school 80 hours a month. Participants will have to meet those requirements a month before they enroll, and Medicaid renewal will be moved from an annual basis to every six months.

The federal government allows exceptions for people who are disabled, pregnant, eligible for the Indian Health Service, in foster care, were formerly in foster care and are younger than 26, or were released from incarceration in the last 90 days, among others.

South Dakota's plan would not have set a number of hours to be eligible, but would have required Medicaid recipients to work, train, attend school, or serve as a caretaker for a child or elderly or disabled



**A South Dakota Department of Social Services economic assistance application.** (Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

person in their home, unless they qualified for an exemption. Compliance with the state-level work rules would have been reviewed on an annual basis, at the time of Medicaid renewal, rather than at the time of application.

South Dakota Medicaid Director Heather Petermann said during the public hearing process that the state-proposed requirements were intended to "encourage" work without "trying to track arbitrary work hours." The federal work requirements must be implemented by the end of 2026.

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

## Federal changes to food assistance will cost South Dakota \$5 million annually

**Nonprofit is worried that expanded work requirements will increase food insecurity**

**BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JULY 23, 2025 7:00 AM**

Federal changes to a food assistance program will cost South Dakota \$5 million starting next fiscal year, according to the state Bureau of Finance and Management.

The situation "could be much worse," said state Department of Social Services Secretary Matt Althoff, given that the estimate is significantly lower than costs anticipated in other states.

President Donald Trump signed the policy changes for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program into law on the Fourth of July as part of broader legislation known as the One Big Beautiful Bill Act. The SNAP provisions include expanded work requirements and requiring some states to match a percentage of benefits.

Previously, the federal government covered 100% of the benefit cost.

South Dakota's \$5 million price tag comes from a shift in some of the program's administrative burden from the federal level to the state, according to state officials.

Budget impacts in other states include an estimated \$133 million in Connecticut and \$240 million in Maryland. Those states will be required to match federal SNAP benefits at 15%, while South Dakota won't have any match to pay. That's because the new law allows states to avoid a match if their SNAP error rate is below 6%.



**At a farm market in St. Petersburg, Florida, on April 14, 2012, SNAP recipients were able to use their Electronic Benefits Transfer cards for food.** (Photo by Lance Cheung/USDA)

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South Dakota has the lowest error rate in the nation at 3.28%. SNAP payment error rates measure how accurately a state determines eligibility and benefit amounts for recipients.

Althoff credited the low error rate to his staff's "due diligence" and focus on accuracy. South Dakotans currently receiving SNAP benefits should not see a change in the level of benefits they're receiving due to an increase in the state's administrative burden, he said.

The \$5 million cost will impact other parts of the department's budget or the broader state budget, he added.

"We're not squirreling away that money right now, so there's going to be a reduction in services or something else if that's to be achieved," Althoff said. He did not suggest potential cuts.

In May — the most recent month of available data — 37,712 South Dakota households received SNAP benefits, costing the federal government \$14.9 million. Of the 75,282 people receiving benefits, 45% were children.

Stacey Andernacht, vice president of public relations for Feeding South Dakota, is grateful for Althoff's assurances about the minimal impact to beneficiaries. But she worries that people affected by expanded work requirements for SNAP won't be able to obtain the food they need.

The requirements include working or volunteering at least 80 hours a month, unless a person meets exemptions.

Nonpartisan policy institute Center for American Progress estimated in June that 14,000 South Dakotans would be at risk of losing some or all SNAP benefits due to expanded work requirements.

Work requirement exemptions were removed for homeless people and veterans, able-bodied people from 55 to 64 years old, people caring for a dependent child older than 13, and people 24 or younger who aged out of foster care at 18. Exemptions were added for tribal members covered by the Indian Health Service. The law did not set a deadline for when the new work requirements will be implemented.

Andernacht said she expects the largest impact to be among older adults and adults with teenage children. They may seek help from nonprofits like Feeding South Dakota and other food banks to meet their needs, she said.

According to the state Department of Social Services, there were 1,714 able-bodied SNAP recipients between the ages of 55 and 64 as of July 1.

Andernacht recommended families continue to use SNAP benefits as normal until federal guidance is released. She said adults who fall within the expanded work requirement categories should be proactive in seeking work.

Feeding South Dakota reported a \$2.5 million budget shortfall in May due to a loss of federal support alongside a 12% increase in demand for mobile food distribution across the state, Andernacht added.

"We'll put roughly the same amount of pounds into the state as last year, but we're serving more people every month," Andernacht said. "The only way to serve more is to stretch. You either serve more people less food or you serve fewer people and the same amount of food."

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



## US House grapples with college athletes' rights as two panels approve bill on player pay

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - JULY 23, 2025 6:10 PM

WASHINGTON — A measure that would set a national framework for college athletes' compensation got one step closer to becoming law Wednesday after advancing in two separate U.S. House panels.

The bill's fate remains uncertain as it makes its way through Congress, and Democrats argue that the legislation would give "unchecked authority" to the NCAA on athletes' pay and fails to provide labor and employment protections for athletes.

Two panels with jurisdiction over the matter — the House Energy and Commerce and Education and Workforce committees — approved the legislation, known as the Student Compensation and Opportunity through Rights and Endorsements Act, or "SCORE Act."

The Energy and Commerce Committee's vote fell along party lines, 30-23.

On the Education and Workforce panel, the 18-17 vote featured all Republicans who were present voting in favor of the measure except Rep. Michael Baumgartner of Washington state. All Democrats on that panel voted against the measure. GOP Reps. Kevin Kiley of California and Elise Stefanik of New York did not vote.

Rep. Tim Walberg, chair of the House Committee on Education and Workforce, said the bill "brings much needed stability to college athletics."

"Since the NCAA lifted Name, Image and Likeness and transfer rules in 2021, college athletics have been in a period of chaos as constant litigation and efforts to classify student-athletes as employees jeopardize thousands of academic and athletic opportunities," the Michigan Republican said during his committee's consideration of the bill.

Kentucky GOP Rep. Brett Guthrie, chair of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, said during his panel's markup that "without this bill, student-athletes will be left to fend for themselves against bad actors, non-revenue generating sports could face devastating cuts and legal uncertainty will continue to hang over all of college sports."

The full House will not consider the legislation until at least September, when members return from their summer recess that began one day ahead of schedule Wednesday.

### A federal standard

The effort, nominally bipartisan, comes as the college sports world grapples with the fallout from the NCAA's 2021 guidelines that let student-athletes profit from their name, image and likeness, or NIL. A patchwork of laws exists across states, and there is currently no federal NIL law.

A federal judge in June approved the terms of a nearly \$2.8 billion antitrust settlement that paved the way for schools to directly pay athletes.

The bill would prohibit college athletes from being recognized as employees and would require colleges to "provide comprehensive academic support and career counseling services to student athletes that



**Tiger Stadium at Louisiana State University pictured on Sept. 13, 2024.** (Matthew Perschall for Louisiana Illuminator)



include life skills development programs," such as those regarding mental health, nutrition, strength and conditioning and financial literacy.

The bill's lead sponsors are GOP Rep. Gus Bilirakis of Florida and Democratic Reps. Janelle Bynum of Oregon and Shomari Figures of Alabama.

Guthrie, Walberg and GOP Reps. Jim Jordan of Ohio, Lisa McClain of Michigan, Scott Fitzgerald of Wisconsin and Russell Fry of South Carolina were also original co-sponsors.

## **'Extreme employment ban'**

Rep. Bobby Scott, ranking member of the House Committee on Education and Workforce, said that "instead of holding the revenue-rich NCAA and its powerful conferences accountable, the SCORE Act provides a series of blank checks and bailouts that will not uplift or protect college athletes," during the panel's markup.

The Virginia Democrat said the bill "imposes obligations without oversight, fails to include concrete protections and outright bans college athletes from ever having labor or employment protections."

"This extreme employment ban will not only open the door for further exploitation of college athletes and protect athletic departments' bottom lines more than the students they serve, it is a broad stripping of athletes' rights, and that should not be the solution," he said.

Rep. Frank Pallone, a New Jersey Democrat and ranking member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, voiced similar concerns during his committee's markup.

The measure "fails to offer meaningful protections to college athletes and completely ignores the true crisis facing colleges and universities," he said, adding that President Donald Trump "continues to destroy America's higher education system with reduced federal research dollars, taxes on endowments and cuts to federal student aid."

Pallone also said the bill "gives the NCAA and conferences nearly limitless and unchecked authority to govern how athletes get paid, if they can transfer schools, and how much time they can be required to spend training, traveling and competing."

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

## **Trump's AI Action Plan removes 'red tape' for AI developers and data centers, punishes states that act alone**

**BY: PAIGE GROSS - JULY 23, 2025 4:21 PM**

The Trump administration wants to greatly expand the development and use of advanced artificial intelligence, including rolling back environmental rules to spur building of power-thirsty data centers and punishing states that attempt to regulate AI on their own.

The administration's action plan, called "Winning the AI Race: America's AI Action Plan," released on Wednesday, is a result of six months of research by tech advisors, after Trump removed President Joe Biden's signature AI guardrails on his first day in office. The plan takes a hands-off approach to AI safeguards, and invests in getting more American workers to use AI in their daily lives.

"To win the AI race, the U.S. must lead in innovation, infrastructure, and global partnerships," AI and Crypto Czar David Sacks said in a statement. "At the same time, we must center American workers and avoid Orwellian uses of AI. This Action Plan provides a roadmap for doing that."

The action plan outlines three major pillars — accelerate AI innovation, build American AI infrastructure and lead in international AI diplomacy and security.

The Trump administration says that to accelerate AI in the U.S., it needs to "remove red tape," around "onerous" AI regulations. The plan recommends the Office of Science and Technology Policy inquire with businesses and the public about federal regulations that hinder AI innovation, and suggests the federal

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government end funding to states "with burdensome AI regulations."

The plan does say that these actions should not interfere with states' ability to pass AI laws that are not "unduly restrictive," despite unsuccessful attempts by Congressional Republicans to impose an AI moratorium for the states.

The plan also says that free speech should be prioritized in AI, saying models must be trained so that "truth, rather than social engineering agendas" are the focus of model outputs. The plan recommends that the Department of Commerce and National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), revise the NIST AI Risk Management Framework to eliminate references to misinformation, DEI and climate change.

The Trump administration also pushes for AI to be more widely adopted in government roles, manufacturing, science and in the Department of Defense, and proposes increased funding and regulatory sandboxes — separate trial spaces for AI to be developed — to do so.

To support the proposed increases in AI use, the plan outlines a streamlined permitting process for data centers, which includes lowering or dropping environmental regulations under the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act and others. It also proposes making federal lands available for data center construction, and a push that American products should be used in building the infrastructure.

The Action Plan warns of cybersecurity risks and potential exposure to adversarial threats, saying that the government must develop secure frontier AI systems with national security agencies and develop "AI compute control enforcement," to ensure security in AI systems and with semiconductor chips. It encourages collaboration with "like-minded nations" working toward AI models with shared values, but says it will counter Chinese influence.

"These clear-cut policy goals set expectations for the Federal Government to ensure America sets the technological gold standard worldwide, and that the world continues to run on American technology," Secretary of State and Acting National Security Advisor Marco Rubio said in a statement.

The policy goals outlined in the plan fall in line with the deregulatory attitude Trump took during his campaign, as he more closely aligned himself with Silicon Valley tech giants, many of whom turned Trump donors. The plan paves the way for continued unfettered growth of American AI models, and outlines the huge energy and computing power needed to keep up with those goals.

In an address at the "Winning the AI Race" Summit Wednesday evening, President Donald Trump called for a "single federal standard" regulating AI, not a state-by-state approach.

"You can't have three or four states holding you up. You can't have a state with standards that are so high that it's going to hold you up," Trump said. "You have to have a federal rule and regulation."

The summit was hosted by the Hill & Valley Forum, a group of lawmakers and venture capitalists and the All-In Podcast, which is co-hosted by AI Czar Sacks,



**David Sacks, U.S. President Donald Trump's "AI and Crypto Czar", speaks to President Trump as he signs a series of executive orders in the Oval Office of the White House on Jan. 23, 2025 in Washington, D.C. Trump signed a range of executive orders pertaining to issues including crypto currency and artificial intelligence.** (Photo by Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images)

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In addition to discussing the AI action plan, Trump signed executive orders to fast track data center permitting, expand AI exports including chips, software and data storage, and one that prohibits the federal government from procuring AI that has "partisan bias or ideological agendas."

He spoke about the need for the U.S. to stay ahead in the global AI race, saying that the technology brings the "potential for bad as well as for good," but that wasn't reason enough to "retreat" from technological advancement. The U.S. is entering a "golden age," he said in his speech.

"It will be powered by American energy. It will be run on American technology improved by American artificial intelligence, and it will make America richer, stronger, greater, freer, and more powerful than ever before," Trump said.

During the address, Trump addressed his evolving relationship with tech CEOs, calling out Amazon, Google, Microsoft for investing \$320 billion in data centers and AI infrastructure this year.

"I didn't like them so much my first term, when I was running, I wouldn't say I was thrilled with them, but I've gotten to know them and like them," Trump said. "And I think they got to like me, but I think they got to like my policies, maybe much more than me."

Sam Altman, CEO of OpenAI — one of the tech giants that stands to flourish under the proposed policies — spoke Tuesday about the productivity and innovation potential that AI has unlocked. The growth of AI in the last five years has surprised even him, Altman said. But it also poses very real risks, he said, mentioning emotional attachment and overreliance on AI and foreign risks.

"Without a drop of malevolence from anyone, society can just veer in a sort of strange direction," Altman said.

*Paige Gross is a Philadelphia-based reporter covering the evolving technology industry for States Newsroom. Her coverage involves how congress and individual states are regulating new and growing technologies, how technology plays a role in our everyday lives and what people ought to know to interact with technology.*

## US-Japan trade deal sets 15% tax on imported vehicles, \$550B investment in US

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - JULY 23, 2025 4:16 PM

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump said late Tuesday he struck a "massive" trade deal with Japan, lowering his threatened tariffs on Japanese products.

The deal, according to Japanese negotiators, will include a lower rate on the country's top export: automobiles.

Trump's declaration of a new framework comes as a legal fight over a large portion of his tariff policy will be heard in federal appeals court next week.

The president announced via Truth Social Tuesday evening that Japan had agreed "at my direction" to invest \$550 billion in the United States and will open its markets to more American products, including cars, trucks, rice and other agricultural goods.

In exchange, Trump agreed to lower what he calls "reciprocal" import taxes on Japanese products to 15%, down from the 25% rate he threatened in early July.

Tariffs are import taxes paid by U.S. companies and individuals who purchase goods from other countries. While some details remained unclear, Trump said the agreement is "the largest Deal ever made," and continued in a post on his online platform that "there has never been anything like it."

Japan's government confirmed the new deal Wednesday. Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi said the parties agreed to a 15% tariff on Japanese vehicles and auto parts imported into the U.S. without any volume restrictions — down from the blanket 25% U.S. tariff on foreign cars that went into effect in April. Hayashi delivered the remarks through an English translation during a morning press conference.

Jeff Schott, senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, said securing \$550 billion in investment from Japan would set the agreement apart from other trade deals.



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"There isn't a lot of information about over what period of time this would cover, and how it would be financed, and things like that, but the headline number of \$550 billion is certainly notable, if it's believable and if it's achievable," Schott said Wednesday in an interview with States Newsroom.

While specifics are unknown, possible investments from Japan might include Nippon Steel's takeover of U.S. Steel, or a joint venture to export liquified natural gas from Alaska.

Schott said the trade deal "is likely going to set a template" for trade talks with other nations, including ongoing negotiations this week in Washington, D.C., with South Korean officials.

## Aug. 1 deadline set

The news of a deal with Japan came just after the White House announced new trade arrangements with Indonesia and the Philippines ahead of a self-imposed Aug. 1 deadline, when steeper tariffs are set to trigger on trading partners around the world.

Trump had threatened Japan in a letter earlier this month with a 25% "reciprocal" tariff on all Japanese goods set to begin Aug. 1, in addition to special sectoral and national security tariffs on foreign automobiles, at 25%, and imported steel and aluminum, which now sit at 50%.

The president shocked global markets in early April when he announced a universal 10% tariff on every foreign good coming into the U.S., plus staggering additional "reciprocal" import taxes on major trading partners based on the country's trading relationship with the U.S.

Trump initially slapped a 24% reciprocal tariff on Japan, which imports less from the U.S. than U.S. entities buy from Japan. The U.S. ran a \$69.4 billion trade deficit with Japan in 2024, according to the Census Bureau.

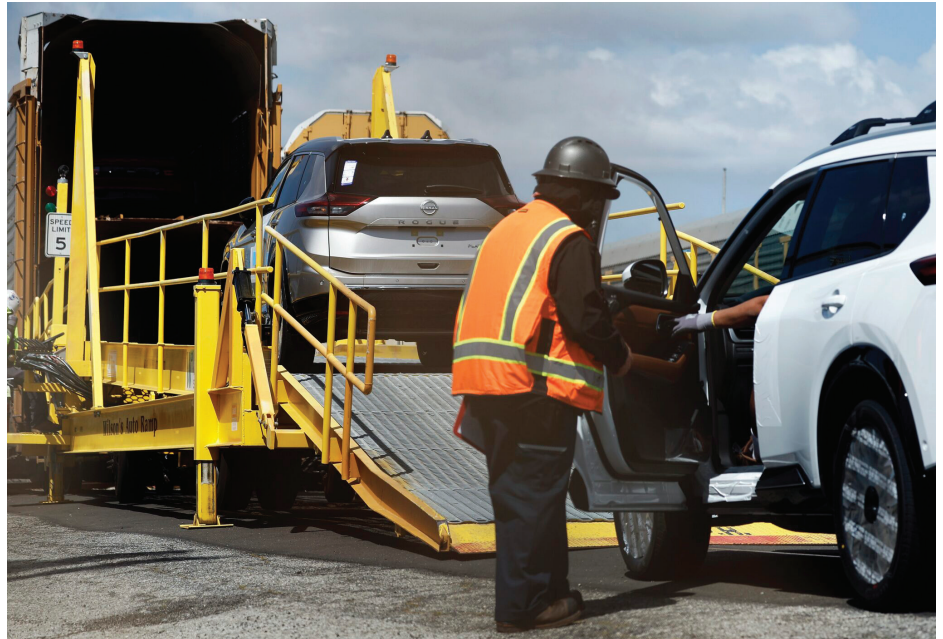
Trump has twice delayed his so-called reciprocal tariffs on other economies as his administration attempts to leverage the threats into agreements. The administration has yet to strike a new deal with the European Union, another major trading partner.

