

Groton Daily Independent

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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: Groton vs. Sisseton at 2 p.m. in the championship game.

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.

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PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

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



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

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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.

'Doomsday Mom' Sentenced

Idaho mom Lori Vallow Daybell, known as the "Doomsday Mom," was handed two life sentences yesterday in an Arizona court for two murder conspiracy convictions. She was found guilty this spring of plotting with her late brother the 2019 murder of her estranged husband, Charles Vallow, and attempted murder of her niece's now ex-husband, Brandon Boudreaux.

The sentencing culminates a yearslong legal saga that began with the 2019 disappearance of Vallow Daybell's two children: 16-year-old Tylee Ryan and 7-year-old Joshua "JJ" Vallow. Their remains were discovered in 2020 on an Idaho property owned by her now husband, Chad Daybell. The couple allegedly led a doomsday cult centered on fringe apocalyptic beliefs, which prosecutors say they used to justify murdering their family members.

Before yesterday's sentencing, Vallow Daybell was already serving three consecutive life terms for the murders of her children and conspiring to kill her husband's first wife. Chad Daybell was sentenced to death last year for murdering both children and his first wife. Vallow Daybell, who represented herself in court this spring, maintains her innocence. Her brother, Alex Cox, died shortly after the crimes, so he was never charged.

Trump administration unfreezes billions in withheld education funding.

The Education Department announced yesterday the release of over \$5B in funding for extracurricular programs, English language classes, teacher preparation, and more. The funding represents the bulk of the \$7B that was frozen earlier this month while Trump administration officials reviewed whether funding allocations aligned with their policy priorities. More than \$1B for after-school and summer programs was released last week amid mounting bipartisan pressure from lawmakers.

Conflict between Thailand and Cambodia escalates.

Thailand warned of war Friday as an armed border dispute with Cambodia entered its second day. Thai authorities also imposed martial law in eight districts, amid reports that at least 16 people have been killed and tens of thousands displaced. The Cambodian prime minister said his country was prepared for a ceasefire and accused Thailand of backing out of a deal brokered by Malaysia. The US and China also offered to mediate a truce.

Aging accelerates in middle age, according to new research.

A comprehensive study of protein changes in different organs over time suggests aging is not linear. Researchers analyzed tissue samples from 76 individuals of Chinese ancestry, aged 14 to 68, who died of accidental brain injuries; they found an inflection point around age 50, after which the pace of aging appeared to accelerate. The study also revealed different organs age at different rates, with blood vessels aging first. However, researchers caution larger studies are needed to confirm age 50 as a definitive turning point.

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The UK and Australia to sign nuclear submarine treaty.

The pact cements a 50-year partnership between the United Kingdom and Australia to develop nuclear-powered submarines. It strengthens AUKUS, a trilateral security alliance formed by the UK, Australia, and the US in response to growing Chinese military power in the Asia-Pacific region. Initially entered by the US under the Biden administration, the alliance is now undergoing review by the Trump administration to ensure it aligns with its agenda.

Deportations from 'Alligator Alcatraz' begin, Florida governor says.

Gov. Ron DeSantis (R) announced yesterday the Department of Homeland Security had flown about 100 detainees from the remote Everglades detention center to other countries. He did not specify which countries, but said the number of deportations would soon increase. Critics have condemned the facility as inhumane; it was built within a week and currently holds roughly 2,000 people who the Trump administration claims are violent criminals.

Former US Rep. George Santos begins federal prison sentence.

The former New York congressman reported to federal prison yesterday to serve a more than seven-year prison sentence for fraud charges that also led to his expulsion from Congress. The Republican pleaded guilty last summer to federal wire fraud and aggravated identity theft in connection with his 2022 congressional campaign. In the days leading up to his sentence, he appeared on a podcast, posted a series of emotional tweets, and hosted a virtual goodbye party on X.

Astronomer HR chief resigns after Coldplay kiss cam incident.

Kristin Cabot's resignation as chief people officer at the technology company yesterday came days after CEO Andy Byron resigned. The two executives were caught on a Jumbotron having an intimate moment at a Coldplay concert in Boston; the video quickly went viral. Both Cabot and Byron are reportedly married and have children.

Humankind(ness)

Today, we're sharing a story from reader Judy L. in Canyon Lake, Texas.

"We live in Canyon Lake, Texas, about an hour and a half drive from Hunt, Texas, where flooding took more than 100 lives. We were on a road trip heading to Canada and while driving down the highway in Indianapolis, a woman started honking at us.

As the passenger, I looked to see if she was pointing out something wrong with our car. Instead, she made the shape of a heart with her hands and mouthed 'I'm so sorry.' I realized then that she saw our license plate and was just expressing her sorrow. It brought tears to my eyes and let me know we are all in this together, no matter where we live."

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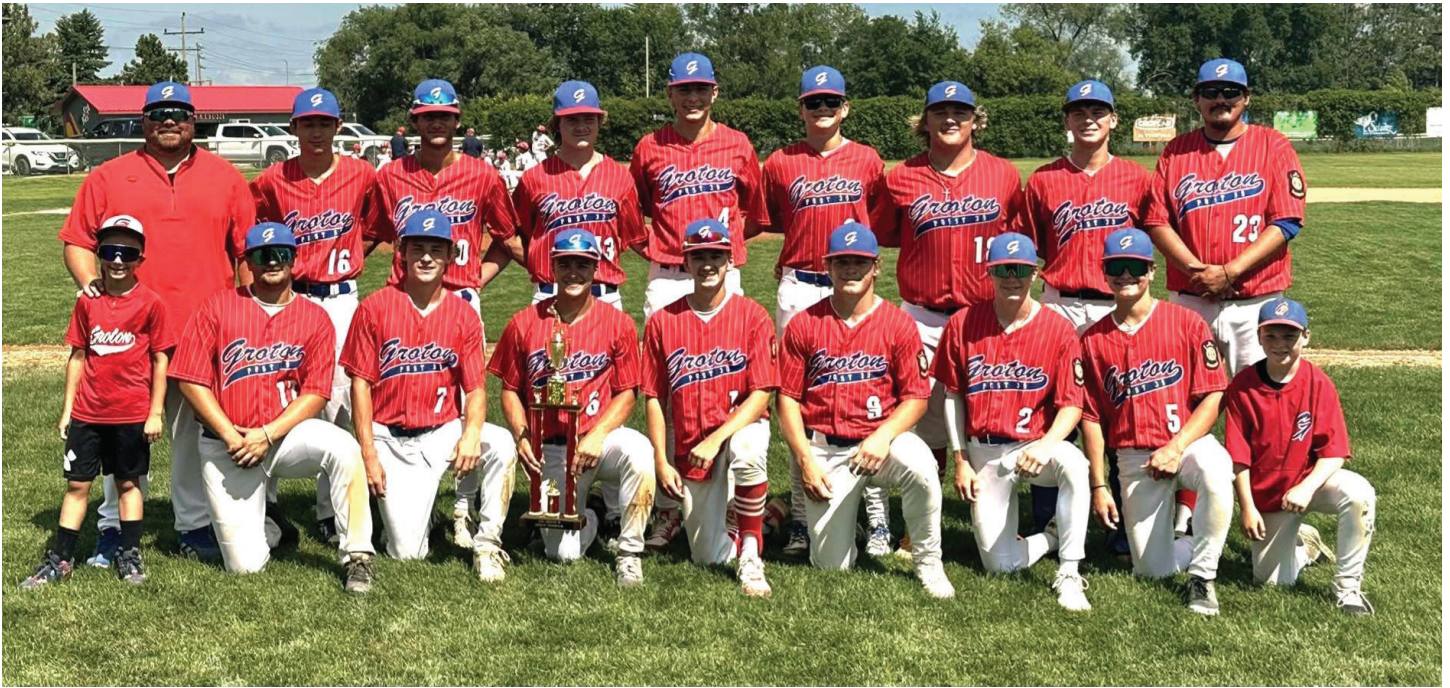
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Groton Legion Post 39 advances to state

Back Row L To R: Coach Seth Erickson, Kellen Antonsen, Jarrett Erdmann, Nick Groeblichhoff, Carter Simon, T.C Schuster, Gavin Englund, Karsten Flihs, coach Aaron Severson
Front left to right: Max Erickson, Nick Morris, Teylor Diegel, Brevin Flihs, Braxton Imrie, Korbin Kucker, Lincoln Krause, Alex Abeln, Micah Krause. (Photo from Groton Baseball/Softball Facebook Page)

Groton Legion Post 39 Beat Sisseton Post 50 in Region 6B Championship Game

By GameChanger Media

Groton Legion Post 39 was victorious against Sisseton Post 50, 6-2, on Friday. This was the Region 6B championship game played in Sisseton.

Groton Legion Post 39 got on the board in the first inning after Carter Simon singled, scoring one run.

Groton Legion Post 39 scored five runs on five hits in the top of the fifth inning. Gavin Englund singled, scoring one run, Nick Morris doubled, scoring two runs, and Alex Abeln singled, scoring two runs.

Englund led things off on the mound for Groton Legion Post 39. The starter surrendered two hits and two runs (zero earned) over seven innings, striking out eight and walking four. Rylan Anderson stepped on the hill first for Sisseton Post 50. The hurler surrendered four hits and one run over three and two-thirds innings, striking out three and walking two.

Groton Legion Post 39 accumulated nine hits in the game. Morris led Groton Legion Post 39 with two runs batted in. The infielder went 1-for-4 on the day. Simon went 3-for-4 at the plate to lead Groton Legion Post 39 in hits.

Hughin Current and Bryson Hanson each collected one hit for Sisseton Post 50. Current and LJ Crooks were tough to handle back-to-back in the lineup, as each drove in one run for Sisseton Post 50. Levi Nelson stole two bases.

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Harding County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash

Where: SD Highway 79, mile marker 204, four miles east of Reva, SD

When: 6:37 a.m., Friday, July 25, 2025

Driver 1: 58-year-old male from Frazee, MN, fatal injuries

Vehicle 1: 2017 Ford F150 with trailer

Seat belt Used: Yes

Passenger 1: 53-year-old female from Frazee, MN, no injuries

Seat belt Used: No

Harding County, S.D.- A Minnesota man died in a single-vehicle crash this morning four miles east of Reva, SD.

The names of the persons involved have not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver of a 2017 Ford F150 pulling an enclosed trailer was traveling south on SD Highway 79 near mile marker 204 when the vehicle crossed the center line and entered the east ditch. The trailer separated from the vehicle and overturned. The truck came to rest in a nearby field.

The driver was taken by ambulance to a nearby hospital and was pronounced deceased. A passenger in the vehicle was not injured.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol is investigating the crash. All information released so far is only preliminary.

The Highway Patrol is an agency of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety.