## Court hearing

The U.S. Appeals Court for the Federal Circuit is set to hear oral arguments July 31 over Trump's reciprocal tariffs, which he triggered by declaring international trade a national emergency under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act.

The U.S. Court of International Trade struck down Trump's emergency tariffs as unconstitutional in a May 28 decision, following two legal challenges brought by a handful of business owners and a dozen Democratic state attorneys general.

Arizona, Colorado, Maine, Minnesota, Nevada, New Mexico and Oregon were among the states that brought the suit.



**New Nissan cars are driven onto a rail car to be transported from an automobile processing terminal located at the Port of Los Angeles on April 3, 2024 in Wilmington, California.**

(Photo by Mario Tama/Getty Images)



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V.O.S. Selections, a New York-based company that imports wine and spirits from 16 countries, led the business plaintiffs. Others included a Utah-based plastics producer, a Virginia-based children's electricity learning kit maker, a Pennsylvania-based fishing gear company and a Vermont-based women's cycling apparel company.

Upon appeal from the White House, the Federal Circuit allowed Trump's tariffs to remain in place while the case moved forward.

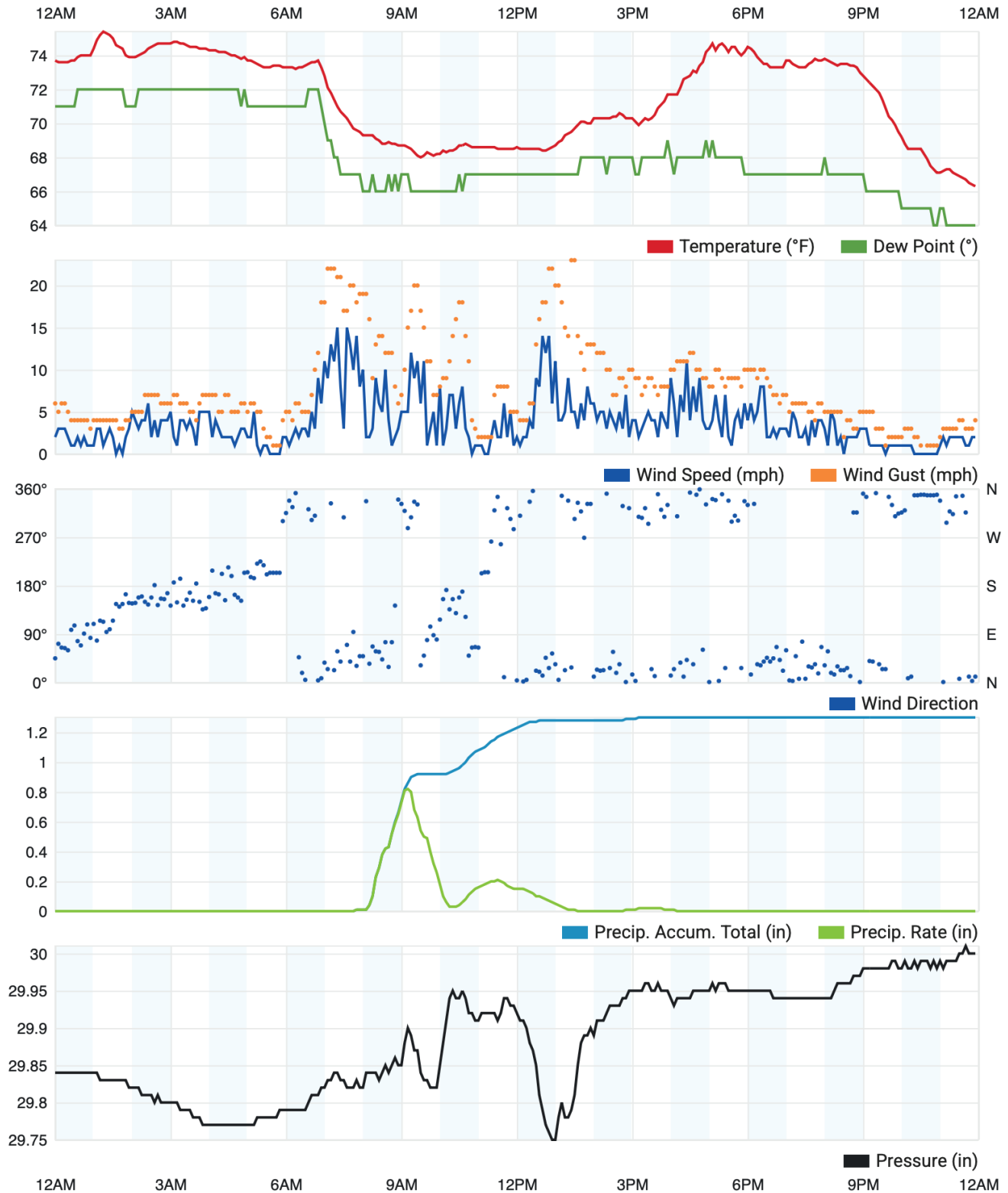
*Ashley Murray covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.*

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

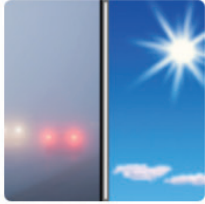
July 23, 2025



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Today



**High: 84 °F**

Patchy Fog  
then Sunny

Tonight



**Low: 62 °F**

Partly Cloudy

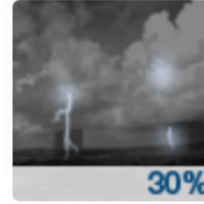
Friday



**High: 85 °F**

Mostly Sunny  
then Slight  
Chance  
T-storms

Friday Night



**Low: 65 °F**

Chance  
T-storms

Saturday



**High: 88 °F**

Sunny

## What's Ahead



**NWS Aberdeen, SD**  
Thu Jul 24, 2025 3:22 AM



### THURSDAY

20% Chance of Evening  
Storm in Central SD  
**Highs: 82-88°**



### FRIDAY

40% Chance of Storms in  
North Central SD at night  
**Highs: 83-90°**



### SATURDAY

30% Chance Evening and  
overnight storms  
**Highs: 85-96°**



### SUNDAY

30% Chance of Afternoon  
& Night Storms in NE SD  
and west central MN  
**Highs: 88-98°**

High pressure moving over the area today will bring seasonal temperatures and light winds. Precipitation chances return tonight in central SD (20% chance) and then continue for portions of the area through the weekend (30-40% chance), mainly during the nighttime hours.



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## Severe Weather Risk Overview

July 24, 2025  
3:34 AM

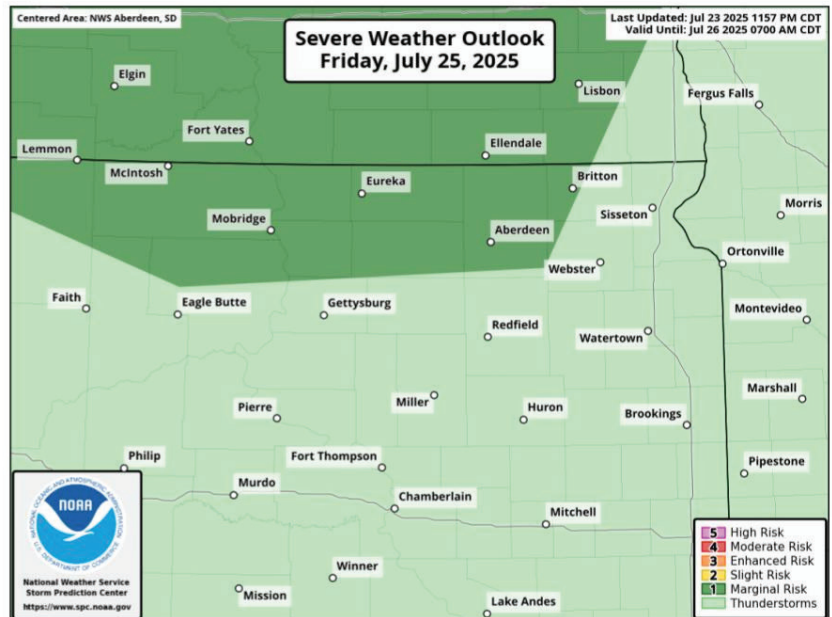
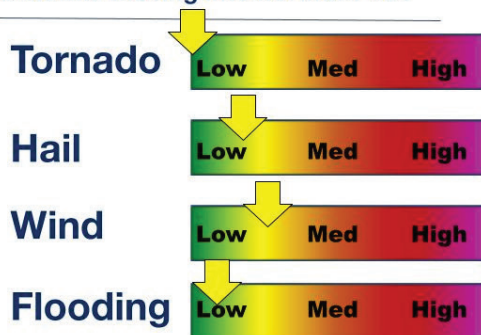
Friday Night

### Hazards

If storms move into northern South Dakota, winds to 60 mph and hail up to 1 inch in diameter would be possible on Friday night.

### Timing/Location

Storms may develop in western ND late Friday afternoon. They would move to the east-southeast through the night, but **there is low confidence on the storms moving into northern SD.**



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

There is a Marginal Risk (level 1 out of 5) for portions of northern SD on Friday night. If storms move into northern SD, winds up to 60 mph and hail to 1" in diameter are possible.

### July Precip at record level

The rain total average for Aberdeen for the month of July is 3.01 with the maximum amount recorded in 2011 with 6.63. As of Wednesday afternoon, Groton has received 6.65 inches this month.

July 4	1.69
July 5	.03
July 9	.12
July 10	.04
July 13	.73
July 15	1.12
July 20	.04
July 21	.65
July 22	.93
July 23	1.30

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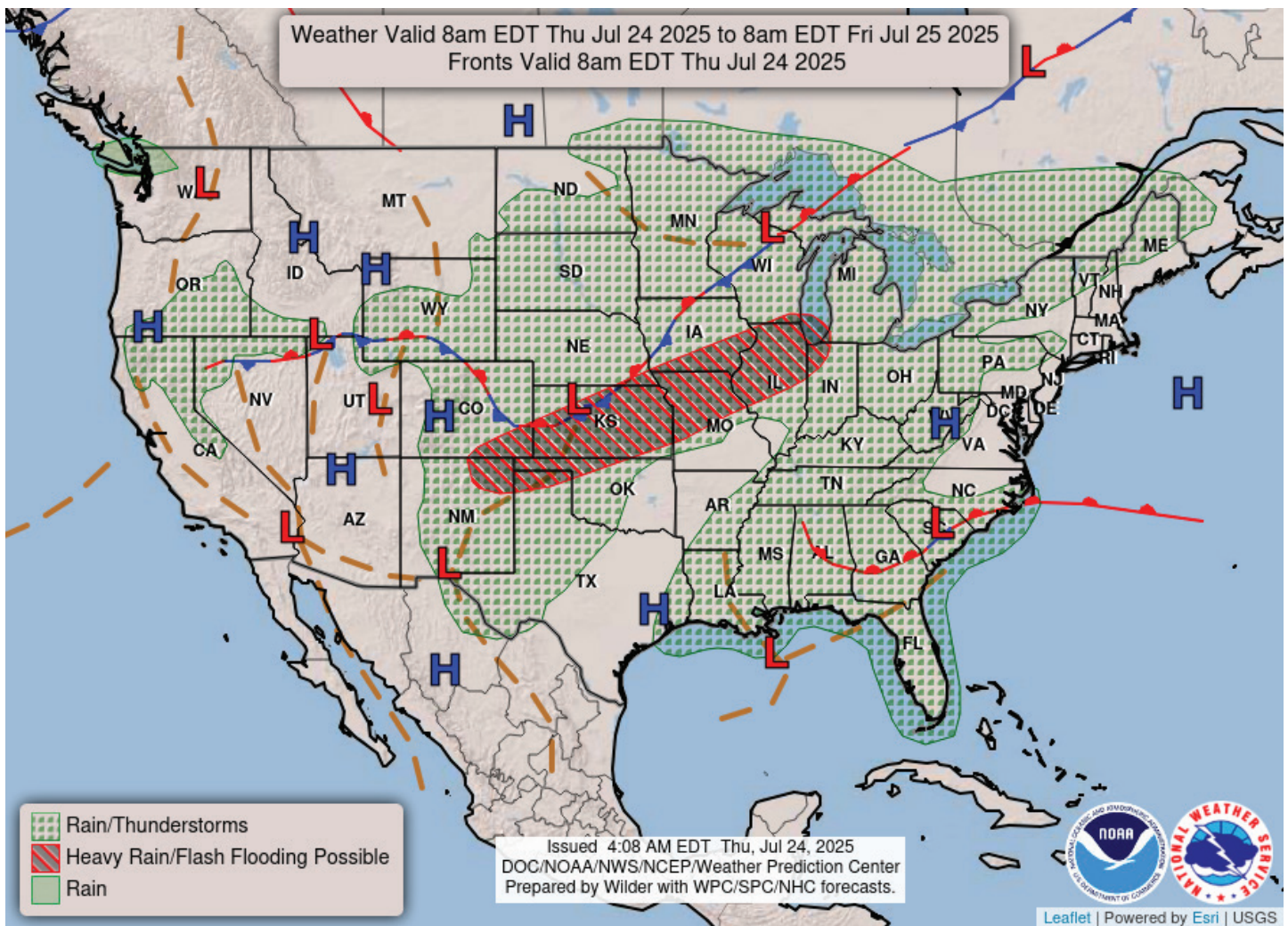
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 75 °F at 1:11 AM**  
**Heat Index: 78 °F at 1:15 AM**  
**Low Temp: 67 °F at 11:25 PM**  
**Wind: 23 mph at 1:20 PM**  
**Precip: : 1.30 Total**

Day length: 15 hours, 4 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 108 in 1931  
Record Low: 46 in 1905  
Average High: 85  
Average Low: 60  
Average Precip in July.: 2.52  
Precip to date in July: 6.65  
Average Precip to date: 13.53  
Precip Year to Date: 14.81  
Sunset Tonight: 9:11:21 pm  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:07:38 am



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## Today in Weather History

July 24, 1993: A severe thunderstorm struck southern Hyde County, including the city of Highmore, with winds more than 60 mph and heavy rains of two to four inches. Near Stephan, in far southern Hyde County, an estimated of over four inches of rain in 20 minutes caused flooding damage to a bridge. Three to nine inches of rain caused widespread flash flooding and flood damage to Day, Roberts, and southeastern Marshall Counties. Especially hard hit was an area from Webster, northeastward through the Pickerell and Buffalo Lakes area, to Sisseton. A state of emergency was declared in Sisseton. The heavy rains overwhelmed a small creek that flows through Sisseton, swelling it to three blocks wide and up to five feet deep. The rushing water carried lumber, railroad ties, propane tanks, and several vehicles. Flood damage occurred to 70 percent of all buildings in Sisseton, including 100 homes. In Webster, the excessive rain flooded all the sewer lifts that pump water out of low-lying areas in town. The sewer system then backed up into homes and businesses. The rainstorm flooded nine of the 12 main floor rooms at the Super 8 motel in Webster. Roads and bridge damage was also extensive in Roberts, Day, and Marshall Counties with about 50 roads and bridges in Day County damaged by the flooding. Areas lakes, including Pickerell, Blue Dog, Enemy Swim, and Buffalo lakes rose over two feet, inundating areas around lake homes and submerging docks. Some estimated storm total rainfall amounts include; 4.60 inches in Webster; 3.91 in Waubay; 3.90 in Britton; and 3.60 inches near Ashton.

July 24, 1997: Over 6 inches of rain fell in the Conde area in far northeast Spink County. Water was over Highway 37, and many town basements were flooded. One basement filled with 5 feet of water. Nearly 7 inches of rain was received at Lake Poinsett, and over 6 inches of rain was received in Estelline. Hidewood Creek in Hamlin County overflowed its banks. Water went into many residences homes, and some people were evacuated. A small bridge was taken out by the high water, and Highway 28 was closed for an hour.

1886 - Rain fell at Lawrence, KS, for the first time in four weeks. Rain fell over much of the state of Kansas that day relieving a severe drought which began in May. The very dry weather ruined crops in Kansas. (David Ludlum)

1930: An estimated, F5 tornado tore through Montello, Veneto, and Friuli in Italy. The tornado killed 23 people along its 50 miles path.

1936 - A record all time Kansas state high temperature set just 6 days earlier was tied in the town of Alton, located in Osborne County. (US National Weather Service Wichita)

1942 - The temperature at Las Vegas, NV, hit 117 degrees to set an all-time record for that location. The record was tied on July 19, 2005.

1947 - One of the most powerful strokes of lightning ever measured yielded 345,000 amperes of electricity in Pittsburgh, PA. (The Weather Channel)

1952: The temperature at Louisville, Georgia soared to 112 degrees to establish a state record. The temperature also hit 112 degrees in Greenville, Georgia on August 20, 1983.

1952 - The temperature at Louisville, GA, soared to 112 degrees to establish a state record. (The Weather Channel)

1980 - Claudette, a weak tropical storm, deluged southeastern Texas with torrential rains. The Houston suburb of Alvin received 43 inches, a 24 hour record for the U.S. (David Ludlum)

1987 - Twenty-one cities in the eastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. The high of 91 degrees at Beckley, WV, was their hottest reading in 25 years of records, and marked their third straight day of record 90 degree heat. Bakersfield, CA, dipped to 60 degrees, marking their eighth straight morning of record cool weather. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Afternoon and evening thunderstorms produced large hail and damaging winds in Oklahoma, and over Nebraska and Wisconsin. Thunderstorms produced wind gusts to 75 mph at Brainerd, NE. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2008: A tornado fluctuated between the category EF1 and the more destructive EF2 strikes Northwood and Pittsfield, as well as nine other towns in New Hampshire. It first touches down in Deerfield, then travels through Northwood, Epsom, Pittsfield, Barnstead, and Alton. From there, it rages through New Durham, Wolfeboro, Freedom, Ossipee, and Effingham. The storm destroys several homes, damaged dozens of others and kills at least one person.





## 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: 07.22.25

22 41 42 59 69 17

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$120,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 24  
Mins 4 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.23.25

4 32 36 39 52 1

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$3,310,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 39  
Mins 4 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.23.25

5 9 11 30 47 8

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 54 Mins 4  
Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.23.25

9 10 11 14 19

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$67,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 54  
Mins 4 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.23.25

4 21 35 60 69 23

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 23  
Mins 4 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.23.25

2 18 19 25 35 25

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$350,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 23  
Mins 4 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

Winner Game 5



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

### **France's first couple sue Candace Owens for defamation over claims that Brigitte Macron is a man**

PARIS (AP) — A lawyer for France's first couple said they'll be seeking "substantial" damages from U.S. conservative influencer Candace Owens if she persists with claims that President Emmanuel Macron's wife, Brigitte, is a man.

The lawyer, Tom Clare, said in an interview with CNN that a defamation suit filed Wednesday for the Macrons in a Delaware court was "really a last resort" after a fruitless yearlong effort to engage with Owens and requests that she "do the right thing: tell the truth, stop spreading these lies."

"Each time we've done that, she mocked the Macrons, she mocked our efforts to set the record straight," Clare said. "Enough is enough, it was time to hold her accountable."

The complaint against Owens lays out "extensive evidence" that Brigitte Macron "was born a woman, she's always been a woman," he said.

"We'll put forward our damage claim at trial, but if she continues to double down between now and the time of trial, it will be a substantial award," he said.

In Paris, the presidential office had no immediate comment.

The Macrons have been married since 2007, and Emmanuel Macron has been France's president since 2017.

The couple first met at the high school where he was a student and she was a teacher. Brigitte Macron was then Brigitte Auzière, a married mother of three children.

Emmanuel Macron moved to Paris for his last year of high school, but promised to marry Brigitte. She later moved to the French capital to join him and divorced before they finally married.

### **Taliban tortured and threatened Afghans expelled from Pakistan and Iran, UN report says**

ISLAMABAD (AP) — The Taliban have tortured and threatened Afghans forcibly returned from Iran and Pakistan because of their identity or personal history, a U.N. report said Thursday.

Pakistan and Iran are expelling millions of Afghans who they say are living in their countries illegally. Afghan authorities have urged nationals to return, pledging amnesty for anyone who left after the Taliban seized power in 2021.

But rights groups and the U.N. have repeatedly warned that some of those returning are at risk of persecution because of their gender, links to the former Western-backed administration or profession.

Thursday's report from the U.N. mission in Afghanistan said some people have experienced serious human rights violations, while others have gone into hiding or relocated for fear of Taliban reprisal.

The violations include torture, ill-treatment, arbitrary arrest, and threats to personal security at the hands of the Taliban, according to the report.

A former government official told the U.N. mission that, after his return to Afghanistan in 2023, he was detained and severely tortured with sticks and cables. He was waterboarded and subjected to a mock execution.

A non-binary person said they were beaten severely, including with the back of a gun.

Volker Türk, the U.N. high commissioner for human rights, said nobody should be sent back to a country where they faced the risk of persecution on account of their identity or personal history. This was even more pronounced for Afghan women and girls, who were subjected to a range of measures "amounting to persecution based on their gender alone," he added.

The Taliban have imposed severe restrictions on Afghan girls and women, cutting off education beyond sixth grade, most employment and access to many public spaces.



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Responding to the report, Taliban authorities denied mistreating Afghan returnees and rejected allegations of arrest, violence, intimidation or retaliation against people because of their identity or personal history.

Afghans returning from neighboring countries were provided with facilities related to documentation, transportation, resettlement, and other legal support, they said, while the Interior Ministry provides a "warm welcome."

They called on the U.N. mission to prevent forced deportations, adding the United Nations as a whole "should not hesitate" in providing basic needs to refugees, such as food, medicine, shelter and education.

Afghans who left their homeland in the millions over the decades are either being pushed out in expulsion campaigns, like those in Iran and Pakistan, or face an uncertain future because of reduced support for refugees.

On Monday, thousands of Afghans in the U.S. lost protection from deportation after a federal appeals court refused to postpone U.S. President Donald Trump administration's decision to end their legal status.

Homeland Security officials said in their decision to end the Temporary Protected Status for Afghans that the situation in their home country was getting better. But groups helping Afghans with this status say the country is still extremely dangerous.

The Trump administration's January suspension of a refugee program has left thousands of Afghans stranded, particularly in Pakistan, and a travel ban on Afghans has further diminished their hopes of resettlement in the U.S.

## Border dispute heats up: What's behind the clash between Thailand and Cambodia

BANGKOK (AP) — Armed clashes broke out Thursday between Thailand and Cambodia in long-disputed border areas, rapidly escalating months-long tensions.

The fighting included gunfire exchanges and shelling and rocket fire, which Thai authorities said killed at least nine Thai civilians and injured 14 others in three provinces. Thailand responded with air strikes.

It was the second armed confrontation since a Cambodian soldier was shot dead in May and a major escalation that came hours after the two countries downgraded diplomatic relations following a land mine explosion that injured Thai soldiers.

Clashes are ongoing in at least six areas along the border, the Thai Defense Ministry said. The first clash Thursday morning happened in an area near the ancient Ta Muen Thom temple along the border of Surin and Cambodia's Oddar Meanchey province.

Here's what to know about the dispute between the two Southeast Asian neighbors.

How the dispute began

The dispute flared in May after armed forces of Thailand and Cambodia briefly fired at each other in a relatively small, contested border area that each country claims as its own.

Both sides said they acted in self-defense. One Cambodian soldier was killed.

While the countries said afterwards they agreed to de-escalate the situation, Cambodian and Thai authorities continued to implement or threaten measures short of armed force, keeping tensions high.

Thailand added tight restrictions at the border with Cambodia that stopped almost all crossings except for students, medical patients and others with essential needs. On Thursday, Thai authorities announced they were sealing the border entirely.

Cambodia also banned Thai movies and TV shows, stopped the import of Thai fuel, fruits and vegetables and boycotted some of its neighbor's international internet links and power supply.

Fighting sparks political turmoil in Thailand

Nationalist passions on both sides have inflamed the situation.

Thailand's Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra was suspended from office July 1 to be investigated for possible ethics violations over her handling of the border dispute following a leaked phone call with a senior Cambodian leader.

In the June call, Paetongtarn referred to Cambodian former Prime Minister Hun Sen as "uncle" and criti-

cized Thai military leadership, remarks framed by critics as disrespectful to national sovereignty.

Hun Sen was succeeded by his son Hun Manet in 2023 but remains influential as Senate president. He was a longtime friend of her father, Thaksin Shinawatra, a popular but divisive former prime minister, but they became estranged over the border dispute.

The leaked call sparked widespread outrage and protests. Paetongtarn's Pheu Thai party-led coalition also weakened when its second-largest partner, the Bhumjaithai Party, withdrew support, citing her perceived softness toward Cambodia.

Paetongtarn has apologized and argued her comments were a negotiating tactic. Her ally, former Defense Minister Phumtham Wechayachai, was appointed acting prime minister.

Border claims cause periodic tensions

Border disputes are long-standing issues that have caused periodic tensions between the two neighbors. Thailand and Cambodia share more than 800 kilometers (500 miles) of land border.

The contesting claims stem largely from a 1907 map drawn under French colonial rule that was used to separate Cambodia from Thailand. Cambodia has been using the map as a reference to claim territory, while Thailand has argued the map is inaccurate.

The most prominent and violent conflicts have been around the 1,000-year-old Preah Vihear temple.

In 1962, the International Court of Justice awarded sovereignty over the temple area to Cambodia. The ruling became a major irritant in bilateral relations.

Cambodia went back to the court in 2011, following several clashes between its army and Thai forces that killed about 20 people and displaced thousands. The court reaffirmed the ruling in Cambodia's favor in 2013.

Cambodia has again turned to the international court to resolve the border disputes but Thailand has rejected the court's jurisdiction.

## Thailand and Cambodia exchange fire in clashes that kill at least 9 civilians

By JINTAMAS SAKSORNCHAI Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Thailand and Cambodia exchanged fire on their border Thursday in a sharp escalation of their conflict that killed at least nine civilians.

Both nations accused each other of starting the military clashes and have downgraded their diplomatic relations since Wednesday. Thailand also sealed all land border crossings with Cambodia. Relations between the Southeast Asian neighbors have deteriorated sharply since an armed confrontation in May that killed a Cambodian soldier. Nationalist passions on both sides have further inflamed the situation.

The Thai army said the most casualties occurred in Si Sa Ket province, where six people were killed after shots were fired at a gas station. At least 14 people were injured in three border provinces.

The Thai army said it launched airstrikes Thursday on ground military targets in Cambodia, while the Cambodian Defense Ministry said the Thai jets dropped bombs on a road near the ancient Preah Vihear temple.

Both governments say they have to respond to the other's actions

Clashes are ongoing in at least six areas along the border, Thai Defense Ministry spokesperson Surasant Kongsiri said. The first clash Thursday morning happened in an area near the ancient Ta Muen Thom temple along the border of Thailand's Surin province and Cambodia's Oddar Meanchey province.

A livestream video from Thailand's side showed people running from their homes and hiding in a concrete bunker Thursday morning as explosions sounded.

Thailand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said Cambodia has attacked both military and non-military sites in Thailand, including a hospital.

"The Royal Thai Government calls upon Cambodia to take responsibility for the incidents that have occurred, cease attacks against civilian and military targets, and stop all actions that violate Thailand's sovereignty. The Royal Thai Government is prepared to intensify our self-defense measures if Cambodia

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persists in its armed attack and violations upon Thailand's sovereignty in accordance with international law and principles," said Nikordej Balankura, the ministry's spokesperson.

Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Manet said his country has always maintained a position of peaceful resolution of problems, but "we have no choice but to respond with armed force against armed aggression."

Ambassadors are withdrawn and borders closed

Earlier Thursday, Cambodia said it was downgrading diplomatic relations with Thailand to their lowest level, expelling the Thai ambassador and recalling all Cambodian staff from its embassy in Bangkok. That was in response to Thailand withdrawing its ambassador and expelling the Cambodian ambassador Wednesday to protest a land mine blast that wounded five Thai soldiers.

The Thai army said of Thursday's initial clash that its forces heard an unmanned aerial vehicle before seeing six armed Cambodian soldiers moving closer to Thailand's station. It said Thai soldiers tried to shout at them to defuse the situation but the Cambodian side started to open fire.

Cambodia's Defense Ministry also said Thailand employed a drone first before opening fire, and that Cambodia "acted strictly within the bounds of self-defense, responding to an unprovoked incursion by Thai troops that violated our territorial integrity."

The Thai embassy in Phnom Penh posted on Facebook that there were clashes at several border areas that could continue to escalate. It urged Thai nationals in Cambodia to leave the country if they could and advised others not to travel to Cambodia unless absolutely necessary.

On Wednesday, a land mine blast near the border wounded five Thai soldiers, one of whom lost a leg. A week earlier, a land mine in a different contested area exploded and wounded three Thai soldiers when one of them stepped on it and lost a foot.

Thai authorities have alleged the mines were newly laid along paths that by mutual agreement were supposed to be safe. They said the mines were Russian-made and not of a type employed by Thailand's military. Cambodia rejected Thailand's account as "baseless accusations," pointing out that many unexploded mines and other ordnance are a legacy of 20th century wars and unrest.

The border dispute has also caused political fallout in Thailand, whose prime minister was suspended from office to be investigated for possible ethics violations over the matter.

Border disputes are longstanding issues that have caused periodic tensions between the countries. The most prominent and violent conflicts have been around the 1,000-year-old Preah Vihear temple.

In 1962, the International Court of Justice recognized Cambodian sovereignty over the temple area in a ruling that became a major irritant in the relations of both countries.

Cambodia went back to the court in 2011, following several military clashes that killed about 20 people. The court reaffirmed the ruling in 2013, a decision that still rattled Thailand.

## **Gabbard's claims of an anti-Trump conspiracy are not supported by declassified documents**

By BYRON TAU and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard this month declassified material that she claimed proved a "treasonous conspiracy" by the Obama administration in 2016 to politicize U.S. intelligence in service of casting doubt on the legitimacy of Donald Trump's election victory.

As evidence, Gabbard cited newly declassified emails from Obama officials and a five-year-old classified House report in hopes of undermining the intelligence community's conclusion that Russian President Vladimir Putin wanted to boost Trump and denigrate his Democratic opponent Hillary Clinton.

Russia's activities during the 2016 election remain some of the most examined events in recent history. The Kremlin's campaign and the subsequent U.S. government response were the subject of at least five major investigations by the Republican-led House and Senate intelligence committee; two Justice Department special counsels; and the department's inspector general.

Those investigations either concluded — or accepted the conclusion — that Russia embarked on a campaign to interfere in the election through the use of social media and hacked material.



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The House-led probe, conducted by Trump allies, also concurred that Russia ran an election interference campaign but said the purpose was to sow chaos in the U.S. rather than boost Trump. Several of the reports criticize the actions of Obama administration officials, particularly at the FBI, but do not dispute the fundamental findings that Moscow sought to interfere in the election.

The Associated Press has reviewed those reports to evaluate how Gabbard's claims stack up:  
Russian election interference

CLAIM: "The intelligence community had one assessment: that Russia did not have the intent and capability to try to impact the outcome of the U.S. election leading up to Election Day. The same assessment was made after the election." — Gabbard to Fox News on Tuesday.

The documents Gabbard released do not support her claim. She cites a handful of emails from 2016 in which officials conclude that Russia had no intention of manipulating the U.S. vote count through cyberattacks on voting systems.

President Barack Obama's administration never alleged that voting infrastructure was tampered with. Rather, the administration said Russia ran a covert influence campaign using hacked and stolen material from prominent Democrats. Russian operatives then used that information as part of state-funded media and social media operations to inflame U.S. public opinion. More than two dozen Russians were indicted in 2018 in connection with those efforts.

Republican-led investigations in Congress have affirmed that conclusion, and the emails that Gabbard released do not contradict that finding.

Shift in assessment?

CLAIM: "There was a shift, a 180-degree shift, from the intelligence community's assessment leading up to the election to the one that President Obama directed be produced after Donald Trump won the election that completely contradicted those assessments that had come previously." — Gabbard to Fox News on Tuesday.

There was no shift.

The emails Gabbard released show that a Department of Homeland Security official in August 2016 told then-Director of National Intelligence James Clapper there was "no indication of a Russian threat to directly manipulate the actual vote count."

The public assessment the Obama administration made public in January 2017 reached the same conclusion: "DHS assesses that the types of systems Russian actors targeted or compromised were not involved in vote tallying."

Putin's intent

CLAIM: The Obama administration "manufactured the January 2017 Intelligence Community Assessment that they knew was false promoting the LIE that Vladimir Putin and the Russian government helped President Trump win the 2016 election." — Gabbard on Truth Social Wednesday.

The material declassified this week reveals some dissent within the intelligence community about whether Putin wanted to help Trump or simply inflame the U.S. public. That same question led to a partisan divide on the House Intelligence panel when it examined the matter several years later.

Gabbard's memo released last week cites a "whistleblower" who she says served in the intelligence community at the time and who is quoted as saying that he could not "concur in good conscience" with the intelligence community's judgment that Russia had a "decisive preference" for Trump.

Such dissent and debate are not unusual in the drafting of intelligence reports. The Republican-led Senate Intelligence Committee examined whether there was any political interference in the Obama administration's conclusions and reported that "all analysts expressed that they were free to debate, object to content, and assess confidence levels, as is normal and proper."

In 2018, Putin directly addressed the question of whether he preferred Trump at a press conference in Helsinki even as he sidestepped a question about whether he directed any of his subordinates to help Trump.

"Yes, I did," Putin said. "Because he talked about bringing the U.S.-Russia relationship back to normal."

Steele dossier

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CLAIM: "They used already discredited information like the Steele dossier — they knew it was discredited at the time." — Gabbard to Fox News on Tuesday.

The dossier refers to a collection of opposition research files compiled by a former British spy, Christopher Steele, whose work was funded by Democrats during the 2016 election.

Those files included uncorroborated tips and salacious gossip about Trump's ties to Russia, but the importance to the Russia investigation has sometimes been overstated.

It was not the basis for the FBI's decision to open an investigation in July 2016 into potential coordination between the Trump campaign and Russia, the Justice Department's inspector general found. Some of the records released by Gabbard this week also reveal that it was a Central Intelligence Agency human source close to the Kremlin that the agency primarily relied on for its conclusion that Putin wanted to help Trump and hurt Clinton, not the Steele dossier.

FBI agents on the case didn't even come to possess the dossier until weeks into their inquiry. Even so, Trump supporters have seized on the unverified innuendo in the document to undercut the broader Russia investigation. Many of Steele's claims have since been discredited or denied.

It is true, however, that the FBI and Justice Department relied in part on the Steele dossier to obtain surveillance warrants to eavesdrop on the communications of a former Trump campaign adviser, the inspector general found. FBI agents continued to pursue those warrants even after questions arose about the credibility of Steele's reporting.