Buffalo County Fatal Crash

What: Two vehicle fatal crash

Where: SD Highway 34, mile marker 284, 14 miles east of Ft. Thompson, SD

When: 11:03 p.m., Thursday, July 24, 2025

Driver 1: 43-year-old male from Willow Lake, SD, fatal injuries

Vehicle 1: 2022 Toyota Prius

Seat belt Used: Yes

Driver 2: 24-year-old male from Hendrum, MN, no injuries

Vehicle 2: 2015 Peterbilt 579

Seat belt Used: Parked, out of cab

Buffalo County, S.D.- One man died in a late night crash with a semi Thursday evening, 14 miles east of Ft. Thompson, SD.

The names of the persons involved have not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver of a 2015 Peterbilt was hauling hay bales on SD Highway 34 near mile marker 284 when a strap broke causing the rear bales to fall off the trailer. In an effort to go back and clear the bales from the road, the driver attempted to turn the semi around near a gravel road intersection and the rear tires of the trailer got stuck in the south side ditch, immobilizing it. The approaching driver of a 2022 Toyota Prius collided with the trailer.

The driver of the Toyota sustained fatal injuries. The driver of the Peterbilt was not injured.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol is investigating the crash. All information released so far is only preliminary.

The Highway Patrol is an agency of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety.

Clark County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash

Where: North of US 212 on 428th Avenue, three miles east of Clark, SD

When: 4:30 p.m., Thursday, July 24, 2025

Driver 1: 15-year-old female from Henry, SD, fatal injuries

Vehicle 1: 2007 Ford Focus

Seat belt Used: Under investigation

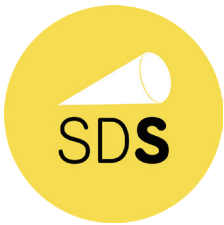
Clark County, S.D.- A Clark County teen died in a single vehicle crash Thursday afternoon, three miles east of Clark, SD.

The name of the person involved has not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver of a 2007 Ford Focus was traveling north on 428th Avenue from US Highway 212. The driver lost control of the vehicle and entered the east ditch, rolling onto its roof. The driver was taken to a nearby hospital where she was pronounced deceased.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol is investigating the crash. All information released so far is only preliminary.

The Highway Patrol is an agency of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Local public broadcasting cuts will happen Oct. 31 without new funding, director says

Plan for layoffs in South Dakota needs approval from governor

BY: JOHN HULT - JULY 25, 2025 6:08 PM

SIoux FALLS — South Dakotans should know what stays and what goes at South Dakota Public Broadcasting — absent a philanthropic or state budget lifeline — within the next two weeks.

Whatever happens, SDPB's director says, the public will have two months' notice before programs and voices disappear.

The recent congressional clawback of federal funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting cost SDPB about \$2.2 million, which is about 20% of its budget.

SDPB is a state entity, and its staff members are state employees. The organization also receives support from the nonprofit Friends of SDPB.

Julie Overgaard, SDPB's executive director, told budget committee lawmakers this week she's looking at layoffs for up to 20 staff members and local content cuts across its radio and television operations as a result.

The state's Educational Telecommunications Board reviewed a proposed downsizing plan in a closed door session in Sioux Falls on Friday afternoon. The board's charge is to ensure SDPB operates within the legal corners of its broadcast licenses.

After the executive session, Overgaard told South Dakota Searchlight "we're going to do everything we can to save our statewide coverage and all of our broadcast licenses."

"Nobody should see their SDPB radio or TV signal go away because of this," she said.

The downsizing plan will have an audience with the board for the Friends of SDPB on Monday.

After that, Overgaard will show the plan to the commissioner of the Bureau of Information Technology — the government office under which SDPB is nested — and Lt. Gov. Tony Venhuizen before offering it to Gov. Larry Rhoden for final approval. The governor needs to approve layoffs for state agencies, Overgaard said.

If Rhoden signs off, staff and the public — in that order — will be notified of "the people and programs we're going to lose, if there is no fix applied."

"It's not the state's job to fill that entire fiscal hole," Overgaard said, but she hopes the governor will at least consider funding to help SDPB continue livestreaming state government proceedings. The state owns the equipment used to livestream legislative and other government meetings, while the money to operate it comes from the SDPB budget.



The South Dakota Educational Telecommunications Board meets in Sioux Falls on July 24, 2025. (John Hult/South Dakota Searchlight)

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Friends of SDPB intends to dip into its endowment to make sure none of the content changes come until Oct. 31, and Overgaard said the intervening months will determine how many of the plan's listed layoffs and program cuts ultimately come to pass.

"To the extent that we're able to fundraise, find foundation support and find business support, those things will come off the list," Overgaard said. "People will be reinstated, programs will be reinstated."

Kay Jorgensen, president of the Educational Telecommunications Board, urged SDPB's supporters to "do what they did during the legislative session," by throwing their support behind the system.

Former Gov. Kristi Noem had proposed an evisceration of SDPB's state-level funding before her departure to join President Donald Trump's cabinet as secretary of the Department of Homeland Security. State lawmakers rejected those efforts.

Before the closed-door session, the board heard a report on the system's financial health through June, the month before Congress opted to ax public media money. SDPB was in the black and living well within its means, Jorgensen said.

In the face of the new reality created by congressional rescission, Jorgensen added, "our goal is to stay lit, and to serve the public as we always have."

"We would ask the public to articulate their views on why public broadcasting is so important, to share it with their friends and neighbors, and certainly with the policymakers on the local, state and national levels," Jorgensen said.

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.

US Education Department to unfreeze contested K-12 funds

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - JULY 25, 2025 2:41 PM

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration said Friday it'll soon release billions in Education Department funding that has been frozen for weeks, delaying disbursements to K-12 schools throughout the country.

The funding — which goes toward migrant education, English-language learning and other programs — was supposed to go out before July 1, but the administration informed schools just one day before that it was instead holding onto \$6.8 billion while staff conducted a review. Members of both parties in Congress objected to the move.

The Education Department released \$1.3 billion for before- and after-school programs as well as summer programs in mid-July, but the rest of the funding remained stalled.

Madi Biedermann, a Department of Education spokesperson, wrote in an email to States Newsroom that the White House budget office "has completed its review" of the remaining accounts and "has directed the Department to release all formula funds."

The administration will begin sending that money to school districts next week, Biedermann wrote.



The Lyndon Baines Johnson Department of Education Building in Washington, D.C., in a file photo from November 2024. (Photo by Shauneen Miranda/States Newsroom)

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Appropriators cheer

Maine Republican Sen. Susan Collins, chairwoman of the Appropriations Committee, wrote in a statement the "funds are essential to the operation of Maine's public schools, supporting everything from classroom instruction to adult education."

"I am pleased that following outreach from my colleagues and me, the Administration has agreed to release these highly-anticipated resources," Collins wrote. "I will continue working to ensure that education funds are delivered without delay so that schools have adequate time to plan their finances for the upcoming school year, allowing students to arrive back to class this fall to properly-funded schools."

Collins and nine other Republican senators wrote a letter to Office of Management and Budget Director Russ Vought earlier this month asking him to "faithfully implement" the spending law Congress approved in March.

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

"Withholding this funding denies states and communities the opportunity to pursue localized initiatives to support students and their families."

West Virginia Republican Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, chairwoman of the appropriations subcommittee that funds the Education Department, wrote in a statement released Friday she was glad to see the funding unfrozen.

"The programs are ones that enjoy longstanding, bipartisan support like after-school and summer programs that provide learning and enrichment opportunities for school aged children, which also enables their parents to work and contribute to local economies, and programs to support adult learners working to gain employment skills, earn workforce certifications, or transition into postsecondary education," Capito wrote. "That's why it's important we continue to protect and support these programs."

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

COMMENTARY

Don't let politics freeze children's futures

by Ngoc Thach

I didn't speak English in kindergarten. I didn't even start learning it until first grade. And I didn't really get it until second grade, when I met Mrs. Cavanaugh.

Every week, she would pull three of us out of class — a Vietnamese refugee (me), an Iraqi refugee, and a classmate whose parents had just opened a Mexican restaurant — and bring us into a little room with a round table. That's where I learned what English could do. Not just how to use it, but how to love it.

That's where I learned that my family had survived war, and that my classmate's family had fled violence, too. That's where we learned to listen to each other's stories, and feel less alone in our own.

It's hard to explain how much that meant, but I know what it gave me: everything.

I eventually transferred to Catholic school, where I got straight A's, won essay contests, read my writing aloud to rooms full of parishioners, and even had some haikus published in a national anthology. We didn't have the money to buy the book, so I never told my teacher I couldn't share it with my mom. She was always working. She learned English the way a lot of immigrants do: on the job, because they can't afford to take a class.

By sixth grade, I gave the class commencement speech. Same thing in eighth grade. In high school, I competed at nationals for speech and became editor of the paper. My senior year superlative was "most likely to be president," even though I was one of the few who could never be.

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All of that started in a small room at Anne Sullivan Elementary. It started with a public school teacher who saw us, and gave us the tools to see ourselves.

That's why it hurts to see lawmakers work to dismantle the federal Department of Education and freeze billions in funding meant for schools like mine. The department doesn't dictate curriculum. What it actually does is distribute federal support for low-income students, multilingual learners, special education services, and civil rights protections in schools. These programs exist so that kids like me can find their footing.

After nationwide outcry, the department recently released a portion of the frozen funds, roughly \$1.3 billion, targeted specifically at after-school and summer learning programs. That's an important step, especially for working families who rely on these programs for safe, enriching environments outside of regular classroom hours. But more than \$5 billion in other critical education funding remains on hold. That includes support for teacher training, English language services, migrant education, adult literacy and student enrichment programs — resources that help kids thrive during the school day, not just after.

Here in the Sioux Falls School District, the impact is still unfolding. Of the anticipated \$3.5 million shortfall, only about \$250,000 has been restored so far — enough to support after-school tutoring. Core staffing plans will remain in place this year, but some non-staff initiatives like professional development, supplemental programs and contracted services have been paused. While English learner support staff will continue, the district says further program expansion may be limited without additional funding. Special education and mental health services aren't directly impacted by the freeze, but flexible funding that could have enhanced or expanded those supports has been lost — for now. The district, like many others, is still waiting for additional guidance from the state and federal government.

I wouldn't be here without that support. And I worry deeply for the kids who won't get what I got. The kids who won't have a Mrs. Cavanaugh. The kids who will never find their way to the words that could change their lives.

And even worse than the cuts is the silence. The silence from leaders who know better. Who know that children like me can thrive when they're cared for, but choose to look the other way. I've spent years ghostwriting for admirable leaders. But lately I've started to wonder what good that's done if they're quiet now — if they won't fight for what saved me, and eventually benefitted them.

Children aren't resources to be groomed. They're not workers-in-waiting. They're not numbers in a cost-benefit analysis. They're kids. And if they feel loved and respected, they'll pay that forward a hundred times over. I'm proof of that and I am far from alone.

I don't know where my classmates from that little roundtable ended up. But if I had to bet, I'd bet long on them. Just like I'd bet on that quiet 6-year-old me.