The dossier was also summarized — over the objections of then-CIA Director John Brennan, he has said — in a two-page annex to the classified version of the intelligence community assessment.

## Why are data nerds racing to save US government statistics?

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

The data nerds are fighting back.

After watching data sets be altered or disappear from U.S. government websites in unprecedented ways after President Donald Trump began his second term, an army of outside statisticians, demographers and computer scientists have joined forces to capture, preserve and share data sets, sometimes clandestinely.

Their goal is to make sure they are available in the future, believing that democracy suffers when policymakers don't have reliable data and that national statistics should be above partisan politics.

"There are such smart, passionate people who care deeply about not only the Census Bureau, but all the statistical agencies, and ensuring the integrity of the statistical system. And that gives me hope, even during these challenging times," Mary Jo Mitchell, director of government and public affairs for the research nonprofit the Population Association of America, said this week during an online public data-users conference.

The threats to the U.S. data infrastructure since January have come not only from the disappearance or modification of data related to gender, sexual orientation, health, climate change and diversity, among other topics, but also from job cuts of workers and contractors who had been guardians of restricted-access data at statistical agencies, the data experts said.

"There are trillions of bytes of data files, and I can't even imagine how many public dollars were spent to collect those data. ... But right now, they're sitting someplace that is inaccessible because there are no staff to appropriately manage those data," Jennifer Park, a study director for the Committee on National Statistics, National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, said during the conference hosted by the Association of Public Data Users (APDU).

'Gender' switched to 'sex'

In February, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's official public portal for health data, data.cdc.gov, was taken down entirely but subsequently went back up. Around the same time, when a query was made to access certain public data from the U.S. Census Bureau's most comprehensive survey of American life, users for several days got a response that said the area was "unavailable due to maintenance" before access was restored.

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Researchers Janet Freilich and Aaron Kesselheim examined 232 federal public health data sets that had been modified in the first quarter of this year and found that almost half had been “substantially altered,” with the majority having the word “gender” switched to “sex,” they wrote this month in The Lancet medical journal.

One of the most difficult tasks has been figuring out what’s been changed since many of the alterations weren’t recorded in documentation.

Beth Jarosz, senior program director at the Population Reference Bureau, thought she was in good shape since she had previously downloaded data she needed from the National Survey of Children’s Health for a February conference where she was speaking, even though the data had become unavailable. But then she realized she had failed to download the questionnaire and later discovered that a question about discrimination based on gender or sexual identity had been removed.

“It’s the one thing my team didn’t have,” Jarosz said at this week’s APDU conference. “And they edited the questionnaire document, which should have been a historical record.”

Among the groups that have formed this year to collect and preserve the federal data are the Federation of American Scientists’ dataindex.com, which monitors changes to federal data sets; the University of Chicago Library’s Data Mirror website, which backs up and hosts at-risk data sets; the Data Rescue Project, which serves as a clearinghouse for data rescue-related efforts; and the Federal Data Forum, which shares information about what federal statistics have gone missing or been modified — a job also being done by the American Statistical Association.

The outside data warriors also are quietly reaching out to workers at statistical agencies and urging them to back up any data that is restricted from the public.

“You can’t trust that this data is going to be here tomorrow,” said Lena Bohman, a founding member of the Data Rescue Project.

Experts’ committee unofficially revived

Separately, a group of outside experts has unofficially revived a long-running U.S. Census Bureau advisory committee that was killed by the Trump administration in March.

Census Bureau officials won’t be attending the Census Scientific Advisory Committee meeting in September, since the Commerce Department, which oversees the agency, eliminated it. But the advisory committee will forward its recommendations to the bureau, and demographer Allison Plyer said she has heard that some agency officials are excited by the committee’s re-emergence, even if it’s outside official channels.

“We will send them recommendations but we don’t expect them to respond since that would be frowned upon,” said Plyer, chief demographer at The Data Center in New Orleans. “They just aren’t getting any outside expertise ... and they want expertise, which is understandable from nerds.”

## **Zelenskyy faces backlash as Ukrainians protest new anti-corruption law**

By ILLIA NOVIKOV and MEHMET GUZEL Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Activists on Wednesday called for more protests of a new law that they say weakens Ukraine’s anti-corruption watchdogs, following the first major anti-government demonstration in over three years of war.

The legislation, which has also drawn rebukes from European Union officials and international rights groups, has put increased pressure on President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and endangered his public support at a critical phase of the war.

Also on Wednesday, delegations from Russia and Ukraine met in Istanbul for a third round of talks in as many months. The talks appeared to have lasted less than an hour and yielded no breakthroughs. The two sides, however, agreed to exchange more prisoners of war.

In the morning, Zelenskyy convened the heads of Ukraine’s key anti-corruption and security agencies in response to the outcry against his decision to approve the law that was passed by parliament.

“We all hear what society says,” Zelenskyy wrote on Telegram after the meeting. But he insisted the



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new legal framework was needed to crack down harder on corruption.

"Criminal cases should not drag on for years without verdicts, and those working against Ukraine must not feel comfortable or immune from punishment," he said.

Zelenskyy said all government agencies agreed to work constructively and respond to public expectations for fairness and effectiveness. A detailed joint action plan is expected within two weeks, aimed at addressing institutional weaknesses, removing legal hurdles and ensuring justice across the board, he said.

Thousands of people gathered in the capital and other cities Tuesday to urge Zelenskyy to veto the controversial bill. After he approved it, activists went on social media to call for another demonstration Wednesday night in central Kyiv.

Zelenskyy has been the international face of Ukraine's determination to defeat Russia's all-out invasion, and his domestic troubles are an unwelcome diversion from the war effort.

Zelenskyy acknowledged the protests and criticism in his nightly address Wednesday, and he said government and law enforcement agencies had agreed to come up with specific steps to "strengthen the rule of law in Ukraine." Those recommendations, he said, would lead to a bill he would propose to parliament to safeguard the autonomy of the agencies.

The legislation tightens government oversight of two key anti-corruption agencies. Critics say the step could significantly weaken the independence of those agencies and give Zelenskyy's circle greater influence over investigations.

EU officials warn of possible setback to joining bloc

Fighting entrenched corruption is crucial for Ukraine's aspirations to join the EU and maintain access to billions of dollars in Western aid in the war.

"Limiting the independence of Ukraine's anti-corruption agency hampers Ukraine's way towards the EU," German Foreign Minister Johann Wadepuhl warned in a post on X.

EU Defense Commissioner Andrius Kubilius, also on X, noted: "In war, trust between the fighting nation and its leadership is more important than modern weapons — difficult to build and to keep, but easy to lose with one significant mistake by the leadership."

The Ukrainian branch of Transparency International criticized the parliament's decision, saying it undermines one of the most significant reforms since 2014, when Ukrainians ousted a pro-Moscow president in what they called the Revolution of Dignity, and damages trust with international partners. It accused authorities of "dismantling" the country's anti-corruption architecture.

Zelenskyy said the new law clears out "Russian influence" from fighting corruption and ensures punishment for those found guilty of it. He cited years of delays in criminal proceedings involving huge amounts of money.

"The cases that have been lying dormant must be investigated," he said in a Telegram post early Wednesday. "For years, officials who have fled Ukraine have been casually living abroad for some reason — in very nice countries and without legal consequences — and this is not normal," he said.

He didn't give examples of what he said was Russian interference.

The legal changes in Ukraine would grant the prosecutor general new authority over investigations and cases handled by the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU) and the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAPO).

Prosecutor General Ruslan Kravchenko, appointed by Zelenskyy just over a month ago, said the anti-corruption watchdogs and other law enforcement agencies would keep working as before.

"The prosecutor general has only been granted broader powers and an increased scope of authority," Kravchenko told a news conference as officials moved to ease public concern.

The anger and frustration among war-weary Ukrainians prevailed in the crowd Tuesday. Some protesters accused Ukraine's leadership of prioritizing loyalty and personal connections over fighting corruption.

"Those who swore to protect the laws and the constitution have instead chosen to shield their inner circle, even at the expense of Ukrainian democracy," said veteran Oleh Symoroz, who lost both legs after he was wounded in 2022.

Russian officials relished Zelenskyy's difficulties, although Moscow faces its own series of corruption

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cases against government and military officials.

A third round of direct talks

The third round of direct talks got underway at the Ciragan Palace in Istanbul with Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan expressing hope the Russian and Ukrainian delegates would “engage in substantive and results-oriented consultations.”

The ultimate goal, he said, is “a ceasefire that will pave the way to peace.”

Speaking to the media after the talks, the Ukrainian delegation once again stressed that Kyiv’s top priorities were a meeting between the Ukrainian and Russian presidents and a “real ceasefire” ending all strikes on civilian infrastructure. The Ukrainian delegation proposed holding such a meeting in August to satisfy the deadline set by U.S. President Donald Trump, who gave the Kremlin a 50-day ultimatum to reach a peace deal or face steep trade tariffs.

“We have progress on humanitarian track. There is no progress on cessation of hostilities or ceasefire,” the head of the Ukrainian delegation, Rustem Umerov, said.

Russian officials in their remarks to reporters reiterated that a peace agreement needs to be finalized before the two leaders meet.

The head of Russia’s delegation, Vladimir Medinsky, said Russia proposed 24- or 48-hour ceasefires along the front line so that medical teams could retrieve dead and wounded soldiers. As for a broader truce, Moscow’s and Kyiv’s “positions are quite distant from each other,” Medinsky said, referring to the memorandums exchanged by both sides that set out conditions for a ceasefire. “We have agreed to continue contact.”

Both sides said more exchanges of prisoners of war were agreed on — at least 1,200 on each side, according to Medinsky. Other issues discussed included the fate of civilian captives, Ukrainian children forcibly deported to Russia and the return of the bodies of fallen soldiers and wounded troops.

In other developments, Russian drone strikes knocked out power to more than 220,000 customers in Ukraine’s northeastern Sumy region, Zelenskyy said on Telegram, adding that repairs restored most of the supply in hours.

Ukrainian and Western officials have accused the Kremlin of stalling in the talks in order for its bigger army to capture more Ukrainian land.

Earlier this month, Trump threatened Russia with severe economic sanctions and said more American weapons, paid for by European countries, would go to Ukraine. Trump hardened his stance toward Moscow after months of frustration with Putin about unsuccessful talks for a ceasefire.

Trump gave Russia until early September to agree to a ceasefire.

## **UN’s top court says failing to protect planet from climate change could violate international law**

By MOLLY QUELL and MIKE CORDER Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — The United Nations’ top court in a landmark advisory opinion Wednesday said countries could be in violation of international law if they fail to take measures to protect the planet from climate change, and nations harmed by its effects could be entitled to reparations.

Advocates immediately cheered the International Court of Justice opinion on nations’ obligations to tackle climate change and the consequences they may face if they don’t.

“Failure of a state to take appropriate action to protect the climate system ... may constitute an internationally wrongful act,” court President Yuji Iwasawa said during the hearing. He called the climate crisis “an existential problem of planetary proportions that imperils all forms of life and the very health of our planet.”

The non-binding opinion, backed unanimously by the court’s 15 judges, was hailed as a turning point in international climate law.

Notably, the court said a “clean, healthy and sustainable environment” is a human right. That paves the way for other legal actions, including states returning to the ICJ to hold each other to account as well as

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domestic lawsuits, along with legal instruments like investment agreements.

'Today, the tables have turned'

The case was led by the Pacific island nation of Vanuatu and backed by more than 130 countries.

All U.N. member states including major greenhouse gas emitters like the United States and China are parties to the court.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres welcomed the "historic" advisory opinion.

"This is a victory for our planet, for climate justice, and for the power of young people to make a difference," he said in a statement. "Young Pacific islanders initiated this call for humanity to the world. And the world must respond."

Climate activists had gathered outside the crowded court with a banner that read: "Courts have spoken. The law is clear. States must ACT NOW." They watched the ruling on a giant screen, clapping and cheering at times during the two-hour hearing.

"Today, the tables have turned. The world's highest court provided us with a powerful new tool to protect people from the devastating impacts of the climate crisis — and to deliver justice for the harm their emissions have already caused," former U.N. human rights chief Mary Robinson said in a statement.

"The ICJ's decision brings us closer to a world where governments can no longer turn a blind eye to their legal responsibilities. It affirms a simple truth of climate justice: Those who did the least to fuel this crisis deserve protection, reparations, and a future," said Vishal Prasad, director of Pacific Islands Students Fighting Climate Change.

Vulnerable island nations led the lobbying

After years of lobbying by vulnerable island nations who fear they could disappear under rising sea waters, the U.N. General Assembly asked the ICJ in 2023 for an advisory opinion, an important basis for international obligations.

Its panel was tasked with answering two questions: What are countries obliged to do under international law to protect the climate and environment from human-caused greenhouse gas emissions? Second, what are the legal consequences for governments when their acts, or lack of action, have significantly harmed the climate and environment?

"The stakes could not be higher. The survival of my people and so many others is on the line," Arnold Kiel Loughman, attorney general of the island nation of Vanuatu, told the court during a week of hearings in December.

In the decade up to 2023, sea levels rose by a global average of around 4.3 centimeters (1.7 inches), with parts of the Pacific rising higher still. The world has also warmed 1.3 degrees Celsius (2.3 Fahrenheit) since preindustrial times because of the burning of fossil fuels.

Ralph Regenvanu, Vanuatu's minister for climate change, called the ruling a "very important course correction in this critically important time. For the first time in history, the ICJ has spoken directly about the biggest threat facing humanity."

He said the ruling exceeded his expectations. "I didn't expect it to be good. It's good. And it did go above and beyond," he told reporters in The Hague.

Ruling could be leverage at next UN climate conference

Activists could bring lawsuits against their own countries for failing to comply with the decision, which ran to over 130 pages.

The senior attorney at the Center for International Environmental Law, Erika Lennon, said the ruling also can be used as leverage at the next U.N. climate conference later this year in the Brazilian city of Belém.

"States must take this ICJ ruling and use it to advance ambitious outcomes at COP30 and beyond. People and the planet deserve it," she said.

The United States and Russia, both of whom are major petroleum-producing states, are staunchly opposed to the court mandating emissions reductions. The Trump administration has again withdrawn the U.S. from the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement and has made it harder to find scientific assessments of how climate change endangers the U.S. and its people.

Asked to comment on the ruling, White House spokesman Taylor Rogers said: "As always, President

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Trump and the entire administration is committed to putting America first and prioritizing the interests of everyday Americans."

Those who cling to fossil fuels could go broke doing it, the U.N. secretary-general told The Associated Press in an exclusive interview this week.

Simply having the U.N. court issue an opinion is the latest in a series of legal victories for the small island nations. Earlier this month, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights found that countries have a legal duty not only to avoid environmental harm but also to protect and restore ecosystems. Last year, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that countries must better protect their people from the consequences of climate change.

In 2019, the Netherlands' Supreme court handed down the first major legal win for climate activists when judges ruled that protection from the potentially devastating effects of climate change was a human right and that the government has a duty to protect its citizens.

The presiding judge on Wednesday acknowledged that international law had "an important but ultimately limited role in resolving this problem," and said a lasting solution will need the contribution of all fields of human knowledge "to secure a future for ourselves and those who are yet to come."

## **Columbia University agrees to pay more than \$220M in deal with Trump to restore federal funding**

By CAROLYN THOMPSON Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Columbia University announced Wednesday it has reached a deal with the Trump administration to pay more than \$220 million to the federal government to restore federal research money that was canceled in the name of combating antisemitism on campus.

Under the agreement, the Ivy League school will pay a \$200 million settlement over three years, the university said. It will also pay \$21 million to resolve alleged civil rights violations against Jewish employees that occurred following the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack on Israel, the White House said.

"This agreement marks an important step forward after a period of sustained federal scrutiny and institutional uncertainty," acting University President Claire Shipman said.

The school had been threatened with the potential loss of billions of dollars in government support, including more than \$400 million in grants canceled earlier this year. The administration pulled the funding because of what it described as the university's failure to squelch antisemitism on campus during the Israel-Hamas war.

Columbia has since agreed to a series of demands laid out by the Republican administration, including overhauling the university's student disciplinary process and applying a contentious, federally endorsed definition of antisemitism not only to teaching but to a disciplinary committee that has been investigating students critical of Israel.

Wednesday's agreement — which does not include an admission of wrongdoing — codifies those reforms while preserving the university's autonomy, Shipman said.

'Columbia's reforms are a roadmap,' Trump administration says

Education Secretary Linda McMahon called the deal "a seismic shift in our nation's fight to hold institutions that accept American taxpayer dollars accountable for antisemitic discrimination and harassment."

"Columbia's reforms are a roadmap for elite universities that wish to regain the confidence of the American public by renewing their commitment to truth-seeking, merit, and civil debate," McMahon said in a statement.

As part of the agreement, Columbia agreed to a series of changes previously announced in March, including reviewing its Middle East curriculum to make sure it was "comprehensive and balanced" and appointing new faculty to its Institute for Israel and Jewish Studies. It also promised to end programs "that promote unlawful efforts to achieve race-based outcomes, quotas, diversity targets or similar efforts."

The university will also have to issue a report to a monitor assuring that its programs "do not promote



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unlawful DEI goals.”

In a post Wednesday night on his Truth Social platform, President Donald Trump said Columbia had “committed to ending their ridiculous DEI policies, admitting students based ONLY on MERIT, and protecting the Civil Liberties of their students on campus.”

He also warned, without being specific, “Numerous other Higher Education Institutions that have hurt so many, and been so unfair and unjust, and have wrongly spent federal money, much of it from our government, are upcoming.”

Crackdown follows Columbia protests

The pact comes after months of uncertainty and fraught negotiations at the more than 270-year-old university. It was among the first targets of Trump’s crackdown on pro-Palestinian campus protests and on colleges that he asserts have allowed Jewish students be threatened and harassed.

Columbia’s own antisemitism task force found last summer that Jewish students had faced verbal abuse, ostracism and classroom humiliation during the spring 2024 demonstrations.