I just hope we can still build a world that bets on kids like us, too.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This commentary was published just prior to the U.S. Department of Education's announcement that it would soon release billions in funding that had been frozen for weeks.



A Sioux Falls School District educator works with students at JFK Elementary School. (Courtesy of Sioux Falls School District)

Ngoc Thach is a writer and communications strategist based in Sioux Falls. A former refugee and the first fluent English speaker in her family, Thach credits the Sioux Falls public school system for nurturing a lifelong passion for language and storytelling. She has since worked with nonprofit leaders, CEOs, and elected officials to help shape messages that make a difference.

South Dakota's budget could face a \$24.5 million revenue shortfall, legislators learn

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JULY 25, 2025 9:07 AM



Derek Johnson, state economist with the governor's Bureau of Finance and Management, and LRC Chief Fiscal Analyst Jeff Mehlhaff (left to right) present to the Revenue Projection Subcommittee in Pierre during the 2023 legislative session. (Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

South Dakota lawmakers should expect an even tighter state budget next legislative session with revenues potentially \$24.5 million less than projected, the Legislature's budget committee learned this week.

Fiscal experts with the Legislative Research Council and the governor's Bureau of Finance and Management briefed the committee Wednesday in Pierre.

They said the lagging revenue is due partly to recent wage growth in the state failing to significantly outpace inflation, which means South Dakotans are spending less money.

The state relies heavily on sales tax, in addition to lottery taxes, insurance taxes and contractor's excise taxes. Projections expect revenue will increase compared to the last fiscal year, but not as much as lawmakers planned for.

The two agencies project the state's general fund this fiscal year, which began July 1, will be short between \$18.3 million and \$24.5 million compared to estimates that lawmakers adopted during the legislative session that ended in March.

Paired with federal funding cuts impacting state programs and nonprofits, state Sen. Ernie Otten, R-Tea, told South Dakota Searchlight "every agency and group will have their hands out this year." Otten is the lead co-chair of the Appropriations Committee.

"We're going to have some very hard discussions coming on in just a few months, and we're going to have to pick winners and losers," Otten told committee members. "When we do this, we're going to actually have to pick and know we're harming people while we're trying to help people. And this is just going to be the way things have to be."

South Dakota reported a \$63 million surplus for the fiscal year that ended June 30, largely driven by higher-than-expected revenue from unclaimed property. Next year, lawmakers plan to begin transitioning unclaimed property revenue into a trust fund and limiting the amount that can go to the general fund to support the budget.

"We won't have the unclaimed property money to bail out the general fund next year," said LRC Chief Fiscal Analyst Jeff Mehlhaff, stressing the need for accurate budget forecasting.

Unclaimed property consists of an array of abandoned or forgotten private assets, including money from bank accounts, PayPal accounts, stocks, life insurance payouts, uncashed checks, unused refunds, and the contents of safe deposit boxes. Holders of the money or items, such as banks, try to find the owners.

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The property reverts to the state after three years.

State sales tax revenue finished the 2025 fiscal year \$3.7 million below projections. Bureau Commissioner Jim Terwilliger said monthly year-to-date sales tax revenue growth in the 2025 fiscal year consistently stayed below the prior year.

"I think the only time that's happened previously would have been in fiscal year 2010, which would have been right in the middle of the Great Recession, when a lot of states were facing a lot of economic and financial challenges," Terwilliger said.

Mehlhoff and Bureau of Finance and Management Economist Derek Johnson expect this fiscal year's sales and use tax to be slightly below the legislative adopted estimate, by about 0.6% to 0.9%, or between \$9 million and \$13 million short.

The agriculture industry started to show signs of strain last year. Farm machinery sales tax revenue was down 21% in fiscal year 2025, Johnson said.

The biggest indicator of state revenue health to Otten, he said, is the state's lottery revenue. Revenue in that category ended the last year \$5.78 million short of what lawmakers projected. Both the bureau and the council expect another shortfall in projected revenue for fiscal year 2026, around \$4 million.

Insurance company tax revenue was one of the few sources to overperform last year, growing 9.9% over fiscal year 2024 numbers. In fiscal year 2026, the bureau projects it'll outpace expectations again, bringing in \$3.5 million more than lawmakers expected.

But more revenue in that one area doesn't bode well for others, said Rep. Al Novstrup, R-Aberdeen. The source is a tax on insurance premiums, so it's a sign of rising costs to consumers.

"When that goes up," Novstrup said, "that's a really bad thing."

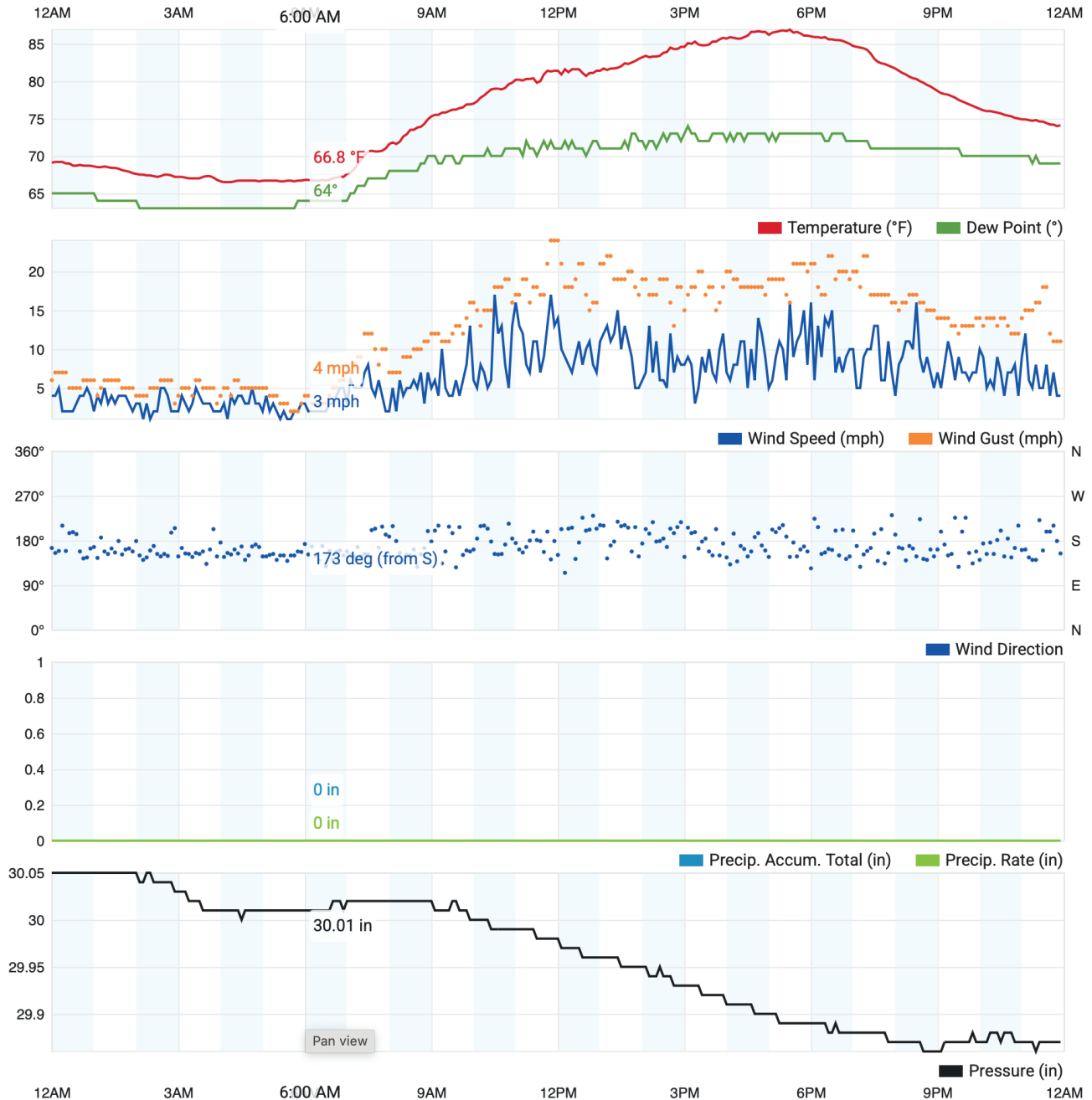
Makenzie Huber is a lifelong South Dakotan who regularly reports on the intersection of politics and policy with health, education, social services and Indigenous affairs. Her work with South Dakota Searchlight earned her the title of South Dakota's Outstanding Young Journalist in 2024, and she was a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

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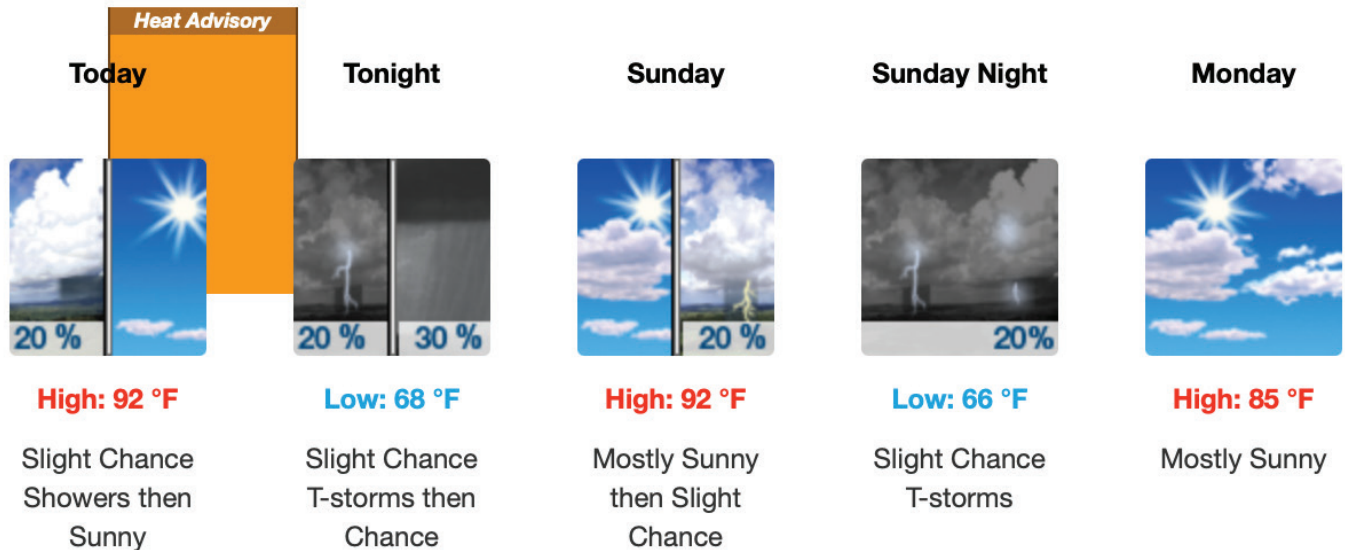
Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

July 25, 2025



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THREAT ASSESSMENT

HIGHEST LOCAL RISK

2

WHAT THIS MEANS:
SCATTERED severe storms
possible

TIMING

6pm through Midnight

PRIMARY THREATS

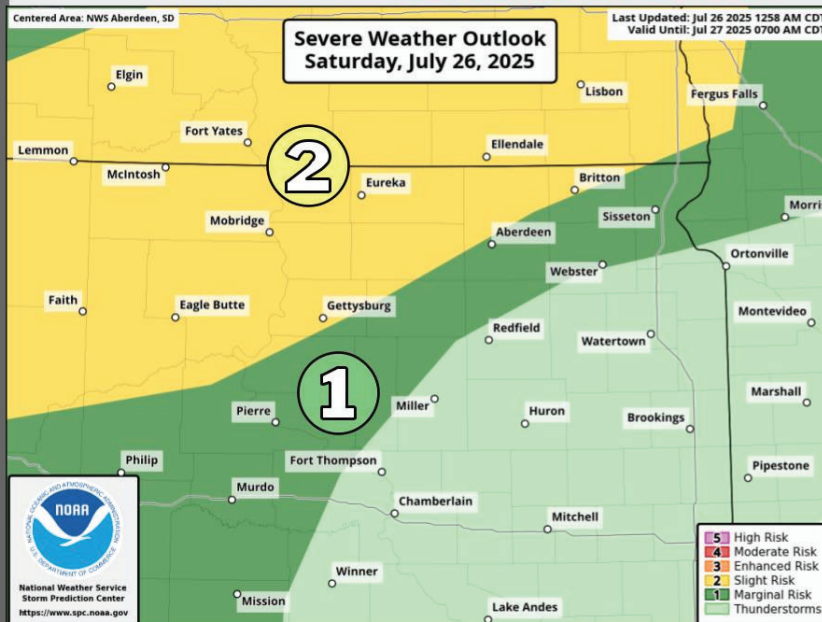


DAMAGING
WIND GUSTS to
60 mph



LARGE
HAIL to 1
inch
diameter

Scattered SEVERE STORMS Tonight



What to Expect:

- Winds to 60 mph and hail up to 1 inch in diameter would be possible

Timing:

- Storms will develop in western SD this evening and move east into central and northeastern SD.

How to be Prepared:



INDOOR SHELTER



OUTDOOR PLANS?
STAY WEATHER
AWARE



MULTIPLE WAYS TO
RECEIVE WARNINGS



There is a 30-50% chance of thunderstorms this evening with a Slight risk (level 2 out of 5) of severe storms over portions of central and northeastern SD. Main threats will be wind gusts of 60 mph and hail 1 inch in diameter.

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THREAT ASSESSMENT

HIGHEST LOCAL RISK

1

WHAT THIS MEANS:
ISOLATED severe storms
possible

Late afternoon into
the overnight

PRIMARY THREATS

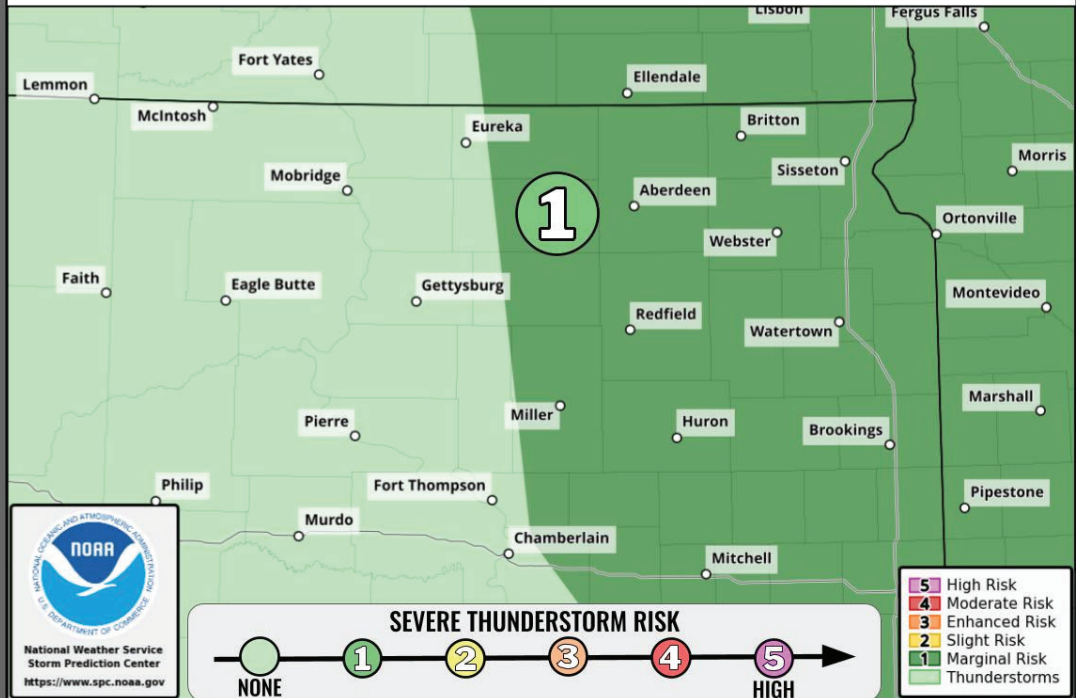


LARGE
HAIL to 1
inch in
diameter



DAMAGING
WIND GUSTS to
60 mph

Isolated SEVERE STORMS Sunday



There is a Marginal risk (level 1 out of 5) for severe storms late Sunday afternoon into Sunday night across eastern SD. The strongest storms will be capable of producing hail to 1 inch in diameter and winds to around 60 mph.



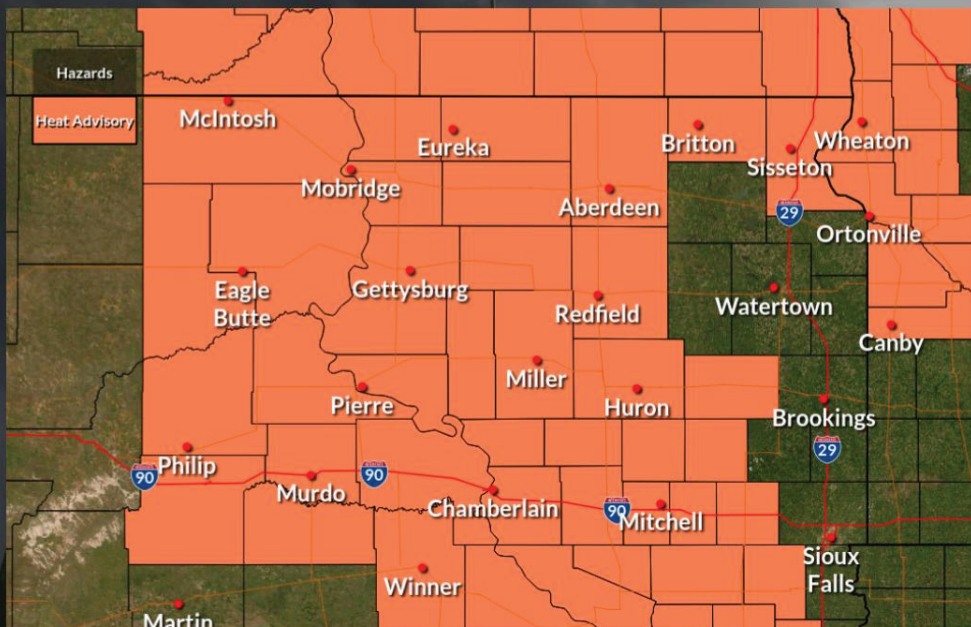
Max Heat Index:
95°F – 104°F



Noon - 8 PM
CDT Saturday



Heat Advisory



NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
weather.gov/abern

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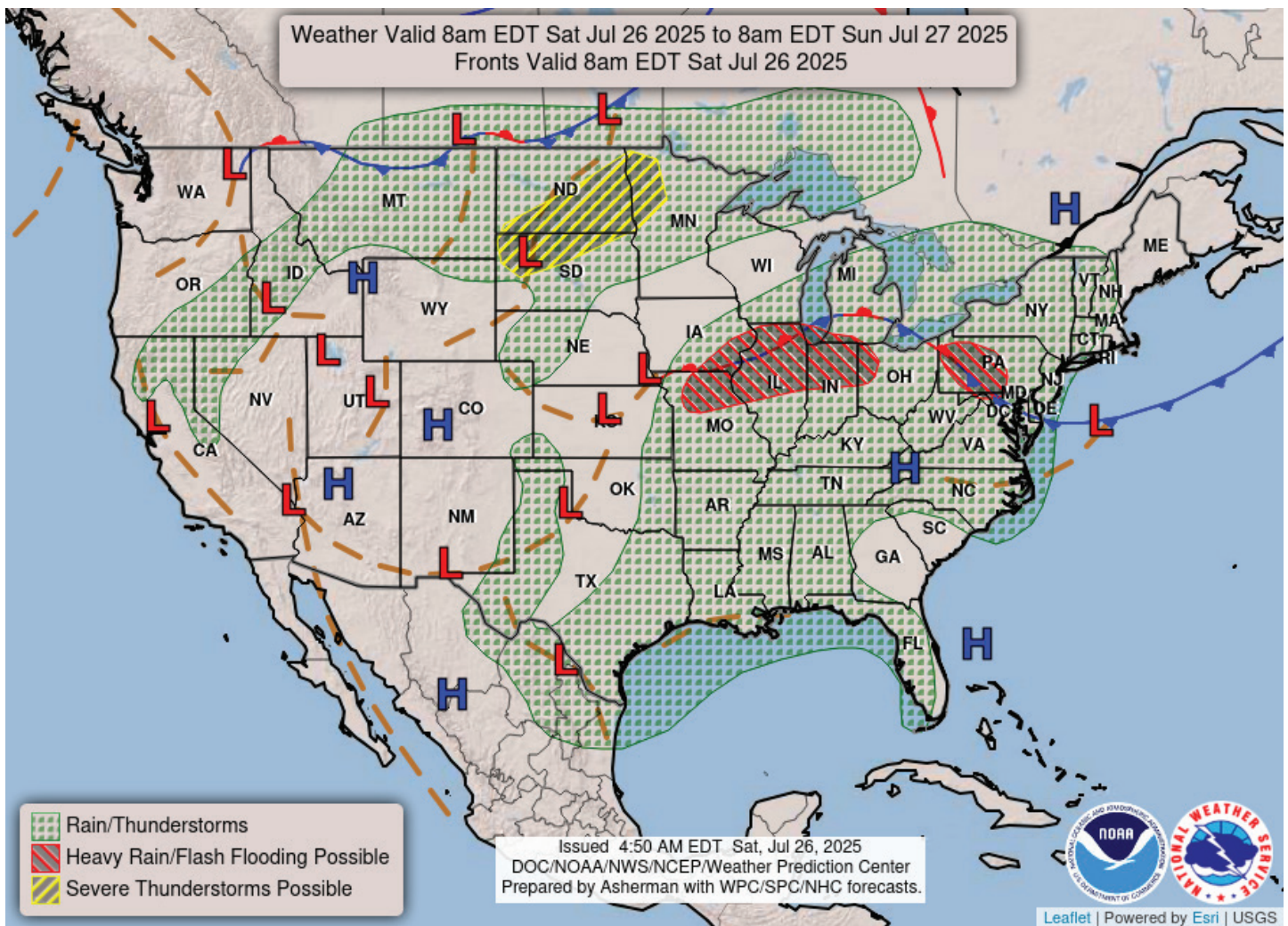
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 87 °F at 5:27 PM
Heat Index: 96 °F at 5:30 PM
Low Temp: 66 °F at 4:04 AM
Wind: 24 mph at 11:50 AM
Precip: : 0.00 Total

Day length: 15 hours, 0 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 112 in 1931
Record Low: 42 in 1962
Average High: 85
Average Low: 60
Average Precip in July.: 2.68
Precip to date in July: 6.65
Average Precip to date: 13.69
Precip Year to Date: 14.81
Sunset Tonight: 9:09:09 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:09:52 am



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Today in Weather History

July 26, 1963: An estimated F2 tornado moved northeast from 4 miles northeast of Raymond. Barns and outbuildings were destroyed on one farm, and the home was unroofed. Asphalt was ripped off a state highway.