Other Jewish students took part in the protests, however, and protest leaders maintain they aren’t targeting Jews but rather criticizing the Israeli government and its war in Gaza.

Columbia’s leadership — a revolving door of three interim presidents in the last year — has declared that the campus climate needs to change.

Columbia agrees to question international students

Also in the settlement is an agreement to ask prospective international students “questions designed to elicit their reasons for wishing to study in the United States,” and establishes processes to make sure all students are committed to “civil discourse.”

In a move that would potentially make it easier for the Trump administration to deport students who participate in protests, Columbia promised to provide the government with information, upon request, of disciplinary actions involving student-visa holders resulting in expulsions or suspensions.

Columbia on Tuesday announced it would suspend, expel or revoke degrees from more than 70 students who participated in a pro-Palestinian demonstration inside the main library in May and an encampment during alumni weekend last year.

The pressure on Columbia began with a series of funding cuts. Then Mahmoud Khalil, a former graduate student who had been a visible figure in the protests, became the first person detained in the Trump administration’s push to deport pro-Palestinian activists who aren’t U.S. citizens.

Next came searches of some university residences amid a federal Justice Department investigation into whether Columbia concealed “illegal aliens” on campus. The interim president at the time responded that the university was committed to upholding the law.

University oversight expands

Columbia was an early test case for the Trump administration as it sought closer oversight of universities that the Republican president views as bastions of liberalism. Yet it soon was overshadowed by Harvard University, which became the first higher education institution to defy Trump’s demands and fight back in court.

The Trump administration has used federal research funding as its primary lever in its campaign to reshape higher education. More than \$2 billion in total has also been frozen at Cornell, Northwestern, Brown and Princeton universities.

Administration officials pulled \$175 million from the University of Pennsylvania in March over a dispute around women’s sports. They restored it when school officials agreed to update records set by transgender swimmer Lia Thomas and change their policies.

The administration also is looking beyond private universities. University of Virginia President James Ryan agreed to resign in June under pressure from a U.S. Justice Department investigation into diversity, equity and inclusion practices. A similar investigation was opened this month at George Mason University.

## Appeals court finds Trump's effort to end birthright citizenship unconstitutional, upholds block

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST and HALLIE GOLDEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal appeals court in San Francisco ruled Wednesday that President Donald Trump's order seeking to end birthright citizenship is unconstitutional, affirming a lower-court decision that blocked its enforcement nationwide.

The ruling from a three-judge panel of the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals comes after Trump's plan was also blocked by a federal judge in New Hampshire. It marks the first time an appeals court has weighed in and brings the issue one step closer to coming back quickly before the Supreme Court.

The 9th Circuit decision keeps a block on the Trump administration enforcing the order that would deny citizenship to children born to people who are in the United States illegally or temporarily.

"The district court correctly concluded that the Executive Order's proposed interpretation, denying citizenship to many persons born in the United States, is unconstitutional. We fully agree," the majority wrote.

The 2-1 ruling keeps in place a decision from U.S. District Judge John C. Coughenour in Seattle, who blocked Trump's effort to end birthright citizenship and decried what he described as the administration's attempt to ignore the Constitution for political gain. Coughenour was the first to block the order.

The White House and Justice Department did not immediately respond to messages seeking comment.

The Supreme Court has since restricted the power of lower court judges to issue orders that affect the whole country, known as nationwide injunctions.

But the 9th Circuit majority found that the case fell under one of the exceptions left open by the justices. The case was filed by a group of states who argued that they need a nationwide order to prevent the problems that would be caused by birthright citizenship only being the law in half of the country.

"We conclude that the district court did not abuse its discretion in issuing a universal injunction in order to give the States complete relief," Judge Michael Hawkins and Ronald Gould, both appointed by President Bill Clinton, wrote.

Judge Patrick Bumatay, who was appointed by Trump, dissented. He found that the states don't have the legal right, or standing, to sue. "We should approach any request for universal relief with good faith skepticism, mindful that the invocation of 'complete relief' isn't a backdoor to universal injunctions," he wrote.

Bumatay did not weigh in on whether ending birthright citizenship would be constitutional.

The Citizenship Clause of the 14th Amendment says that all people born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to U.S. jurisdiction, are citizens.

Justice Department attorneys argue that the phrase "subject to United States jurisdiction" in the amendment means that citizenship isn't automatically conferred to children based on their birth location alone.

The states — Washington, Arizona, Illinois and Oregon — argue that ignores the plain language of the Citizenship Clause as well as a landmark birthright citizenship case in 1898 where the Supreme Court found a child born in San Francisco to Chinese parents was a citizen by virtue of his birth on American soil.

Trump's order asserts that a child born in the U.S. is not a citizen if the mother does not have legal immigration status or is in the country legally but temporarily, and the father is not a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident. At least nine lawsuits challenging the order have been filed around the U.S.

## Bryan Kohberger gets life in prison but leaves loved ones of Idaho students he killed wondering why

By REBECCA BOONE and GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — One after another, the friends and family of the four University of Idaho students killed in their home by Bryan Kohberger vented their emotions in sobs, insults and curses before a packed courtroom Wednesday as he was sentenced to life in prison.

Ben Mogen, the father of Madison Mogen, credited her with helping keep him alive through his fight with addiction. He called her "the only thing I'm proud of."

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Dylan Mortensen, a roommate of the victims who told police of seeing a strange man with bushy eyebrows and a ski mask in the home that night, called Kohberger "a hollow vessel, something less than human." She shook with tears as she described how Kohberger "took the light they carried into each room."

"Hell will be waiting," Kristi Goncalves, the mother of Kaylee Goncalves, told the killer.

Judge Steven Hippler ordered Kohberger to serve four life sentences without parole for first-degree murder in the killings of Mogen, Goncalves, Xana Kernodle and Ethan Chapin. Kohberger was also given a 10-year sentence for burglary and assessed \$270,000 in fines and civil penalties.

Kohberger, 30, pleaded guilty weeks before his trial was to start in a deal to avoid the death penalty. Prosecutors and defense attorneys agreed on the sentence.

Kohberger gives no explanation

When it was his turn to speak in court, Kohberger said, "I respectfully decline," shedding no light on why he slipped into the rental home in Moscow through a sliding glass door early on Nov. 13, 2022, and stabbed four of the students inside.

"I share the desire expressed by others to understand the why," Hippler said. "But upon reflection, it seems to me, and this is just my own opinion, that by continuing to focus on why, we continue to give Mr. Kohberger relevance, we give him agency and we give him power."

The crime horrified the city, which had not seen a homicide in about five years, and prompted a massive search for the perpetrator. Some students took the rest of their classes online because they felt unsafe. Kohberger, a graduate student in criminology at nearby Washington State University, was arrested in Pennsylvania, where his parents lived, roughly six weeks later.

A Q-tip from the garbage at his parents' house and genetic genealogy was used to match Kohberger's DNA to material recovered from a knife sheath found at the home, investigators said. They used cellphone data to pinpoint his movements and surveillance camera footage to help locate a white sedan that was seen repeatedly driving past the home the night of the killings.

But investigators told reporters after Wednesday's hearing that exhaustive efforts failed to find the murder weapon, the clothes Kohberger was wearing at the time or any connection between him and the students.

Within hours of the sentencing, the Moscow Police Department posted hundreds of documents about the investigation on its website. They detailed how investigators processed the gruesome crime scene; ran down tips from people who claimed to have gone on a Tinder date with Kohberger or to have seen him walking along a highway; and tested soil and pollen found on a shovel in his car to see if they could narrow down where it had been used.

Loved ones express loss and fury

"This world was a better place with her in it," said Scott Laramie, Mogen's stepfather. "Karen and I are ordinary people, but we lived extraordinary lives because we had Maddie."

Goncalves' father, Steve, taunted Kohberger for getting caught despite his education in forensics.

"You were that careless, that foolish, that stupid," he said. "Master's degree? You're a joke."

Kernodle's father, Jeff, recalled that his daughter had not been feeling well that night and he thought about driving the 7 miles (11.3 km) to the rental home to be with her. He decided against it because he had been drinking.

Mortensen and another surviving roommate, Bethany Funke, described crippling panic attacks afterward.

"I slept in my parents' room for almost a year and had them double lock every door, set an alarm and still check everywhere in the room just in case someone was hiding," Funke said in a statement read by a friend.

Alivea Goncalves's voice did not waver as she asked Kohberger questions including what her sister's last words were. She drew applause after belittling Kohberger, who remained expressionless.

"You didn't win, you just exposed yourself as the coward you are," Alivea Goncalves said. "You're a delusional, pathetic, hypochondriac loser."

Chapin's family did not attend.

Kohberger's mother and sister sat in the gallery near the defense table. His mother quietly wept at times

as the other parents described their grief. She sobbed briefly when Mogen's grandmother said her heart goes out to the other families, including Kohberger's.

Xana Kernodle's aunt, Kim Kernodle, said she forgave Kohberger and asked him to call her from prison, hoping he would answer her lingering questions about the killings.

"Bryan, I'm here today to tell you I have forgiven you, because I no longer could live with that hate in my heart," she said. "And for me to become a better person, I have forgiven you. And any time you want to talk and tell me what happened, get my number. I'm here. No judgment."

## Judge rejects Trump administration effort to unseal Epstein grand jury records in Florida

By ED WHITE Associated Press

A judge on Wednesday rejected a Trump administration request to unseal transcripts from grand jury investigations of Jeffrey Epstein years ago in Florida, though a similar request for the work of a different grand jury is pending in New York.

U.S. District Judge Robin Rosenberg in West Palm Beach said the request to release grand jury documents from 2005 and 2007 did not meet any of the extraordinary exceptions under federal law that could make them public.

The Justice Department last week asked the judge to release records to quell a storm among supporters of President Donald Trump who believe there was a conspiracy to protect Epstein's clients, conceal videos of crimes being committed and other evidence.

In 2008, Epstein cut a deal with federal prosecutors in Florida that allowed him to escape more severe federal charges and instead plead guilty to state charges of procuring a person under 18 for prostitution and solicitation of prostitution.

Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche had asked judges in Florida and New York to unseal transcripts from grand jury proceedings that resulted in indictments against Epstein and former girlfriend Ghislaine Maxwell, saying "transparency to the American public is of the utmost importance to this Administration."

Federal grand juries hear evidence in secret and then decide whether there is enough for an indictment. Experts say the transcripts likely would not reveal much because prosecutors typically are trying only to present enough material to get charges and don't introduce the entire investigation.

Epstein, a wealthy financier, years later was arrested in 2019 on federal sex trafficking charges, while Maxwell was charged with helping him abuse teenage girls.

Epstein was found dead in his cell at a federal jail in New York City about a month after he was arrested. Investigators concluded he killed himself. Maxwell later was convicted at trial and sentenced to 20 years in prison.

The case attracted attention because of Epstein and Maxwell's links to famous people, including royals, presidents and billionaires. It also led to some of the biggest conspiracy theories animating Trump's base.

The furor over records has been stoked by the Justice Department. In February, far-right influencers were invited to the White House and provided with binders marked "The Epstein Files: Phase 1" and "Declassified." The binders contained documents that had largely already been in the public domain.

The department on July 7 acknowledged that Epstein did not have a list of clients. It also said no more files related to his case would be made public.

A two-page memo that bore the logos of the FBI and Justice Department, but that was not signed by any individual, said the department determined that no "further disclosure would be appropriate or warranted."

Meanwhile, a House Oversight subcommittee voted Wednesday to subpoena the Justice Department for files. The full committee issued a subpoena for Maxwell to testify before committee officials in August. And Sen. Adam Schiff, D-Calif., called on Attorney General Pam Bondi and FBI Director Kash Patel to appear before the Senate Judiciary Committee.



## From tech podcasts to policy: Trump's new AI plan leans heavily on Silicon Valley industry ideas

By MATT O'BRIEN, ALI SWENSON and COLLIN BINKLEY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Wednesday unveiled a sweeping new plan for America's "global dominance" in artificial intelligence, proposing to cut back environmental regulations to speed up the construction of AI supercomputers while promoting the sale of U.S.-made AI technologies at home and abroad.

The "AI Action Plan" embraces many of the ideas voiced by tech industry lobbyists and the Silicon Valley investors who backed Trump's election campaign last year.

"America must once again be a country where innovators are rewarded with a green light, not strangled with red tape," Trump said at an unveiling event that was co-hosted by the bipartisan Hill and Valley Forum and the "All-In" podcast, a business and technology show hosted by four tech investors and entrepreneurs, which includes Trump's AI czar, David Sacks.

The plan includes some familiar tech lobby pitches. That includes accelerating the sale of AI technology abroad and making it easier to construct the energy-hungry data center buildings that are needed to form and run AI products. It also includes some AI culture war preoccupations of the circle of venture capitalists who endorsed Trump last year.

Trump signed three executive orders Wednesday to deliver on the plan. They seek to fast-track permitting of AI construction projects, expand U.S. tech exports and get rid of "woke" in AI.

Trump had given his tech advisers six months to come up with new AI policies after revoking President Joe Biden's signature AI guardrails on his first day in office.

Trump's AI plan: global dominance, cutting regulations

The plan prioritizes AI innovation and adoption, urging the removal of any barriers that could slow down adoption across industries and government. The nation's policy, Trump said, will be to do "whatever it takes to lead the world in artificial intelligence."

Yet it also seeks to guide the industry's growth to address a longtime rallying point for the tech industry's loudest Trump backers: countering the liberal bias they see in AI chatbots such as ChatGPT or Google's Gemini.

Trump's plan aims to block the government from contracting with tech companies unless they "ensure that their systems are objective and free from top-down ideological bias." The plan says the nation's leading AI models should protect free speech and be "founded on American values," though it doesn't define which values those should include.

Sacks, a former PayPal executive and now Trump's top AI adviser, has been criticizing "woke AI" for more than a year, fueled by Google's February 2024 rollout of an AI image generator. When asked to show an American Founding Father, it created pictures of Black, Asian, and Native American men.

Google quickly fixed its tool, but the "Black George Washington" moment remained a parable for the problem of AI's perceived political bias, taken up by X owner Elon Musk, venture capitalist Marc Andreessen, Vice President JD Vance and Republican lawmakers.

Streamlining AI data center permits to speed up supercomputer construction

Chief among the plan's goals is to speed up permitting and loosen environmental regulation to accelerate construction on new data centers and factories. It condemns "radical climate dogma" and recommends lifting environmental restrictions, including clean air and water laws.

Trump has previously paired AI's need for huge amounts of electricity with his own push to tap into U.S. energy sources, including gas, coal and nuclear.

"We will be adding at least as much electric capacity as China," Trump said at the Wednesday event. "Every company will be given the right to build their own power plant."

Many tech giants are already well on their way toward building new data centers in the U.S. and around the world. OpenAI announced this week that it has switched on the first phase of a massive data center complex in Abilene, Texas, part of an Oracle-backed project known as Stargate that Trump promoted

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earlier this year. Amazon, Microsoft, Meta and xAI also have major projects underway.

The tech industry has pushed for easier permitting rules to get its computing facilities connected to power, but the AI building boom has also contributed to spiking demand for fossil fuel production, which contributes to global warming.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Tuesday called on the world's major tech firms to power data centers completely with renewables by 2030.

The plan includes a strategy to disincentivize states from aggressively regulating AI technology, calling on federal agencies not to provide funding to states with burdensome regulations.

"We need one common sense federal standard that supersedes all states, supersedes everybody," Trump said, "so you don't end up in litigation with 43 states at one time."

Who benefits from Trump's AI action plan?

There are sharp debates on how to regulate AI, even among the influential venture capitalists who have been debating it on their favorite medium: the podcast.

While some Trump backers, particularly Andreessen, have advocated an "accelerationist" approach that aims to speed up AI advancement with minimal regulation, Sacks has described himself as taking a middle road of techno-realism.

"Technology is going to happen. Trying to stop it is like ordering the tides to stop. If we don't do it, somebody else will," Sacks said on the "All-In" podcast.

On Tuesday, more than 100 groups, including labor unions, parent groups, environmental justice organizations and privacy advocates, signed a resolution opposing Trump's embrace of industry-driven AI policy and calling for a "People's AI Action Plan" that would "deliver first and foremost for the American people."

J.B. Branch, Big Tech accountability advocate at the watchdog group Public Citizen, which signed the resolution, called the plan a "sellout."

"Under this plan, tech giants get sweetheart deals while everyday Americans will see their electricity bills rise to subsidize discounted power for massive AI data centers," Branch said in a statement Wednesday. "Americans deserve an AI future rooted in safety, fairness, and accountability — not a handout to billionaires."

## House subcommittee votes to subpoena Justice Department for Epstein files

By STEPHEN GROVES and MATT BROWN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A House subcommittee on Wednesday voted to subpoena the Department of Justice for files in the sex trafficking investigation into Jeffrey Epstein after Democrats successfully goaded GOP lawmakers to defy President Donald Trump and Republican leadership to support the action.

The vote showed the intensifying push for disclosures in the Epstein investigation even as House Speaker Mike Johnson — caught between demands from Trump and clamoring from his own members for the House to act — was sending lawmakers home a day early for its August recess. The House Committee on Oversight also issued a subpoena Wednesday for Ghislaine Maxwell, a convicted sex offender and girlfriend of the late Epstein, to testify before committee officials in August.

Meanwhile, Democrats on a subcommittee of the powerful House Oversight Committee made a motion for the subpoena Wednesday afternoon. Three Republicans on the panel voted with Democrats for the subpoena, sending it through on an 8-2 vote tally.

The Republican subcommittee chairman, Rep. Clay Higgins of Louisiana, said that work was beginning to draft the subpoena but did not give a timeline for when it would be issued.

"I've never handled a subpoena like this. This is some fascinating stuff," said Higgins, who voted against the motion.

Democrats cheered the action as proof that their push for disclosures in the Epstein investigation was growing stronger. The committee agreed to redact information on victims, yet Democrats successfully blocked a push by Republicans to only subpoena information that was deemed to be "credible" — language

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that Trump has also used when discussing what he would support releasing.