1819 - Twin cloudbursts of fifteen inches struck almost simultaneously at Catskill, NY, and Westfield, MA. Flash flooding resulted in enormous erosion. (David Ludlum)

1874: Torrential rainfall brought flash flooding to Pittsburg, Pennsylvania.

1890: During the morning hours, an estimated F3 tornado went through the southern part of Lawrence, Massachusetts. The tornado left 500 people homeless as the tornado destroyed 35 homes and damaged 60 others.

1897: Jewel, Maryland received 14.75 inches of rain in a 24 hour period. This record is currently the oldest, state rainfall record in the United States. All other state rainfall records are in the 1900s and 2000s.

1921: On the summit of Mt. Wellenkuppe, in Switzerland, the temperature reached 100 degrees by 10 am. The summit had an elevation of 12,830 feet and was covered in snow.

1931: A swarm of grasshoppers descends on crops throughout the American heartland, devastating millions of acres. Iowa, Nebraska, and South Dakota, already in the midst of a bad drought, suffered tremendously from this disaster.

1943 - Tishomingo, OK, baked in the heat as the mercury soared to 121 degrees, a state record. (The Weather Channel)

1960 - The temperature at Salt Lake City, UT, hit 107 degrees, an all-time record high for that location. (The Weather Channel)

1979: Tropical Storm Claudette stalled over Alvin, Texas, inundating the town with 45 inches of rain in 42 hours. The total included 43 inches in 24 hours, which is the maximum 24-hour rainfall in American history.

1987 - Thunderstorms developing along a cold front produced hail two inches in diameter in McHenry County, IL, and wind gusts to 70 mph at Auburn, ME. A wind gust of 90 mph was recorded at Blairstown, NJ, before the anemometer broke. The high winds were associated with a small tornado. The record high of 88 degrees at Beckley, WV, was their sixth in a row. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms produced large hail and damaging winds in the Middle Atlantic Coast Region, and in the south central U.S. Eight cities in the northwestern and north central U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Salem, OR, hit 103 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Morning thunderstorms produced heavy rain in southeastern Texas, with more than three inches reported at the Wildlife Refuge in southwestern Chambers County. Evening thunderstorms produced severe weather in Montana, with wind gusts to 62 mph reported at Helena. Eight cities from Maine to Minnesota reported record high temperatures for the date, including Newark, NJ, with a reading of 99 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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GOING BEYOND THE ORDINARY

What does it take to "go beyond" others and find happiness? Education? Wealth? Family? Networking? Occupation? Power? Recognition? Prestige?

What about "going beyond" for the Christian? Are there standards for "happiness?"

The first Psalm almost explodes with a joyful exclamation of one who "goes beyond." That one is called "blessed," or in many translations, "happy." And it is not "everyone" who attains this plateau of happiness. It is "the one" who is a believer in the Word of God – Christ Jesus.

To look at some who profess to be followers of the Lord does not provide an easy answer. They do not seem to be satisfied with life, have a sense of peace about them, or look forward to living each day with expectancy and joy. They appear "ordinary." They give the world the wrong impression of what God has to offer us through His Son.

The first Psalm provides the "do's" and "do not's" to "go beyond" the ordinary Christian and become an extraordinary Christian.

Negatively, the extraordinary Christian does not follow the advice of the wicked, spend time talking to them, or listening to their advice, and even avoids being in their presence whenever possible.

Positively, the extraordinary Christian takes pleasure in honoring God, following His teachings, and being obedient to His Word.

The extraordinary Christian is always seeking ways to grow into the likeness of Christ, to follow His teachings, and to worship and serve Him daily.

Prayer: Help us, Heavenly Father, to willingly make any and every sacrifice that is necessary to become all that we can become in You and through You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: But they delight in the law of the Lord, meditating on it day and night. Psalm 1:1-4

We all need the encouragement, comfort, and peace that comes through God's grace. Our daily devotionals, known as Seeds of Hope, have been a means through which thousands of people have experienced this grace. Each devotional comes from God's Word and we pray this good "seed" finds good soil in your heart. Our aim is that the Seeds of Hope will be a great source of daily encouragement to you and that God will use them to draw you near to Him

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.25.25

14 21 25 49 52 7

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$130,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[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: 13 Hrs 44 Mins 34 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.25.25

19 20 31 37 41 2

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 13 Hrs 59 Mins 35 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.23.25

9 10 11 14 19

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$67,000

NEXT DRAW: 13 Hrs 59 Mins 35 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.23.25

4 21 35 60 69 23

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 28 Mins 34 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: 14 Hrs 28 Mins 34 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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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

Women in legislatures across the US fight for 'potty parity'

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI and CLAIRE RUSH Associated Press

For female state lawmakers in Kentucky, choosing when to go to the bathroom has long required careful calculation.

There are only two bathroom stalls for women on the third floor of the Kentucky Statehouse, where the House and Senate chambers are located. Female legislators — 41 of the 138 member Legislature — needing a reprieve during a lengthy floor session have to weigh the risk of missing an important debate or a critical vote.

None of their male colleagues face the same dilemma because, of course, multiple men's bathrooms are available. The Legislature even installed speakers in the men's bathrooms to broadcast the chamber's events so they don't miss anything important.

In a pinch, House Speaker David Osborne allows women to use his single stall bathroom in the chamber, but even that attracts long lines.

"You get the message very quickly: This place was not really built for us," said Rep. Lisa Willner, a Democrat from Louisville, reflecting on the photos of former lawmakers, predominantly male, that line her office.

The issue of potty parity may seem comic, but its impact runs deeper than uncomfortably full bladders, said Kathryn Anthony, professor emerita at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's School of Architecture.

"It's absolutely critical because the built environment reflects our culture and reflects our population," said Anthony, who has testified on the issue before Congress. "And if you have an environment that is designed for half the population but forgets about the other half, you have a group of disenfranchised people and disadvantaged people."

There is hope for Kentucky's lady legislators seeking more chamber potties.

A \$300 million renovation of the 155-year-old Capitol — scheduled for completion by 2028 at the soonest — aims to create more women's restrooms and end Kentucky's bathroom disparity.

The Bluegrass State is among the last to add bathrooms to aging statehouses that were built when female legislators were not a consideration.

In the \$392 million renovation of the Georgia Capitol, expanding bathroom access is a priority, said Gerald Pilgrim, chief of staff with the state's Building Authority. It will introduce female facilities on the building's fourth floor, where the public galleries are located, and will add more bathrooms throughout to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

"We know there are not enough bathrooms," he said.

Evolving equality in statehouses

There's no federal law requiring bathroom access for all genders in public buildings. Some 20 states have statutes prescribing how many washrooms buildings must have, but historical buildings — such as statehouses — are often exempt.

Over the years, as the makeup of state governments has changed, statehouses have added bathrooms for women.

When Tennessee's Capitol opened in 1859, the architects designed only one restroom — for men only — situated on the ground floor. According to legislative librarian Eddie Weeks, the toilet could only be "flushed" when enough rainwater had been collected.

"The room was famously described as 'a stench in the nostrils of decency,'" Weeks said in an email.

Today, Tennessee's Capitol has a female bathroom located between the Senate and House chambers. It's in a cramped hall under a staircase, sparking comparisons to Harry Potter's cupboard bedroom, and it contains just two stalls. The men also just have one bathroom on the same floor, but it has three urinals and three stalls.

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Democratic Rep. Aftyn Behn, who was elected in 2023, said she wasn't aware of the disparity in facilities until contacted by The Associated Press.

"I've apparently accepted that waiting in line for a two-stall closet under the Senate balcony is just part of the job," she said.

"I had to fight to get elected to a legislature that ranks dead last for female representation, and now I get to squeeze into a space that feels like it was designed by someone who thought women didn't exist -- or at least didn't have bladders," Behn said.

The Maryland State House is the country's oldest state capitol in continuous legislative use, operational since the late 1700s. Archivists say its bathroom facilities were initially intended for white men only because desegregation laws were still in place. Women's restrooms were added after 1922, but they were insufficient for the rising number of women elected to office.

Delegate Pauline Menes complained about the issue so much that House Speaker Thomas Lowe appointed her chair of the "Ladies Rest Room Committee," and presented her with a fur covered toilet seat in front of her colleagues in 1972. She launched the women's caucus the following year.

It wasn't until 2019 that House Speaker Adrienne A. Jones, the first woman to secure the top position, ordered the addition of more women's restrooms along with a gender-neutral bathroom and a nursing room for mothers in the Lowe House Office Building.

'No longer do we fret and squirm or cross our legs in panic'

As more women were elected nationwide in the 20th century, some found creative workarounds.

In Nebraska's unicameral Legislature, female senators didn't get a dedicated restroom until 1988, when a facility was added in the chamber's cloakroom. There had previously been a single restroom in the senate lounge, and Sen. Shirley Marsh, who served for some 16 years, would ask a State Patrol trooper to guard the door while she used it, said Brandon Metzler, the Legislature's clerk.

In Colorado, female House representatives and staff were so happy to have a restroom added in the chamber's hallway in 1987 that they hung a plaque to honor then-state Rep. Arie Taylor, the state's first Black woman legislator, who pushed for the facility.

The plaque, now inside a women's bathroom in the Capitol, reads: "Once here beneath the golden dome if nature made a call, we'd have to scramble from our seats and dash across the hall ... Then Arie took the mike once more to push an urge organic, no longer do we fret and squirm or cross our legs in panic."

The poem concludes: "In mem'ry of you, Arie (may you never be forgot), from this day forth we'll call that room the Taylor Chamber Pot."

New Mexico Democratic state Rep. Liz Thomson recalled missing votes in the House during her first year in office in 2013 because there was no women's restroom in the chamber's lounge. An increase in female lawmakers — New Mexico elected the largest female majority Legislature in U.S. history in 2024 — helped raise awareness of the issue, she said.

"It seems kind of like fluff, but it really isn't," she said. "To me, it really talks about respect and inclusion."

The issue is not exclusive to statehouses. In the U.S. Capitol, the first restroom for congresswomen didn't open until 1962. While a facility was made available for female U.S. Senators in 1992, it wasn't until 2011 that the House chamber opened a bathroom to women lawmakers.

Jeannette Rankin of Montana was the first woman elected to a congressional seat. That happened in 1916.

Willner insists that knowing the Kentucky Capitol wasn't designed for women gives her extra impetus to stand up and make herself heard.

"This building was not designed for me," she said. "Well, guess what? I'm here."

Voters in Taiwan reject bid to oust China-friendly lawmakers in closely watched poll

By CHRISTOPHER BODEEN and KANIS LEUNG Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — Taiwanese voters rejected a bid to oust about one-fifth of their lawmakers, all from the opposition Nationalist Party, in a recall election Saturday, dampening hopes for the ruling party

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to flip the balance of power in the self-ruled island's legislature.

The independence-leaning ruling Democratic Progressive Party won last year's presidential election, but the China-friendly Nationalists, also known as the KMT, and the smaller Taiwan People's Party have enough seats to form a majority bloc.

While vote counting was still underway, preliminary results showed that the recall efforts failed to remove any of the two dozen KMT lawmakers. The scale of the recall elections is unprecedented, with another seven KMT lawmakers facing a similar vote on Aug. 23.

The KMT currently holds 52 seats, while the ruling DPP holds 51 seats. For the DPP to secure a legislative majority, at least six KMT lawmakers would need to be ousted, and the ruling party would need to win the by-elections, which must be held within three months of the announcement of results.

For the recall to pass, more than a quarter of eligible voters in the electoral district must vote in favor of it, and the total number of supporters must exceed those voting against.

The poll closed at 4 p.m. local time. Taiwan's Central Election Commission will announce the official results on Aug. 1.

If next month's poll results are also unfavorable to the DPP, it would mean that the government of Taiwan President Lai Ching-te could continue to face strong resistance from within the legislature before elections expected to take place in 2028.

'An uphill battle'

KMT chairman Eric Chu told reporters that voters had used their ballots to prove Taiwan's democracy is mature and great, calling for an apology from Lai.

"All Taiwanese people chose stability, chose that the government should focus on getting things done, rather than engaging in bitter political fighting," he said.

Despite their huge effort, those backing the recall were facing an "uphill battle" in trying to unseat lawmakers in well organized, strongly KMT districts, said Lev Nachman, a professor of political science at National Taiwan University.

The result is going to make it even harder for Lai to push his agenda forward, especially ahead of local elections next year, said Nachman, who is an expert on Taiwan's elections.

"At the moment, there is very little Lai can do other than try to think of other creative ways to appeal to the public," he told The Associated Press.

Fu Kun-chi, one of the most powerful and controversial lawmakers targeted, said the result left Lai with no option other than to meet with the opposition and "find a way for Taiwan to proceed in a more stable way in this chaotic world."

Political retaliation claim

Those who support removing the 24 lawmakers have criticized the KMT and its allies for blocking key legislation, especially the defense budget, and passing controversial changes that are seen as diminishing the power of the executive and favoring China, which considers the island its own territory.

The opposition parties' actions sparked concerns among some Taiwanese about the island's democratic integrity and its ability to deter Chinese military threats, leading to the recall campaigns.

But the KMT has accused the ruling party of resorting to political retaliation after it lost the legislative majority, saying the recalls were undermining and challenging Taiwan's democratic system.

Tensions flared over the poll

The elections have intensified tensions between those backing the status quo and those favoring improved ties with Beijing.

Critics accuse China-friendly politicians of compromising Taiwan and take issue with their meetings with mainland Chinese politicians. But these Taiwanese politicians claim their connections are vital for dialogue given Beijing's refusal to interact with the DPP.

When asked about the recall election, China's Taiwan Affairs Office spokesperson Zhu Fenglian said in June that since the administration of Lai came into power, it has sought to achieve "one-party dominance" and practiced dictatorship under the guise of democracy, state broadcaster CCTV reported. The office is

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a branch of China's ruling Communist Party government, which itself maintains strict one-party rule.

Zhu said that Lai's government has spared no effort in suppressing opposition parties and those who supported the development of cross-strait relations.

Taiwan's mainland affairs council said Wednesday that the Chinese authorities and state media had tried to blatantly interfere with the vote.

Israeli gunshots and strikes kill at least 25 in Gaza, some while seeking aid

By WAFAA SHURAF and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli airstrikes and gunshots overnight killed at least 25 people, according to Palestinian health officials and the ambulance service on Saturday, as ceasefire talks appear to have stalled and Gaza faces famine.

The majority of victims were killed by gunfire as they waited for aid trucks close to the Zikim crossing with Israel, said staff at Shifa hospital, where the bodies were brought.

Israel's army didn't respond to a request for comments about the latest shootings.

Those killed in strikes include four people in an apartment building in Gaza City, among others, hospital staff and the ambulance service said.

The strikes come as ceasefire talks between Israel and Hamas have hit a standstill after the U.S and Israel recalled their negotiating teams on Thursday, throwing the future of the talks into further uncertainty.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Friday his government was considering "alternative options" to ceasefire talks with Hamas. His comments came as a Hamas official said negotiations were expected to resume next week and portrayed the recall of the Israeli and American delegations as a pressure tactic.

Egypt and Qatar, which are mediating the talks alongside the United States, said the pause was only temporary and that talks would resume, though they did not say when.

Experts and the UN warn of famine

For desperate Palestinians, a ceasefire can't come soon enough.

The United Nations and experts say that Palestinians in Gaza are at risk of famine, with reports of increasing numbers of people dying from causes related to malnutrition. While Israel's army says it's allowing aid into the enclave with no limit on the number of trucks that can enter, the U.N. says it is hampered by Israeli military restrictions on its movements and incidents of criminal looting.

The Zikim crossing shootings come days after at least 80 Palestinians were killed trying to reach aid entering through the same crossing. Israel's military said at the time its soldiers shot at a gathering of thousands of Palestinians who posed a threat, and that it was aware of some casualties.

During the shootings Friday night, Sherif Abu Aisha said people started running when they saw a light that they thought was from the aid trucks, but as they got close, they realized it was from Israel's tanks. That's when the army started firing on people, he told The Associated Press. He said his uncle, a father of eight, was among those killed.

"We went because there is no food ... and nothing was distributed," he said.

Israel is facing increased international pressure to alleviate the catastrophic humanitarian crisis in Gaza. More than two dozen Western-aligned countries and over 100 charity and human rights groups have called for an end to the war, harshly criticizing Israel's blockade and a new aid delivery model it has rolled out.

The charities and rights groups said even their own staff were struggling to get enough food.

For the first time in months, Israel said it is allowing airdrops, requested by Jordan. A Jordanian official said the airdrops will mainly be food and milk formula. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer wrote in a newspaper article on Saturday that the U.K. was "working urgently" with Jordan to get British aid into Gaza.

Aid group the World Central Kitchen said on Friday that it was resuming limited cooking operations in Deir al-Balah after being forced to halt due to a lack of food supplies.

It said it's trying to serve 60,000 meals daily through its field kitchen and partner community kitchens, less than half of what it's cooked over the previous month.

Families of Americans slain in the West Bank lose hope for justice

By JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

BIDDU, West Bank (AP) — When Sayfollah Musallet of Tampa, Florida, was beaten to death by Israeli settlers in the West Bank two weeks ago, he became the fourth Palestinian-American killed in the occupied territory since the war in Gaza began.

No one has been arrested or charged in Musallet's slaying — and if Israel's track record on the other three deaths is any guide, it seems unlikely to happen. Yet Musallet's father and a growing number of U.S. politicians want to flip the script.

"We demand justice," Kamel Musallet said at his 20-year-old son's funeral earlier this week. "We demand the U.S. government do something about it."

Still, Musallet and relatives of the other Palestinian-Americans say they doubt anyone will be held accountable, either by Israel or the U.S. They believe the first word in their hyphenated identity undercuts the power of the second. And they say Israel and its law enforcement have made them feel like culprits — by imposing travel bans and, in some cases, detaining and interrogating them.

Although the Trump administration has stopped short of promising investigations of its own, the U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem has urged Israel to investigate the circumstances of each American's death.

Writing on X on July 15, U.S. Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee said he'd asked Israel to "aggressively investigate the murder" of Musallet and that "there must be accountability for this criminal and terrorist act."

Senator Chris Van Hollen of Maryland and 28 other Democratic senators have also called for an investigation. In a letter this week to Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Attorney General Pam Bondi, they pointed to the "repeated lack of accountability" after the deaths of Musallet and other Americans killed in the West Bank.

Israel's military, police and Shin Bet domestic security agency did not respond to requests for comment about the Palestinian-Americans' deaths.

Families have demanded independent investigations

American-born teenagers Tawfic Abdel Jabbar and Mohammad Khmour were killed in early 2024 by Israeli fire while driving in the West Bank. In April 2025, 14-year-old Amer Rabee, a New Jersey native, was shot in the head at least nine times by Israeli forces, according to his father, as he stood among a grove of green almond trees in his family's village.

In the immediate aftermath of both cases, Israeli authorities said that forces had fired on rock throwers, allegations disputed by the families and by testimony obtained by the AP. Israel pledged to investigate the cases further, but has released no new findings.

The teens' families told the AP they sought independent investigations by American authorities, expressing doubts that Israel would investigate in good faith. According to the Israeli watchdog group Yesh Din, killings of Palestinians in the West Bank rarely result in investigations — and when they do, indictments are uncommon.

The U.S. Justice Department has jurisdiction to investigate the deaths of its own citizens abroad, but does so after it gets permission from the host government and usually works with the host country's law enforcement. The U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem declined to say whether the U.S. has launched independent probes into the killings.

A spokesperson for the embassy said in a statement that investigations are "underway" in Israel over the deaths of the four Americans and that its staff is pressing the Israeli authorities to move quickly and transparently.

Sen. Van Hollen said that when the U.S. deals with Israel it "either doesn't pursue these cases with the vigor necessary, or we don't get any serious cooperation."

"And then instead of demanding cooperation and accountability, we sort of stop — and that's unacceptable. It's unacceptable to allow American citizens to be killed with impunity," the Maryland Democrat said.

Israel says it holds soldiers and settlers accountable

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Israel says it holds soldiers and settlers to account under the bounds of the law, and that the lack of indictments does not mean a lack of effort.

A prominent recent case was the death of Shireen Abu Akleh, a Palestinian-American journalist for broadcaster Al Jazeera killed in the West Bank in 2022. An independent U.S. analysis of the circumstances of her death found that fire from an Israeli soldier was "likely responsible" for her killing but said it appeared to be an accident.