"Democrats are focused on transparency and are pushing back against the corruption against Donald Trump. What is Donald Trump hiding that he won't release the Epstein files?" said Rep. Robert Garcia, the top Democrat on the oversight committee.

Democrats push for disclosure of the Epstein files

Earlier Wednesday, Johnson had said there was no need to vote on a separate piece of bipartisan legislation calling for the release of the Epstein files this week because the Trump administration is "already doing everything within their power to release them."

Yet Democrats have delighted in pressing Republicans to support the release of the files. Their efforts halted the GOP's legislative agenda for the week and turned attention to an issue that Trump has unsuccessfully implored his supporters to forget about.

"They're fleeing our work, our job and sending us back home because they don't want to vote to release these files. This is something that they ran on. This is something that they talked about: the importance of transparency, holding pedophiles accountable," said Rep. Summer Lee, the Pennsylvania Democrat who pushed for the subpoena.

Democrats have seized on Epstein files to divide GOP

Democratic leaders are hoping to make the issue about much more than just Epstein, who died in his New York jail cell six years ago while he awaited trial on sex trafficking charges.

"Why haven't Republicans released the Epstein files to the American people? It's reasonable to conclude that Republicans are continuing to protect the lifestyles of the rich and the shameless, even if that includes pedophiles," said House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries at a news conference. "So it's all connected."

It comes as both parties are gearing up to take their messaging to voters on Trump's big multitrillion-dollar tax breaks and spending cuts bill. For Republicans, it's "beautiful" legislation that will spark economic growth; for Democrats, it's an "ugly" gift mostly to the richest Americans that undermines health care for low-income people.

Yet as furor has grown on the right over the Trump administration's reversal on promises related to Epstein, several Democrats have seized on the opportunity to divide Republicans on the issue.

"This goes to a fundamental sense of, 'Is our government co-opted by rich and powerful people that isn't looking out for ordinary Americans? Or can we have a government that looks out for ordinary Americans?'" said Rep. Ro Khanna, a California Democrat who has put forward a bipartisan bill meant to force the release of the files.

Republican leaders accuse Democrats of caring about the issue purely for political gain. They point out that the Department of Justice held on to the Epstein investigation through the presidency of Democrat Joe Biden.

Trump's Justice Department has also sought the release of testimony from secret grand jury proceedings in the Epstein case, but a federal judge in Florida rejected that request on Wednesday. A similar records request is still pending in New York.

## More than 100 aid groups warn of starvation in Gaza as Israeli strikes kill 29, officials say

By WAFAA SHURAFU and TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — More than 100 charity and human rights groups said Wednesday that Israel's blockade and ongoing military offensive are pushing Palestinians in the Gaza Strip toward starvation, as Israeli strikes killed another 29 people overnight, according to local health officials.

Meanwhile, the Trump administration's Mideast envoy, Steve Witkoff, was set to meet with a senior Israeli official about ceasefire talks, a sign that lower-level negotiations that have dragged on for weeks could be approaching a breakthrough.

Experts say Gaza is at risk of famine because of Israel's blockade and the offensive launched in response to Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack. The head of the World Health Organization said Gaza is "witnessing a

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deadly surge" in malnutrition and related diseases, and that a "large proportion" of its roughly 2 million people are starving.

Israel says it allows enough aid into the territory and faults delivery efforts by U.N. agencies, which say they are hindered by Israeli restrictions and the breakdown of security.

Hamas has said it will only release the remaining 50 hostages it holds, around 20 of them believed to be alive, in exchange for a lasting ceasefire and an Israeli withdrawal. Israel has vowed to recover all the captives and continue the war until Hamas has been defeated or disarmed.

'Chaos, starvation and death'

In an open letter, 115 organizations, including major international aid groups such as Doctors Without Borders, Mercy Corps and Save the Children, said they were watching their own colleagues, as well as the Palestinians they serve, "waste away."

The letter blamed Israeli restrictions and "massacres" at aid-distribution points. Witnesses, health officials and the U.N. human rights office say Israeli forces have repeatedly fired on crowds seeking aid, killing more than 1,000 people. Israel says its forces have only fired warning shots and that the death toll is exaggerated.

The Israeli government's "restrictions, delays, and fragmentation under its total siege have created chaos, starvation, and death," the letter said.

WHO Director Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus echoed that criticism, telling reporters that acute malnutrition centers in Gaza are full of patients and lack adequate supplies. He said rates of acute malnutrition exceed 10% and that among pregnant and breastfeeding women, more than 20% are malnourished, often severely.

The U.N. health agency's representative in the occupied Palestinian territories, Dr. Rik Peeperkorn, said there were more than 30,000 children under 5 with acute malnutrition in Gaza and that the WHO had reports that at least 21 children under 5 have died so far this year.

Israel says critics are 'echoing Hamas' propaganda'

The Israeli Foreign Ministry rejected the criticism in the open letter and accused the groups of "echoing Hamas' propaganda." It said it has allowed around 4,500 aid trucks into Gaza since lifting a complete blockade in May, and that more than 700 trucks are waiting to be picked up and distributed by the U.N.

That's an average of around 70 trucks a day, the lowest rate of the war and far below the 500 to 600 trucks a day the U.N. says are needed, and which entered during a six-week ceasefire earlier this year.

The U.N. says it has struggled to deliver aid inside Gaza because of Israeli military restrictions, ongoing fighting and a breakdown of law and order. An alternative system established by Israel and an American contractor has been marred by violence and controversy.

Top adviser to Netanyahu will meet US envoy in Rome

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said Witkoff was headed to Europe to meet with key leaders from the Middle East to discuss the latest ceasefire proposal and release of hostages.

"We want this ceasefire to happen as soon as possible, and we want these hostages to be released," Leavitt said.

An official familiar with the negotiations said Ron Dermer, a top adviser to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, was traveling to Rome to meet Witkoff on Thursday. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the sensitive negotiations.

The evolving deal is expected to include a 60-day ceasefire in which Hamas would release 10 living hostages and the remains of 18 others in phases in exchange for Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. Aid supplies would be ramped up, and the two sides would hold negotiations on a lasting truce.

Overnight strikes kill at least 29

Israel has continued to carry out waves of daily airstrikes against what it says are militant targets but which often kill women and children. Israel blames civilian deaths on Hamas because the militants operate in densely populated areas.

One of the overnight strikes hit a house in Gaza City, killing at least 12 people, according to Shifa Hospital, which received the casualties. The dead included six children and two women, according to Gaza's



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Health Ministry. The Israeli military said it struck an Islamic Jihad militant, and that the incident was under review because of reports of civilian casualties.

Shifa said another strike late Tuesday in Gaza City killed three children.

A strike on an apartment in northern Gaza killed at least six people. Among the dead were three children and two women, including one who was pregnant, the ministry said. The military said it struck a Hamas operative.

In central Gaza, a strike in a densely populated part of the built-up Nuseirat refugee camp killed eight people and wounded 57, according to Awda Hospital, which received the casualties.

Hamas-led militants abducted 251 people in the Oct. 7 attack and killed around 1,200 people, mostly civilians.

More than 59,000 Palestinians have been killed during the war, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. Its count doesn't distinguish between militants and civilians, but the ministry says that more than half of the dead are women and children. The U.N. and other international organizations see it as the most reliable source of data on casualties.

## US stocks hit more records following US-Japan trade deal

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. stocks set more records on Wednesday following a trade deal between the world's No. 1 and No. 4 economies, one that would lower proposed tariffs on Japanese imports coming to the United States.

The S&P 500 added 0.8% to its all-time high. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rallied 507 points, or 1.1%, and the Nasdaq composite climbed 0.6% to hit its own record.

Stocks jumped even more in Tokyo, where the Nikkei 225 rallied 3.5% after President Donald Trump announced a trade framework that would place a 15% tax on imports coming from Japan. That's lower than the 25% rate that Trump had earlier said would kick in on Aug. 1.

"It's a sign of the times that markets would cheer 15% tariffs," said Brian Jacobsen, chief economist at Annex Wealth Management. "A year ago, that level of tariffs would be shocking. Today, we breathe a sigh of relief."

Trump has proposed stiff taxes on imports from around the world, which carry the double-edged risk of driving up inflation for U.S. households while slowing the economy. But many of Trump's tariffs are currently on pause, giving time to reach deals with other countries that could lower the tax rates. Trump also announced a trade agreement with the Philippines on Tuesday.

So far, the U.S. economy has seemed to hold up OK despite the pressures on it. And tariffs already in place may be having less of an effect than expected, at least when it comes to the prices that U.S. households are paying at the moment.

"The main lesson about tariffs so far is that passthrough to consumer prices is tracking somewhat lower than in 2019," according to Goldman Sachs economist David Mericle.

Tariffs are certainly having an effect, to be sure, as big U.S. companies across industries have been showing through their profit updates in recent days.

Hasbro took a \$1 billion, non-cash hit to its results for the spring to write down the value of some of its assets following a review triggered by the implementation of tariffs. It said tariffs have had no impact yet on how much profit it's making from each \$1 of its sales, but it expects to see costs ramp during the current quarter.

Hasbro's stock fell 0.9% even though it reported a stronger profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected, when not including the \$1 billion charge.

Texas Instruments' stock also fell despite delivering results for the latest quarter that were above analysts' expectations. It gave a forecasted range for profit in the current quarter whose midpoint fell a bit shy of Wall Street's.

Analysts pointed to some cautious commentary from Texas Instruments executives about how the un-

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certainty created by tariffs could slow demand. Its stock sank 13.3%.

Most of the stocks on Wall Street nevertheless rose, including a 14.6% jump for GE Vernova. The energy company not only delivered a stronger profit than analysts expected, it also raised its forecasts for revenue from its power and electrification businesses.

GE Vernova said that the inflation it's expecting to see as a result of tariffs may be trending toward the lower end of \$300 million to \$400 million, net of mitigating actions.

Lamb Weston rallied 16.3% after the supplier of French fries and other potato products delivered better results for the latest quarter than analysts expected and said it expects customers will continue to eat fries even with an uncertain economy. It also announced a plan to cut at least \$250 million in costs by cutting about 4% of its workforce and making other moves.

Elsewhere on Wall Street, several stocks jumped as traders search for the next "meme stock" that could ride a wave of online enthusiasm to high prices, regardless of what the company's profits are doing. Krispy Kreme, which came into the day with a 58.4% loss for the year so far, jumped nearly 39% shortly after trading began. It then gave back most of it and ended with a gain of 4.6%. GoPro rose 12.4%.

That's even as other potential meme stocks lost their momentum. Opendoor Technologies, which had more than tripled between the last two Mondays, fell 20.3%.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 49.29 points to 6,358.91. The Dow Jones Industrial Average jumped 507.85 to 45,010.29, and the Nasdaq composite gained 127.33 to 21,020.02.

In stock markets abroad, indexes rose across Asia and Europe following Trump's announcements of trade deals.

Japan's market was the big winner, where a series of automakers gave no public reaction as their stock prices rallied. Japanese companies tend to be cautious about their public reactions, and some business officials have privately remarked in off-record comments that they hesitate to say anything because Trump keeps changing his mind.

Elsewhere, Hong Kong's Hang Seng rose 1.6%, and France's CAC 40 gained 1.4% for two of the world's bigger moves.

In the bond market, Treasury yields ticked higher.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury rose to 4.38% from 4.35% late Tuesday.

## **Muscogee Nation court rules descendants of enslaved people are entitled to citizenship**

By GRAHAM LEE BREWER Associated Press

The Muscogee Nation Supreme Court ruled Wednesday that two descendants of people once enslaved by the tribe are entitled to tribal citizenship.

The court found that the tribal nation's citizenship board violated an 1866 treaty when it denied the applications of Rhonda Grayson and Jeffrey Kennedy in 2019 because they could not identify a lineal descendant of the tribe.

"Are we, as a Nation, bound to treaty promises made so many years ago? Today, we answer in the affirmative, because this is what Mvskoke law demands," the court wrote in its opinion.

The Muscogee Nation is one of five tribes in Oklahoma that once practiced slavery, and in that 1866 treaty with the U.S. government, the tribe both abolished it and granted citizenship to the formerly enslaved. But in 1979, the tribal nation adopted a constitution that restricted membership to the descendants of people listed as "Muscogee (Creek) Indians by blood" on the Dawes Rolls, a census of members of the five tribes created around 1900.

When the Dawes Rolls were created, people were listed on two separate rolls: those who were Muscogee and those who were identified by the U.S. government as Freedmen. In its ruling Wednesday, the court remanded the matter back to the Muscogee Nation's citizenship board and directed it to apply the Treaty of 1866 to Grayson and Kennedy's applications, as well as any future applicants who can trace an ancestor to either roll.

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The decision could create a path to tribal citizenship for thousands of new members who are not Muscogee by blood.

The ruling is a long-awaited affirmation of their ancestors and their rightful place in the Muscogee Nation, said Rhonda Grayson.

"While this victory honors our past, it also offers a meaningful opportunity for healing and reconciliation. It's time now to come together, rebuild trust, and move forward as one united Nation, ensuring future generations never again face exclusion or erasure," she said in a statement to The Associated Press.

"When I heard the ruling, I felt generations of my family exhale at once," Kennedy added in a statement. "Our ancestors signed that treaty in good faith, and today the Court finally honored their word."

The court also found that any reference of "by blood" in the Muscogee Nation's constitution is unlawful, which could mean the tribe will have to overhaul parts of the governing document. One provision of the constitution requires that citizens be at least one quarter Muscogee "by blood" to run for office.

"We are currently reviewing the order to understand its basis as well as its implications for our processes," Muscogee Nation Chief David Hill said in a statement. "It may be necessary to ask for a reconsideration of this order to receive clarity so that we can ensure that we move forward in a legal, constitutional manner."

Successful legal cases were brought against two of the five tribes, the Seminole Nation and the Cherokee Nation, which have since granted citizenship to Freedmen descendants. But how that citizenship is implemented could come down to politics, said Jonathon Velie, an attorney who worked on behalf of Freedmen in both cases.

The roughly 2,500 Freedmen citizens in the Seminole Nation are not allowed to run for higher office and do not have access to certain resources, like tribal housing and education assistance. The 17,000 Freedmen citizens in the Cherokee Nation, however, have been embraced by the last two administrations and are given the full benefits of tribal members.

When it comes to the U.S. Department of the Interior, which oversees many of the resources owed to tribes through treaty rights, the Freedmen citizens in both tribes are the same, said Velie — their tribes just honor their citizenship differently.

"I hope the (Muscogee) Creek Nation welcomes them back in, because what they won today wasn't the U.S. Government or the U.S. courts telling them, they told themselves in their own judicial system," Velie said.

## Judge bars ICE from immediately taking Abrego Garcia into custody if he's released from jail

By BEN FINLEY Associated Press

A federal judge in Maryland has prohibited the Trump administration from taking Kilmar Abrego Garcia into immediate immigration custody if he's released from jail in Tennessee while awaiting trial on human smuggling charges, according to an order issued Wednesday.

U.S. District Judge Paula Xinis ordered the U.S. government to provide notice of three business days if Immigration and Customs Enforcement intends to initiate deportation proceedings against him.

The judge also ordered the government to restore the federal supervision that Abrego Garcia was under before he was wrongfully deported to his native El Salvador in March. That supervision had allowed Abrego Garcia to live and work in Maryland for years, while he periodically checked in with ICE.

"Defendants have done little to assure the Court that absent intervention, Abrego Garcia's due process rights will be protected," Xinis wrote in her order.

Abrego Garcia became a prominent face in the debate over President Donald Trump's immigration policies following his wrongful expulsion to El Salvador in March. Trump's administration violated a U.S. immigration judge's order in 2019 that shields Abrego Garcia from deportation to El Salvador because he likely faces threats of gang violence there.

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

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to drive on.

Abrego Garcia's criminal attorneys in the Tennessee case want him released from jail to await trial, but only if he won't be taken into ICE custody and deported. A federal judge in that criminal case on Wednesday affirmed that Abrego Garcia is eligible for release. U.S. District Judge Waverly Crenshaw ruled that appropriate release conditions will mitigate any risk of flight or any danger to the community.

Crenshaw then sent the case back to U.S. Magistrate Judge Barbara Holmes, who originally held that Abrego Garcia is eligible for release last month. Holmes has held off on ordering his release at the request of Abrego Garcia's own lawyers. On Wednesday, she signed yet another order putting off his release from jail, this time for 30 days.

U.S. officials have said they'll try to deport Abrego Garcia to a country that isn't El Salvador, such as Mexico or South Sudan, before his trial starts in January because they allege he's a danger to the community.

Abrego Garcia's American wife, Jennifer Vasquez Sura, is suing the Trump administration in Xini's Maryland court over his wrongful deportation in March and is trying to prevent another expulsion.

U.S. officials have argued that Abrego Garcia can be deported because he came to the U.S. illegally around 2011 and because a U.S. immigration judge deemed him eligible for expulsion in 2019, although not to his native El Salvador. Following the 2019 decision, Abrego Garcia was released under federal supervision, received a federal work permit and checked in with ICE each year, his attorneys have said.

The Trump administration recently stated in court documents that they revoked Abrego Garcia's supervised release when they deported him in March, claiming that he was in the MS-13 gang.

## Colorado's measles outbreak is over, and the weekly US case count continues to diminish

By DEVI SHASTRI AP Health Writer

Health officials in Colorado say the state's measles outbreak is over, and the U.S. added just 10 confirmed cases nationally in the last week.

Wednesday's national case count stood at 1,319, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Earlier this month, the U.S. passed the total count for 2019, when the country almost lost its status of having eliminated measles.

A vast majority of this year's cases are from Texas, where a major outbreak raged through the late winter and spring. Other states with active outbreaks — which the CDC defines as three or more related cases — include Arizona, Georgia, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Utah.