Despite an Israeli military investigation with similar conclusions, no one was ever disciplined.

Violence by Israeli forces and settlers has flared in the West Bank since the Hamas attack on Oct. 7, 2023. More than 950 Palestinians have been killed since the beginning of the war in Gaza, according to the United Nations. Some have been militants killed in fighting with Israel, though the dead have also included stone-throwers and bystanders uninvolved in violence.

Instead of justice, restrictions and detentions

Rather than a path toward justice, the families of Khdour, Rabee, and Abdel Jabbar say they've faced only challenges since the deaths.

Khdour, born in Miami, Florida, was shot and killed in April 2024 while driving in Biddu, a West Bank town near Jerusalem where he lived since age 2. U.S. investigators visited his family after the killing, his family said. Abdel Jabbar was killed while driving down a dirt road close to Al Mazra as-Sharqiya, his village in the northern West Bank.

Khdour's cousin, Malek Mansour, the sole witness, told the AP he was questioned by both Israeli and American investigators and repeated his testimony that shots came from a white pickup on Israeli territory.

He believes the investigators did not push hard enough to figure out who killed his cousin.

"The matter ended like many of those who were martyred (killed)," said Hanan Khdour, Khdour's mother.

Two months after the death, Israeli forces raided the family's home and detained Mohammad's brother, Omar Khdour, 23, also an American citizen.

Videos taken by family and shared with the AP show Omar Khdour blindfolded and handcuffed as Israeli soldiers in riot gear lead him out of the building and into a military jeep.

He said he was threatened during questioning, held from 4 a.m. to 3 p.m., and warned not to pursue the case.

'Here, being American means nothing'

Omar Khdour said Israeli soldiers at checkpoints have prevented him from leaving the West Bank to visit Israel or Jerusalem. Two other American fathers of Palestinian-Americans killed since Oct. 7, 2023 reported similar restrictions.

Hafeth Abdel Jabbar, Tawfic Abdel Jabbar's father, said he and his wife were blocked from leaving the West Bank for seven months. His son, Amir Abdel Jabbar, 22, remains restricted.

The father of Amer Rabee says he and his wife have also been stuck in the West Bank since their son's killing. He showed AP emails from the U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem in which a consular official told him that Israel had imposed a travel ban on him, though it was unclear why.

Israeli authorities did not respond to comment on the detentions or travel restrictions.

Rabee said that in a land where violence against Palestinians goes unchecked, his family's American passports amounted to nothing more than a blue book.

"We are all American citizens," Rabee said. "But here, for us, being American means nothing."

Paramount gets green light for \$8 billion merger. But what is the psychic cost for company?

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

With this week's FCC approval, the merger between Paramount Global and Skydance Media is expected to be completed in the coming weeks at a value of \$8 billion. The question for the new company is whether the psychic cost is much higher.

It has been a particularly rough few months at Paramount-owned CBS, where the settlement of a lawsuit

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regarding "60 Minutes" and announced end of Stephen Colbert's late-night show has led critics to suggest corporate leaders were bowing to President Donald Trump.

Following the Federal Communications Commission approval Thursday, one of the triumvirate of current Paramount leaders, Chris McCarthy, said that he would be leaving the company. McCarthy has been in charge of fading cable properties like MTV, Comedy Central and Nickelodeon, expected to bear the brunt of an estimated \$2 billion in cost cuts identified by Skydance leaders.

Skydance head David Ellison is expected to head the new company, and he has identified former NBC Universal executive Jeff Shell as the incoming president.

CBS News' trajectory will be scrutinized

After the merger's Aug. 7 closing date, the new leaders will be watched most closely for how they deal with CBS News, particularly given the \$16 million paid in a settlement of Trump's complaint that last fall's "60 Minutes" interview was edited to make opponent Kamala Harris look good. Two news executives — News CEO Wendy McMahon and "60 Minutes" executive producer Bill Owens — resigned due to their opposition to the deal.

The appointment of respected insider Tanya Simon to replace Owens this week was seen as a positive sign by people at "60 Minutes."

Days before the FCC's vote, Paramount agreed to hire an ombudsman at CBS News with the mission of investigating complaints of political bias. "In all respects, Skydance will ensure that CBS's reporting is fair, unbiased, and fact-based," Skydance said in a letter to FCC Chairman Brendan Carr.

The role of an ombudsman, or public editor, who examines a news outlet's work is often positive — if they are given independence, said Kelly McBride, an ethics expert who has had that role at NPR for five years. "You really want the person to have loyalty only to their own judgment and the journalistic mission of the organization," she said.

Having the sole mission of examining bias could be problematic, however. To be fair, a journalist's work should be closely studied before making that determination, not judged on the basis of one report or passage, she said.

Carr, in an interview with CNBC on Friday, said the role "should go a long way toward restoring America's trust in media." Anna Gomez, an FCC commissioner who voted to reject the deal on Thursday, interpreted the arrangement as a way for the government to control journalists.

"They want the news media to report on them in a positive light or in the light that they want," Gomez told MSNBC. "So they don't want the media to do their job, which is to hold government to account without fear or favor."

How the merger could ripple out across Paramount properties

According to published reports, Ellison has explored purchasing The Free Press, a flourishing news site founded by Bari Weiss perhaps best known for a former NPR editor's study of liberal bias in public broadcasting. An Ellison spokeswoman did not return a message seeking comment on Friday.

Colbert's slow-motion firing — he'll work until the end of his contract next May — was described by CBS as a financial decision given late-night television's collapsing economics. Colbert's relentless lampooning of Trump, and his criticism of the "60 Minutes" settlement, led to suspicion of those motives.

"Was this really financial?" comic Jon Stewart wondered. "Or maybe the path of least resistance for your \$8 billion merger was killing a show that you know rankled a fragile and vengeful president?"

Stewart's profane criticism on his own Paramount-owned show may provide its own test for Skydance. "The Daily Show" is one of the few original programs left on Comedy Central, and his contract ends later this year.

In an odd way, Comedy Central's "South Park" buttresses CBS' claim that the Colbert decision was financial, not political. Creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone delivered an episode this week that depicted a naked Trump in bed with the devil. Paramount just signed Parker and Stone to a new \$1.5 billion deal that Skydance executives surely cleared; it makes the entire "South Park" library available for streaming on Paramount+. a platform where Colbert's show doesn't do nearly as well.

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Figuring out what to do with others at Paramount's cable networks, or even the networks as a whole, will be an early decision for Ellison, son of multibillionaire and Oracle co-founder Larry Ellison.

"There is a clear opportunity to improve Paramount's growth profile by letting those assets go," analyst Doug Creutz of TD Securities told investors Friday. "On the other hand, we suspect the Ellisons did not purchase Paramount in order to break it up for parts."

The merger also brings together the Paramount movie studio with one of its most regular partners. David Ellison has been one of the industry's top investors and producers since founding Skydance in 2006.

Ellison has a challenge here, too: Years of uncertainty over its future and modest investment in its movie pipeline has shrunk Paramount's market share to last among the major studios. The Paramount+ streaming service has been a money-loser.

To revive Paramount, Ellison will look to revamp its streaming operations, leverage its franchises and try to bolster family content.

Thailand and Cambodia trade accusations as deadly border clashes enter third day

By JINTAMAS SAKSORNCHAI and SOPHENG CHEANG Associated Press

SURIN, Thailand (AP) — Thailand and Cambodia traded accusations Saturday of fresh attacks as deadly border clashes entered a third day, leaving at least 33 people dead and more than 168,000 displaced, as international pressure mounted on both sides to reach a ceasefire.

Artillery fire and gunshots were reported near several border villages, expanding the area of the fighting that flared again Thursday after a land mine explosion along the border wounded five Thai soldiers. Cambodian and Thai officials claimed to have acted in retaliation.

Both countries recalled their ambassadors and Thailand closed its northeastern border crossings with Cambodia.

Cambodian authorities reported on Saturday 12 new deaths, bringing its toll to 13, while Thai officials said a soldier was killed, raising the deaths to 20, mostly civilians.

The regional bloc, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN, is under growing pressure to defuse the situation between its two members. During an emergency meeting on Friday, members of the U.N. Security Council called for de-escalation and urged ASEAN to mediate a peaceful solution.

The 800-kilometer (500-mile) frontier between Thailand and Cambodia has been disputed for decades, but past confrontations have been limited and brief. The current tensions broke out in May when a Cambodian soldier was killed in a confrontation that created a diplomatic rift and roiled Thailand's domestic politics.

Fresh attacks and rising tension

Cambodia's Defense Ministry condemned what it said was an expanded Thai offensive early Saturday after five heavy artillery shells were fired into multiple locations in the province of Pursat, calling the attack an "unprovoked and premeditated act of aggression."

Ministry spokesperson Lt. Gen. Maly Socheata said tensions flared in the province of Koh Kong, where four Thai naval vessels were reportedly stationed offshore and four others en route. She said the naval deployment was an "act of aggression" that risked further escalation.

Maly Socheata said seven civilians and five soldiers were killed in two days of fighting. Earlier, one man was reported dead after a pagoda he was hiding under was hit by Thai rockets.

The Thai army had denied targeting Cambodian civilian sites and accused Phnom Penh of using "human shields" by positioning their weapons near residential areas.

Meanwhile, Thailand's navy, in a statement Saturday, accused Cambodian forces of initiating a new attack in the province of Trat, saying Thai forces responded swiftly and "successfully pushed back the Cambodian incursion at three key points", warning that "aggression will not be tolerated."

Thai authorities also alleged several Cambodian artillery shells had landed across the border in Laos, damaging homes and property. Lao officials have not publicly responded to the claim.

The conflict has so far left thousands displaced.

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Cambodia's Information Minister Neth Pheaktra said Saturday the clashes had forced 10,865 Cambodian families, or 37,635 people, in three border provinces to evacuate to safe locations, while Thai officials said more than 131,000 people had fled their border villages.

Call to protect civilians amid claim of cluster bomb use

Human Rights Watch urged the U.N. Security Council and concerned governments to press the Thai and Cambodian governments to abide by international humanitarian law and take all steps to protect civilians. Children have been harmed and Thai authorities have closed at least 852 schools and seven hospitals for safety reasons, the rights group said in a statement Saturday.

Both sides have employed rocket and artillery attacks, and after initially denying Cambodian claims that internationally prohibited cluster munitions were being used, a Thai military spokesperson in a statement Friday said that such weapons could be utilized "when necessary" to target military objectives. HRW condemned the use of cluster munitions in populated areas.

Neither Thailand nor Cambodia is party to the Convention on Cluster Munitions, which bans the use of the weapon and Thai authorities had previously used them during a border dispute with Cambodia in February 2011 that left 20 people dead.