There have been three deaths in the U.S. this year, and all were unvaccinated: two elementary school-aged children in West Texas and an adult in New Mexico.

North America has three other large outbreaks. The longest, in Ontario, Canada, has resulted in 2,276 cases from mid-October through July 15. The province logged its first death June 5 in a baby who got congenital measles but also had other preexisting conditions.

Another outbreak in Alberta, Canada, has sickened 1,472 as of Tuesday. And the Mexican state of Chihuahua had 3,296 measles cases and 10 deaths as of Tuesday, according to data from the state health ministry.

Measles is caused by a highly contagious virus that's airborne and spreads easily when an infected person breathes, sneezes or coughs. It is preventable through vaccines and has been considered eliminated from the U.S. since 2000.

How many measles cases are there in Texas?

Texas did not add any cases in the last week, coming in at 762 measles cases Tuesday across 36 counties, most of them in West Texas.

Throughout the outbreak, 99 people have been hospitalized. State health officials estimated less than 1% of cases — fewer than 10 — were actively infectious as of Tuesday.

Statewide, only Lamar County has ongoing measles transmission, officials said. In total, though, more



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than half of Texas' cases (414) have been in Gaines County, where the virus started spreading in a close-knit, undervaccinated Mennonite community.

The April 3 death in Texas was an 8-year-old child, according to Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. Local health officials said the child did not have underlying health conditions and died of "what the child's doctor described as measles pulmonary failure." A unvaccinated child with no underlying conditions died of measles in Texas in late February; Kennedy said the child was 6.

How many measles cases are there in New Mexico?

New Mexico also stayed steady at 95 measles cases on Tuesday.

Lea County has seen the most with 67, but Lea and six other counties no longer have active measles spread, officials said Tuesday.

An outbreak of 14 cases tied to a jail in Luna County remains active.

An unvaccinated adult died of measles-related illness March 6. The person did not seek medical care. Seven people have been hospitalized since the state's outbreak started.

How many cases are there in Oklahoma?

Oklahoma held steady a third week at 17 confirmed and three probable cases.

The state health department is not releasing which counties have cases, but no counties have recent public exposures.

How many cases are there in Arizona?

Arizona has four cases in Navajo County. They are linked to a single source, the county health department said June 9. All four were unvaccinated and had a history of recent international travel.

How many cases are there in Georgia?

Georgia has an outbreak of three cases in metro Atlanta, with the most recent infection confirmed June 18.

The state has confirmed six total cases in 2025. The remaining three are part of an unrelated outbreak from January.

How many cases are there in Iowa?

Iowa announced another measles case on Tuesday, bringing the state's total to eight in 2025. The state health department said the new case isn't linked to others in the state, and occurred in a person who was fully vaccinated.

An outbreak in eastern Johnson County involves four cases in members of the same household.

How many cases are there in Kansas?

Kansas was steady this week with 90 cases across 11 counties in the southwestern part of the state, with eight hospitalizations. All but three of the cases are connected, and most are in Gray County.

How many measles cases are there in Kentucky?

Kentucky has 13 cases this year.

Central Kentucky's outbreak rose to nine cases as of July 8. The cases are in Fayette County, which includes Lexington, and neighboring Woodford County.

How many cases are there in Michigan?

The state has had 18 cases total in 2025; eight are linked to outbreaks.

In northern Michigan, Grand Traverse County has an outbreak of four cases as of Wednesday. An earlier outbreak of four cases in Montcalm County was declared over on June 2.

How many cases are there in Missouri?

Missouri stayed steady with seven cases as of Wednesday.

Five cases are in southwestern Cedar County, and four of those are members of the same family. The fifth case is still under investigation, according to county health director Victoria Barker.

How many cases are there in Montana?

Montana added two measles cases this week for a total of 27. Cascade County confirmed its first case.

Seventeen were in Gallatin County, which is where the first cases showed up — Montana's first in 35 years. Flathead County has two cases, Yellowstone County had three and Hill County had four cases.

There are outbreaks in neighboring North Dakota and the Canadian provinces of Alberta, British Columbia

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and Saskatchewan.

How many cases are there in Utah?

Utah's measles case count rose by one to 11 as of Tuesday.

At least three of the cases are linked, the state health department said last week. State epidemiologist Dr. Leisha Nolen has said there are at least three different measles clusters in the state.

Where else is measles showing up in the U.S.?

Measles cases also have been reported this year in Alaska, Arkansas, California, District of Columbia, Florida, Hawaii, Louisiana, Maryland, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Vermont, Virginia, Washington and Wyoming.

Earlier outbreaks in Illinois, Indiana, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Tennessee are over.

Cases and outbreaks in the U.S. are frequently traced to someone who caught the disease abroad. The CDC said in May that more than twice as many measles have come from outside of the U.S. compared to May of last year. Most of those are in unvaccinated Americans returning home.

What do you need to know about the MMR vaccine?

The best way to avoid measles is to get the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine. The first shot is recommended for children between 12 and 15 months old and the second between 4 and 6 years old.

Getting another MMR shot as an adult is harmless if there are concerns about waning immunity, the CDC says. People who have documentation of receiving a live measles vaccine in the 1960s don't need to be revaccinated, but people who were immunized before 1968 with an ineffective vaccine made from "killed" virus should be revaccinated with at least one dose, the agency said.

People who have documentation that they had measles are immune and those born before 1957 generally don't need the shots because so many children got measles back then that they have "presumptive immunity."

Measles has a harder time spreading through communities with high vaccination rates — above 95% — due to "herd immunity." But childhood vaccination rates have declined nationwide since the pandemic and more parents are claiming religious or personal conscience waivers to exempt their kids from required shots.

What are the symptoms of measles?

Measles first infects the respiratory tract, then spreads throughout the body, causing a high fever, runny nose, cough, red, watery eyes and a rash.

The rash generally appears three to five days after the first symptoms, beginning as flat red spots on the face and then spreading downward to the neck, trunk, arms, legs and feet. When the rash appears, the fever may spike over 104 degrees Fahrenheit, according to the CDC.

Most kids will recover from measles, but infection can lead to dangerous complications such as pneumonia, blindness, brain swelling and death.

How can you treat measles?

There's no specific treatment for measles, so doctors generally try to alleviate symptoms, prevent complications and keep patients comfortable.

## Close call between a B-52 bomber and a commercial jet over North Dakota puts focus on small airports

By JOSH FUNK AP Transportation Writer

The evasive action an airline pilot took to avoid a B-52 bomber in the skies over North Dakota has focused attention on the way small airport towers are often run by private companies without their own radars.

Neither one of the pilots of the bomber or of the Delta Air Lines jet seemed to know the other plane was there before the airline pilot saw the B-52 looming in its path. The incident last Friday is still under investigation. But the Air Force has said the controller at the Minot airport didn't let the bomber's crew know about the airliner, and the SkyWest pilot flying the Delta flight told passengers he was surprised.

Passengers were alarmed by the sharp turn and dive the pilot of Delta Flight 3788 executed to avoid the bomber that had just completed a flyover at the State Fair in Minot, and a video shot aboard the plane

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captured the pilot's explanation afterward.

"Sorry about the aggressive maneuver. It caught me by surprise," the pilot can be heard saying on the video posted on social media. "This is not normal at all. I don't know why they didn't give us a heads-up."

This close call is just the latest incident to raise questions about aviation safety in the wake of January's midair collision over Washington, D.C., that killed 67 people. Here's more about the way small airports like Minot operate:

Many small airports lack radar

It is common for small airports across the country to operate without their own radar systems because it would be too costly to install them at every airport. But there generally aren't many problems with that.

The controllers at small airports are able to guide planes in to land visually with binoculars and radios as long as the weather is clear. Aviation safety consultant Jeff Guzzetti, who used to investigate crashes for both the National Transportation Safety Board and Federal Aviation Administration, said if the weather is bad, a regional FAA radar facility may be able to help, but ultimately planes simply won't land if the weather is too bad.

Sometimes small airport towers do have a video feed that gives controllers a view of a radar screen at an FAA facility miles away. Because the radar is so far away the display may not be as detailed about planes flying close to the ground, but the system does give controllers more information. It's not clear if the Minot tower has one of those systems because the company that runs it, Midwest Air Traffic Control Inc., hasn't responded to questions since the incident.

The overlapping network of FAA radar facilities across the country also keeps track of planes flying between airports, and an approach control radar center in Minneapolis helps direct planes in and out of Minot before controllers at the airport take over once they see the planes. The Minot airport typically handles between 18 and 24 flights a day. That's how it works at many small airports.

"Most times it works just fine," Guzzetti said.

Some of these small airports could gain radar as part of a massive overhaul of the air traffic control system, but that will depend on how busy the airports are and how much funding Congress ultimately approves for the multibillion-dollar project. So far, \$12.5 billion was included in President Trump's overall budget bill.

Private companies operate the towers

The FAA says that 265 airport towers nationwide are operated by companies as part of the contract system. The Transportation Department's Inspector General has said the contract towers that handle more than one quarter of the nation's flights are more cost effective than comparable FAA towers and have similar safety records. In some cases, local governments help pay the costs of contract towers.

The program began in 1982 at five less busy towers that had closed because of the air traffic controller strike the previous year, and it has expanded significantly over the years because it has been so successful. Most of the airports with contract towers would have no controllers without the program.

"Common sense would tell you that having an extra set of eyes controlling the local traffic — especially in good weather — would be safer than having no controller and just having the pilots talking to each other," Guzzetti said.

That's exactly how it works at the vast majority of the 5,100 public airports nationwide that are smaller than Minot. Pilots at those uncontrolled airports use their radios to coordinate takeoffs and landings with other planes in the area. Only about 10% of all airports have towers.

The FAA says it works closely with the companies that run contract towers to ensure their controllers are properly trained. It is easier to get certified at a contract tower because they handle fewer flights than FAA towers even though controllers are held to the same standard.

More controllers are needed nationwide

The ongoing shortage of air traffic controllers has persisted for years partly because it takes so long to train and certify new controllers. The FAA has said that it is roughly 3,000 short of the number of controllers it should have at its facilities.

The staffing situation at private towers is similar because they hire from the same pool of candidates. All the roughly 1,400 controllers at these smaller airports have to meet the same qualification and training

requirements. But contract towers also have the ability to hire controllers who retired from an FAA tower before the mandatory retirement age of 56. The contract towers don't have a retirement age.

The FAA has been working for a long time to hire more air traffic controllers to replace retiring workers and handle growing air traffic. But it can be hard to find good candidates for the stressful positions who can complete the rigorous training.

Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy has announced several efforts to hire and retain more controllers. The FAA is trying to shorten the time it takes between when someone applies to the air traffic controller academy in Oklahoma City and when they start training, and the agency is also trying to improve the graduation rate there by offering more support to the students. The candidates with the highest scores on the entrance exam are also getting top priority.

The FAA is also offering bonuses to experienced controllers if they opt not to retire early and continue working to help ease the shortage.

## **Doctor pleads guilty to selling Matthew Perry ketamine in the weeks before the actor's death**

By ANDREW DALTON and ITZEL LUNA Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A doctor who was a primary target in the sweeping investigation of actor Matthew Perry's overdose death pleaded guilty Wednesday to supplying the "Friends" star with ketamine despite knowing he was a struggling addict.

Dr. Salvador Plasencia became the fourth of the five people charged in connection with Perry's death to plead guilty. He and a woman prosecutors say was a major ketamine dealer faced the most serious charges after Perry was found dead in the hot tub of his Los Angeles home on Oct. 28, 2023.

Plasencia stood next to his lawyer and said "guilty" four times for four different counts before Judge Sheryllyn Peace Garnett in federal court in Los Angeles.

Plasencia, 43, was to have gone on trial in August until the doctor agreed last month to plead guilty to four counts of distribution of ketamine, according to the signed document filed in federal court in Los Angeles.

The charges can carry up to 40 years in prison. He is likely to be sentenced to much less, but there is no guarantee in his agreement.

He spoke only to answer the judge's questions. When asked if his lawyers had considered all the possibilities of pleas and sentencing in the case, Plasencia replied, "They've considered everything."

One of Matthew Perry's ketamine suppliers expresses regret

"Dr. Plasencia is profoundly remorseful for the treatment decisions he made while providing ketamine to Matthew Perry," the doctor's attorney, Debra White, said in an emailed statement after the hearing. "He is fully accepting responsibility by pleading guilty to drug distribution. Dr. Plasencia intends to voluntarily surrender his medical license, acknowledging his failure to protect Mr. Perry, a patient who was especially vulnerable due to addiction."

In exchange for the guilty pleas, prosecutors have agreed to drop three additional counts of distribution of ketamine and two counts of falsifying records.

Prosecutors outlined the charges in court before the plea, and said that he did not sell Perry the dose that killed the actor.

They described, and Plasencia admitted, that Perry froze up and his blood pressure spiked when the doctor gave him one injection, but Plasencia still left more ketamine for Perry's assistant to inject.

In court, Perry was referred to only as "victim MP." Plasencia acknowledged that he knew the actor was in addict when he charged him thousands of dollars and gave him ketamine, a drug primarily used as a surgical anesthetic.

Plasencia has been free on bond since shortly after his arrest in August, and will be allowed to remain free until his Dec. 3 sentencing.

Defense lawyer Karen Goldstein assured the judge that he is not a flight risk, saying he was born and raised in the area and is one of the primary caretakers for his son, who is about 2 years old.



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Plasencia has already turned over his license to prescribe controlled substances. He has been allowed to practice medicine in the past year, but he must inform patients of the charges before treating them. Goldstein told the judge he'll now surrender his medical license too.

Plasencia left the courthouse with his lawyers without speaking to reporters gathered outside.

Case raises questions about at-home ketamine use

"While Dr. Plasencia was not treating Mr. Perry at the time of his death," his lawyer's statement said, "he hopes his case serves as a warning to other medical professionals and leads to stricter oversight and clear protocols for the rapidly growing at-home ketamine industry in order to prevent future tragedies like this."

The only remaining defendant who has not reached an agreement with the U.S. Attorney's Office is Jasveen Sangha, who prosecutors allege is a drug dealer known as the "Ketamine Queen" and sold Perry the lethal dose. Her trial is scheduled to begin next month. She has pleaded not guilty.

According to prosecutors and co-defendants who reached their own deals, Plasencia illegally supplied Perry with a large amount of ketamine starting about a month before his death on Oct. 28, 2023.

According to a co-defendant, Plasencia in a text message called the actor a "moron" who could be exploited for money.

Perry's personal assistant, his friend, and another doctor all agreed to plead guilty last year in exchange for their cooperation as the government sought to make their case against larger targets, Plasencia and Sangha. None have been sentenced yet.

Perry was found dead by the assistant, Kenneth Iwamasa. The medical examiner ruled that ketamine was the primary cause of death.

The actor had been using the drug through his regular doctor in a legal but off-label treatment for depression, which has become increasingly common. Perry began seeking more ketamine than his doctor would give him.

Plasencia admitted in his plea agreement that another patient connected him with Perry, and that starting about a month before Perry's death, he illegally supplied the actor with 20 vials of ketamine totaling 100 mg of the drug, along with ketamine lozenges and syringes.

He admitted to enlisting another doctor, Mark Chavez, to supply the drug for him, according to the court filings.

"I wonder how much this moron will pay," Plasencia texted Chavez, according to Chavez's plea agreement.

Perry struggled with addiction for years, dating back to his time on "Friends," when he became one of the biggest stars of his generation as Chandler Bing. He starred alongside Jennifer Aniston, Courteney Cox, Lisa Kudrow, Matt LeBlanc and David Schwimmer for 10 seasons from 1994 to 2004 on NBC's megahit.

## Harvard under investigation over participation in visa program for foreign students and researchers

By MICHAEL CASEY Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — In the latest in series of Trump administration inquiries targeting Harvard University, the State Department said Wednesday it is investigating whether the Ivy League school will remain part of a government program that provides American visas for students and researchers from other countries.

Harvard has faced mounting sanctions and scrutiny from Washington since rejecting demands from a federal antisemitism task force in April. Harvard has filed a lawsuit challenging \$2.6 billion in federal cuts and has accused the Republican administration of waging a retaliation campaign.

The statement from Secretary of State Marco Rubio did not say why his department was examining Harvard's eligibility to take part in the Exchange Visitor Program, which allows foreign nationals to study or work in the United States through cultural and education exchange programs.

It said all sponsors, such as Harvard, "are required to fully comply with exchange visitor regulations, transparency in reporting, and a demonstrated commitment to fostering the principles of cultural exchange and mutual understanding upon which the program was founded."

Harvard spokesperson Jason Newton said the investigation was "another retaliatory step" taken by the

administration.

"Harvard continues to enroll and sponsor international scholars, researchers, and students, and will protect its international community and support them as they apply for U.S. visas and travel to campus this fall," Newton said in a statement. He said the school is committed to complying with the program's rules.

Brett Bruen, a former director of global engagement under Democratic President Barack Obama, said there is no justification for the administration's action.

"It not only damages Harvard, but American higher education & industry that depend on the best & brightest wanting to come here," Bruen said in a post on X.

The State Department said the investigation will seek to ensure that its programs "do not run contrary to our nation's interests."

The administration also has tried several times to prevent the school in Cambridge, Massachusetts, from hosting foreign students, and President Donald Trump has threatened to revoke Harvard's tax-exempt status.

Last month, his administration issued a finding that Harvard tolerated antisemitism, a step that could jeopardize all of Harvard's federal funding, including student loans or grants. The penalty is typically referred to as a "death sentence."

Harvard's president, Alan Garber, has said the university has made changes to combat antisemitism and will not submit to the administration's demands.

## What to know about Parkinson's disease after Ozzy Osbourne's death

By The Associated Press undefined

Heavy metal rocker Ozzy Osbourne died this week at 76, just weeks after his farewell show and about five years after announcing he had Parkinson's disease.

Here's what to know about the disease:

What is Parkinson's?

Parkinson's is a neurologic disease that robs people of control over their movements. It typically starts with tremors and is characterized by slow movement, a shuffling gait, stiff limbs, balance problems and slurred speech.

Who gets it?

About 1 million Americans are living with Parkinson's, and 10 million people worldwide, the Parkinson's Foundation. estimates. It usually appears after age 60, although sometimes it can develop before age 50.

What causes Parkinson's?

The exact cause isn't known, but Parkinson's develops when cells that produce one of the brain's chemical messengers, called dopamine, begin to deteriorate and die.

Dopamine transports signals to parts of the brain that control movement. Parkinson's symptoms appear after enough dopamine-producing cells die that there's too little of this neurotransmitter in the brain.

According to the foundation, most experts believe genetic and environmental factors are behind the disease. Dozens of gene mutations linked to Parkinson's have been discovered and genetics account for 10% to 15% of all cases. Other factors suspected of increasing the risk include head injuries, exposure to pesticides and herbicides and where you live.

Is there a cure?

There is no cure but there are treatments, including medications that affect dopamine levels and a surgically implanted tremor-blocking device. Patients also can benefit from physical and occupational therapy.

What's the prognosis?

Symptoms worsen over time, usually slowly. The severity of symptoms and how quickly they progress varies widely between patients. In advanced cases, people may be unable to walk or care for themselves. They also can suffer from depression as well as memory and thinking problems.

While Parkinson's itself isn't considered fatal, people can die from complications of the disease, including

lung problems as muscle weakness impedes the ability to cough and to swallow.

## **Gaza has been at risk of famine for months, experts say.**

### **Here's why they haven't declared one**

By JAMEY KEATEN and SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

For months, U.N. officials, aid groups and experts have warned that Palestinians in the Gaza Strip are on the brink of famine without formally declaring one.

Even though Israel eased a 2 1/2-month blockade on the territory in May, aid groups say only a trickle of assistance is getting into the enclave and that Palestinians face catastrophic levels of hunger 21 months into the Israeli offensive launched after Hamas' Oct. 7 attack.

Hundreds have been killed by Israeli forces as they try to reach aid sites or convoys, according to witnesses, health officials and the United Nations' human rights office. The military says it has only fired warning shots.

Despite the mounting desperation, there's been no formal declaration of famine. Here's why:

UN says Gaza's hunger crisis is worsening

Gaza's population of roughly 2 million Palestinians relies almost entirely on outside aid. Israel's offensive has wiped out what was already limited local food production. Israel's blockade, along with ongoing fighting and chaos inside the territory, has further limited people's access to food.

The U.N. World Food Program says Gaza's hunger crisis has reached "new and astonishing levels of desperation." Nearly 100,000 women and children are suffering from severe acute malnutrition, and a third of Gaza's population is going days without eating, Ross Smith, the agency's director for emergencies, said Monday.

Gaza's Health Ministry said Tuesday that more than 100 people have died while showing signs of hunger and malnutrition, mostly children.

It did not give their exact cause of death. The ministry, part of the Hamas-run government, is staffed by medical professionals and its figures on war deaths are seen by the U.N. and other experts as the most reliable estimate of casualties.

Famine occurs when these conditions are met

The leading international authority on food crises is the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, or IPC, first set up in 2004 during the famine in Somalia. It includes more than a dozen U.N. agencies, aid groups, governments and other bodies.

Famine can appear in pockets — sometimes small ones — and a formal classification requires caution.

The IPC has only declared famine a few times — in Somalia in 2011, and South Sudan in 2017 and 2020, and last year in parts of Sudan's western Darfur region. Tens of thousands are believed to have died in Somalia and South Sudan.

It rates an area as in famine when all three of these conditions are confirmed:

- 20% of households have an extreme lack of food, or are essentially starving.
- At least 30% of children six months to five years old suffer from acute malnutrition or wasting, meaning they're too thin for their height.
- At least two people or four children under five per 10,000 are dying daily due to starvation or the interaction of malnutrition and disease.

Gaza poses a major challenge for experts because Israel severely limits access to the territory, making it difficult and in some cases impossible to gather data.

Famine declarations usually come from the U.N. or governments

While the IPC says it is the "primary mechanism" used by the international community to conclude whether a famine is happening or projected, it typically doesn't make such a declaration itself.

Often, U.N. officials together with governments will make a formal statement based on an analysis from the IPC.

But the IPC says once a famine is declared it's already too late. While it can prevent further deaths, it

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means many people will have died by the time a famine is declared.

It's not always clear that hunger is the cause of death

Most cases of severe malnutrition in children arise through a combination of lack of nutrients along with an infection, leading to diarrhea and other symptoms that cause dehydration, said Alex de Waal, author of "Mass Starvation: The History and Future of Famine" and executive director of the World Peace Foundation.

"There are no standard guidelines for physicians to classify cause of death as 'malnutrition' as opposed to infection," he said.

When famine occurs, there are often relatively few deaths from hunger alone, with far more people dying from a combination of malnutrition, disease and other forms of deprivation. All of these count as excess deaths — separate from violence — that can be attributed to a food crisis or famine, he said.

The war has made it hard to get accurate information

Israel's offensive has gutted Gaza's health system and displaced some 90% of its population. With hospitals damaged and overwhelmed by war casualties, it can be difficult to screen people for malnutrition and collect precise data on deaths.

"Data and surveillance systems are incomplete and eroded," said James Smith, an emergency doctor and lecturer in humanitarian policy at the University College London who spent more than two months in Gaza.

"Which means that all health indicators — and the death toll — are known to be an underestimation," he said.

Even when famine is declared, the response can be lacking

A declaration of famine should in theory galvanize the international community to rush food to those who need it. But with aid budgets already stretched, and war and politics throwing up obstacles, that doesn't always happen.

"There is not a big, huge bank account" to draw on, said OCHA's Laerke. "The fundamental problem is that we build the fire engine as we respond."

Aid groups say plenty of food and other aid has been gathered on Gaza's borders, but Israel is allowing only a small amount to enter. Within Gaza, gunfire, chaos and looting have plagued the distribution of food.

The Israeli military says it has facilitated the entry of some 4,500 aid trucks since mid-May. That's far below the 600 trucks a day that aid groups say are needed, and which entered during a six-week ceasefire earlier this year. An Israeli-backed American contractor is also distributing food.

U.N. agencies say Israeli restrictions, and the breakdown of law and order, make it difficult to distribute the food that does come in.

"Only a massive scale-up in food aid distributions can stabilize this spiraling situation, calm anxieties and rebuild the trust within communities that more food is coming," the World Food Program said over the weekend. "An agreed ceasefire is long overdue."

## Scientists in Barbados overturn hundreds of rocks to rediscover world's smallest-known snake

By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — For nearly two decades, no one had spotted the world's smallest-known snake.

Some scientists worried that maybe the Barbados threadsnake had become extinct, but one sunny morning, Connor Blades lifted a rock in a tiny forest in the eastern Caribbean island and held his breath.

"After a year of searching, you begin to get a little pessimistic," said Blades, project officer with the Ministry of Environment in Barbados.

The snake can fit comfortably on a coin, so it was able to elude scientists for almost 20 years. Too tiny to identify with the naked eye, Blades placed it in a small glass jar and added soil, substrate and leaf litter.

Several hours later, in front of a microscope at the University of the West Indies, Blades looked at the specimen. It wriggled in the petri dish, making it nearly impossible to identify.

"It was a struggle," Blades recalled, adding that he shot a video of the snake and finally identified it



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thanks to a still image.

It had pale yellow dorsal lines running through its body, and its eyes were located on the side of its head. "I tried to keep a level head," Blades recalled, knowing that the Barbados threadsnake looks very much like a Brahminy blind snake, best known as the flower pot snake, which is a bit longer and has no dorsal lines.

On Wednesday, the Re:wild conservation group, which is collaborating with the local environment ministry, announced the rediscovery of the Barbados threadsnake.

"Rediscovering one of our endemics on many levels is significant," said Justin Springer, Caribbean program officer for Re:wild who helped rediscover the snake along with Blades. "It reminds us that we still have something important left that plays an important role in our ecosystem."

The Barbados threadsnake has only been seen a handful of times since 1889. It was on a list of 4,800 plant, animal and fungi species that Re:wild described as "lost to science."

The snake is blind, burrows in the ground, eats termites and ants and lays one single, slender egg. Fully grown, it measures up to four inches (10 centimeters).

"They're very cryptic," Blades said. "You can do a survey for a number of hours, and even if they are there, you may actually not see them."

But on March 20 at around 10:30 a.m., Blades and Springer surrounded a jack-in-the-box tree in central Barbados and started looking under rocks while the rest of the team began measuring the tree, whose distribution is very limited in Barbados.

"That's why the story is so exciting," Springer said. "It all happened around the same time."

S. Blair Hedges, a professor at Temple University and director of its center for biology, was the first to identify the Barbados threadsnake. Previously, it was mistakenly lumped in with another species.

In 2008, Hedges' discovery was published in a scientific journal, with the snake baptized *Tetracheilostoma carlae*, in honor of his wife.

"I spent days searching for them," Hedges recalled. "Based on my observations and the hundreds of rocks, objects that I turned over looking for this thing without success, I do think it is a rare species."

That was June 2006, and there were only three other such specimens known at the time: two at a London museum and a third at a museum collection in California that was wrongly identified as being from Antigua instead of Barbados, Hedges said.

Hedges said that he didn't realize he had collected a new species until he did a genetic analysis.

"The aha moment was in the laboratory," he said, noting that the discovery established the Barbados threadsnake as the world's smallest-known snake.

Hedges then became inundated for years with letters, photographs and emails from people thinking they had found more Barbados threadsnakes. Some of the pictures were of earthworms, he recalled.

"It was literally years of distraction," he said.

Scientists hope the rediscovery means that the Barbados threadsnake could become a champion for the protection of wildlife habitat.

A lot of endemic species on the tiny island have gone extinct, including the Barbados racer, the Barbados skink and a particular species of cave shrimp.

"I hope they can get some interest in protecting it," Hedges said. "Barbados is kind of unique in the Caribbean for a bad reason: it has the least amount of original forest, outside of Haiti."

## UN body says Israeli forces have killed over 1,000 aid-seekers in Gaza since May, as hunger worsens

By WAFAA SHURAF, SAMY MAGDY and TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — More than 1,000 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces since May while trying to get food in the Gaza Strip, mostly near aid sites run by an American contractor, the U.N. human rights office said Tuesday.

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Meanwhile, Israeli strikes killed 25 people across Gaza, according to local health officials.

Desperation is mounting in the Palestinian territory of more than 2 million, which experts say is at risk of famine because of Israel's blockade and nearly two-year offensive. A breakdown of law and order has led to widespread looting and contributed to chaos and violence around aid deliveries.

Israel accuses Hamas of siphoning off aid — without providing evidence of widespread diversion — and blames U.N. agencies for failing to deliver food it has allowed in. The military says it has only fired warning shots near aid sites. The Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, an Israeli-backed American contractor, rejected what it said were "false and exaggerated statistics" from the United Nations.

The Gaza Health Ministry, which is part of the Hamas-run government and staffed by medical professionals, said Tuesday that 80 children have died from starvation since the beginning of the war, while 21 adults have since Sunday. The ministry only recently began tracking deaths from malnutrition in adults.

The deaths could not be independently verified, but U.N. officials and major international aid groups say the conditions for starvation exist in Gaza. During hunger crises, people can die from malnutrition or from common illnesses or injuries that the body is not strong enough to fight.

Israel eased a 2½-month blockade in May, allowing a trickle of aid in through the longstanding U.N.-run system and the newly created GHF. Aid groups say it's not nearly enough.

'I do it for my children'

Dozens of Palestinians lined up Tuesday outside a charity kitchen in Gaza City, hoping for a bowl of watery tomato soup. The lucky ones got small chunks of eggplant. As supplies ran out, people holding pots pushed and shoved to get to the front.

Nadia Mdoukh, a pregnant woman who was displaced from her home and lives in a tent with her husband and three children, said she worries about being shoved or trampled on, and about heat stroke as daytime temperatures hover above 90 F (32 C).

"I do it for my children," she said. "This is famine — there is no bread or flour."

The U.N. World Food Program says Gaza's hunger crisis has reached "new and astonishing levels of desperation." Ross Smith, the agency's director for emergencies, told reporters Monday that nearly 100,000 women and children are suffering from severe acute malnutrition, and a third of Gaza's population is going without food for multiple days in a row.

MedGlobal, a charity working in Gaza, said five children as young as 3 months had died from starvation in the past three days.

"This is a deliberate and human-made disaster," said Joseph Belliveau, its executive director. "Those children died because there is not enough food in Gaza and not enough medicines, including IV fluids and therapeutic formula, to revive them."

The charity said food is in such short supply that its own staff members suffer dizziness and headaches. Aid delivery model criticized

Of the 1,054 people killed while trying to get food since late May, 766 were killed while heading to sites run by the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, according to the U.N. human rights office. The others were killed when gunfire erupted around U.N. convoys or aid sites.

Thameen al-Kheetan, a spokesperson for the U.N. rights office, says its figures come from "multiple reliable sources on the ground," including medics, humanitarian and human rights organizations. He said the numbers were still being verified according to the office's strict methodology.

Palestinian witnesses and health officials say Israeli forces regularly fire toward crowds of thousands of people heading to the GHF sites. The military says it has only fired warning shots, and GHF says its armed contractors have only fired into the air on a few occasions to try to prevent stampedes.

A joint statement from 28 Western-aligned countries on Monday condemned the "the drip feeding of aid and the inhumane killing of civilians."

"The Israeli government's aid delivery model is dangerous, fuels instability and deprives Gazans of human dignity," read the statement, which was signed by the United Kingdom, France and other countries friendly to Israel. "The Israeli government's denial of essential humanitarian assistance to the civilian

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population is unacceptable.”

Israel and the United States rejected the statement, blaming Hamas for prolonging the war by not accepting Israeli terms for a ceasefire and the release of hostages abducted in the militant-led attack on southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, which triggered the fighting.

Hamas has said it will release the remaining hostages only in return for a lasting ceasefire and an Israeli withdrawal. Israel says it will keep fighting until Hamas has been defeated or disarmed.

Strikes on tents sheltering the displaced

Israeli strikes killed at least 25 people Tuesday across Gaza, according to local health officials.

One strike hit tents sheltering displaced people in the built-up seaside Shati refugee camp in Gaza City, killing at least 12 people, according to Shifa Hospital, which received the casualties. The Israeli military said that it wasn't aware of such a strike by its forces.

The dead included three women and three children, the hospital director, Dr. Mohamed Abu Selmiya, told The Associated Press. Thirty-eight other Palestinians were wounded, he said.

An overnight strike that hit crowds of Palestinians waiting for aid trucks in Gaza City killed eight, hospitals said. At least 118 were wounded, according to the Palestinian Red Crescent.

“A bag of flour covered in blood and death,” said Mohammed Issam, who was in the crowd and said some people were run over by trucks in the chaos. “How long will this humiliation continue?”

The Israeli military had no immediate comment on that strike. Israel blames the deaths of Palestinian civilians on Hamas, because the militants operate in densely populated areas.

Israel renewed its offensive in March with a surprise bombardment after ending an earlier ceasefire. Talks on another truce have dragged on for weeks despite pressure from U.S. President Donald Trump.

Hamas-led militants abducted 251 people in the Oct. 7 attack, and killed around 1,200 people. Fewer than half of the 50 hostages still in Gaza are believed to be alive.

More than 59,000 Palestinians have been killed during the war, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. Its count doesn't distinguish between militants and civilians, but the ministry says that more than half of the dead are women and children. The U.N. and other international organizations see it as the most reliable source of data on casualties.

## Today in History: July 24, Apollo 11 returns home from the moon

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, July 24, the 205th day of 2025. There are 160 days left in the year.

Today in History:

On July 24, 1969, the Apollo 11 astronauts — two of whom had been the first humans to set foot on the moon — splashed down safely in the Pacific.

Also on this date:

In 1567, Mary, Queen of Scots, was forced to abdicate her throne to her 1-year-old son James.

In 1847, Mormon leader Brigham Young and his followers arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in present-day Utah.

In 1866, Tennessee became the first state to be readmitted to the Union after the Civil War.

In 1915, the SS Eastland, a passenger ship carrying more than 2,500 people, rolled onto its side while docked at the Clark Street Bridge on the Chicago River. An estimated 844 people died in the disaster.

In 1959, during a visit to Moscow, Vice President Richard Nixon engaged in his famous “Kitchen Debate” with Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev.

In 1974, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled that President Richard Nixon had to turn over subpoenaed White House tape recordings to the Watergate special prosecutor.

In 1975, an Apollo spacecraft splashed down in the Pacific, completing a mission which included the first docking with a Soyuz capsule from the Soviet Union.

In 2010, a stampede inside a tunnel crowded with techno music fans left 21 people dead and more than

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500 injured at the famed Love Parade festival in western Germany.

In 2013, a high-speed train crash outside Santiago de Compostela in northwest Spain killed 79 people.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Dan Hedaya is 85. Actor Chris Sarandon is 83. Actor Robert Hays is 78. Actor Michael Richards is 76. Actor Lynda Carter is 74. Movie director Gus Van Sant is 73. Country singer Pam Tillis is 68. Basketball Hall of Famer Karl Malone is 62. Retired MLB All-Star Barry Bonds is 61. Actor Kadeem Hardison is 60. Actor-singer Kristin Chenoweth is 57. Actor Laura Leighton is 57. Actor-singer Jennifer Lopez is 56. Director Patty Jenkins ("Wonder Woman") is 54. Actor Eric Szmanda is 50. Actor Rose Byrne is 46. Country singer Jerrod Niemann is 46. Actor Elisabeth Moss is 43. Actor Anna Paquin is 43. Former NHL center Patrice Bergeron is 40. Actor Mara Wilson is 38. TV personality Bindi Irwin is 27.