"Neither Thailand nor Cambodia appears to be paying attention to international humanitarian law at great expense to civilians," John Sifton, Asia advocacy director at Human Rights Watch, said in a statement. "Diplomatic efforts underway need to prioritize protecting civilians and civilian infrastructure."

Thai officials also acknowledged the use of F-16 jets and drones to launch airstrikes.

UN urges ASEAN bloc to mediate

The U.N. Security Council didn't issue a resolution on the crisis during its Friday emergency session, but Thai Foreign Minister Maris Sangiampongsa said Saturday all 15 member countries called on both sides to exercise restraint, halt attacks, and resolve the dispute peacefully. They also supported ASEAN's role in mediating between its two member states, he said.

Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, whose country is the current ASEAN chair, had earlier said Thailand and Cambodia were open in principle to his ceasefire proposal. Malaysian media said Anwar has tasked the country's foreign minister to mediate peace talks to halt the fighting.

Maris said Saturday his country agreed in principle to the proposal, but insisted that Cambodia must first show sincerity and cease hostilities, adding that Thailand would continue to engage constructively with Malaysia.

"Thailand reaffirms its commitment to resolving the conflict peacefully and in accordance with international law," he said, urging Cambodia to "return to the negotiating table with sincerity and in good faith."

In Syria's Sweida, the stench of death still lingers days after sectarian bloodshed

By OMAR SANADIKI and SALLY ABOU ALJOUD Associated Press

SWEIDA, Syria (AP) — The stench of decaying bodies hangs heavy in the streets of the provincial capital in Syria's southern province of Sweida, where fighting recently erupted. Once bustling roads now lie eerily silent, with only a few people passing by. In some areas, the destruction is overwhelming, with buildings and cars charred black.

At a bank branch, shattered glass covered the floor as an alarm blared nonstop. Walls are emblazoned with slogans graffitied by both sides in the recent conflict.

The devastation came after violent clashes broke out two weeks ago, sparked by tit-for-tat kidnappings between armed Bedouin clans and fighters from the Druze religious minority. The fighting killed hundreds of people and threatened to unravel Syria's fragile postwar transition.

Syrian government forces intervened, ostensibly to end the fighting, but effectively sided with the clans. Some government fighters reportedly robbed and executed Druze civilians.

Associated Press journalists from outside the city were able to enter Sweida on Friday for the first time

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since the violence started on July 13. With a ceasefire largely holding, residents of Sweida are trying to pick up the pieces of their lives.

'Snipers hit him'

At the main hospital, where bodies of those killed in the fighting were piled up for days, workers were scrubbing the floor, but the smell lingered.

Manal Harb was there with her wounded 19-year-old son, Safi Dargham, a first-year engineering student, who was shot while volunteering at the overwhelmed hospital.

"Snipers hit him in front of the hospital," she said. "We are civilians and have no weapons."

Safi sustained injuries to his elbow, behind his ear, and his leg. Harb says he may lose his arm if he doesn't receive urgent treatment.

Harb's husband, Khaled Dargham, was killed when armed men stormed their home, shot him, and set the house on fire. She said the armed men also stole their phones and other belongings.

An emergency room nurse who gave only her nickname, Em Hassib ("mother of Hassib"), said she had remained in the hospital with her children throughout the conflict. She alleged that at one point, government fighters who were brought to the hospital for treatment opened fire, killing a police officer guarding the hospital and wounding another. The AP could not independently verify her claim.

She said the bodies had piled up for days with no one to remove them, becoming a medical hazard.

Sectarian tensions simmer as Druze resist disarmament

Disturbing videos and reports from Sweida surfaced showing Druze civilians being humiliated and executed during the conflict, sometimes accompanied by sectarian slurs. After a ceasefire took hold, some Druze groups launched revenge attacks on Bedouin communities. The U.N. has said more than 130,000 people were displaced by the violence.

Government officials, including interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa, have promised to hold accountable those who targeted civilians, but many residents of Sweida remain angry and suspicious.

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

The Druze largely welcomed the fall of former President Bashar Assad in December in a rebel offensive that ended decades of autocratic rule by the Assad dynasty.

However, the new government under al-Sharaa, a former Islamist commander who once had al-Qaida ties, drew mixed reactions from Druze leaders. Some clerics supported engaging with the new leadership, while others, including spiritual leader Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri and his Sweida Military Council, opposed him.

Al-Sharaa has denied targeting the Druze and blamed the unrest on armed groups defying state authority, particularly those loyal to al-Hijri. He also accused Israel of deepening divisions by striking Syrian forces in Sweida, attacks that were carried out under the pretext of defending the Druze.

Talal Jaramany, a 30-year-old Druze resort owner, took up arms during the fighting.

"What pushed me to put on a military uniform and go to the front lines is that what happened was lawless," he told The Associated Press.

Jaramany insisted there was little distinction between the Bedouin clans and the government's General Security forces. "They used weapons, not dialogue," he said.

He rejects calls for disarmament, saying the Druze need their weapons for self-defense.

"We won't hand over our arms. Our weapon is sacred," he said. "It's not for attacking. We've never been supporters of war. We'll only give it up when the state provides real security that protects human rights."

Sweida's Christians also recount near-death escapes

Members of Sweida's Christian minority were also caught up in the violence.

At a church where a number of Christian families were sheltering, 36-year-old Walaa al-Shammas, a housewife with two children, said a rocket struck her home on July 16.

"Had we not been sheltering in the hallway, we would've been gone," she said. "My house lies in destruction and our cars are gone."

Gunmen came to the damaged house later, but moved on, apparently thinking it was empty as the fam-

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ily hid in the hallway, she said.

In recent days, hundreds of people — Bedouins as well as Druze and Christians — have evacuated Sweida in convoys of buses carrying them to other areas, organized by the Syrian Red Crescent. Others have found their own way out.

Micheline Jaber, a public employee in the provincial government in Sweida, was trying to flee the clashes last week with her husband, in-laws and extended family members when the two cars they were driving in came under shelling. She was wounded but survived, along with her mother-in-law and the young son of one of her husband's siblings.

Her husband and the rest of the family members who were fleeing with them were killed.

Someone, Jaber doesn't know who, loaded her and the other two survivors in a car and drove them to an ambulance crew, which evacuated them to a hospital outside of the city. She was then taken to another hospital in the southwestern city of Daraa, and finally transported to Damascus. She's now staying with friends in the Damascus suburb of Jaramana, her arms encased in bandages.

"When the shell hit the car, I came out alive — I was able to get out of the car and walk normally," Jaber said. "When you see all the people who died and I'm still here, I don't understand it. God has His reasons."

The one thing that comforts her is that her 15-year-old daughter was with her parents elsewhere at the time and was not harmed.

"My daughter is the most important thing and she is what gives me strength," Jaber said.

4 people killed in Russia and Ukraine as countries trade aerial attacks

By The Associated Press undefined

Russia and Ukraine traded aerial attacks overnight, resulting in two deaths in each country, according to officials.

Ukraine's southern Dnipro and northeastern Sumy regions came under combined rocket and drone attack, local officials reported. Head of the Dnipro regional administration Serhii Lysak said at least two people had died and five were wounded in the barrage.

In the city of Dnipro, a multi-story building and business were damaged during the strike and in the region a fire engulfed a shopping center.

In Sumy, the military administration said three people were injured.

Kharkiv sustained an intense aerial bombardment overnight with local authorities reporting Ukraine's second-largest city was hit by four guided aerial bombs, two ballistic missiles and 15 drones over a three-hour period.

In a post on Telegram, Kharkiv mayor Ihor Terekhov said high-rise residential buildings, local businesses, roads and the communication network were damaged in the attack. He said at least five people were injured, including three rescue workers who were wounded in a double tap strike — where a second attack targets emergency workers trying to help people wounded in the initial attack.

According to the daily air force report, in total Russia targeted Ukraine with 208 drones and 27 missiles overnight. It said according to preliminary data, air defense and electronic warfare took down or intercepted 183 drones and 17 missiles but hits from 10 missiles and 25 drones had been recorded in nine locations.

In Russia, officials said that Ukrainian drones targeted multiple regions overnight. A drone attack on the Rostov region, on the border with Ukraine, killed two people, acting governor Yuri Slyusar reported.

In the neighboring Stavropol region, drones hit an unspecified industrial facility, governor Vladimir Vladimirov said on Telegram. He added that the attack sparked a brief fire, but didn't specify where exactly. Vladimirov said cellphone internet in the region was restricted because of the attack — a measure authorities regularly take across the vast country that critics say helps widespread online censorship.

An unconfirmed media report said videos posted online by local residents showed that the drones hit the Signal radio plant that makes jamming equipment. The Associated Press was unable to verify the claim.

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Drones also targeted Moscow, but were shot down, according to Mayor Sergei Sobyanin, and an unspecified industrial facility in the Penza region southeast of the capital, Gov. Oleg Melnichenko said.

Russia's Defense Ministry said that its air defenses shot down or intercepted a total of 54 Ukrainian drones, including 24 over the Bryansk region on the border with Ukraine, 12 over the Rostov region, six over the annexed Crimean Peninsula, four over the Azov sea, three over the Black Sea and a few others over the Orlov, Tula and Belgorod regions.

Russian civil aviation agency Rosaviatsia overnight briefly halted flights in and out of airports serving the city of Kaluga, southwest of Moscow, as well as Vladikavkaz and Grozny in the North Caucasus. ____

Follow AP's coverage of the war in Ukraine at <https://apnews.com/hub/russia-ukraine>

Jared Allen's 136 sacks and fun-loving cowboy style for Chiefs, Vikings have him Hall of Fame-bound

By DAVE CAMPBELL AP Pro Football Writer

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Jared Allen will be wearing a cowboy hat next weekend in Canton for his Hall of Fame induction, the signature apparel that inspired his celebratory calf-roping act after each sack and still serves as a fitting snapshot of his off-the-field life.

Raised on a horse ranch in Northern California, Allen was audacious enough at age 8 to tell his father he planned to become a professional football player.

He fulfilled that vision with a relentless vengeance on the offensive tackles tasked with blocking him and the quarterbacks who tried to escape, using exceptional quickness, creative moves and pure strength to accumulate 136 sacks and four first team All-Pro selections as a defensive end over a 12-year career in the NFL.

"When you're doing what you love to do, you want to honor the game by being great, not in an arrogant way but in a way to show respect and gratitude for all those who came before you," said Allen, who will be honored at the ceremony next weekend along with Antonio Gates, Eric Allen and Sterling Sharpe. "I always wanted to go out there and let people know I genuinely loved playing this game."

First making his mark with the Kansas City Chiefs and then reaching another level with the Minnesota Vikings, Allen was one of the most fun-loving players of his generation.

That went all the way down to his routine of running away from the play, dropping to one knee, twirling his hand as if he had a lasso and pretending to catch a calf in a rodeo before extending both arms outward to the crowd. He was a showman who had plenty to show for it.

The crossroads of Allen's career came upon consummation of the 2008 trade that sent him from the Chiefs to the Vikings, his promising start in the NFL tainted by off-the-field trouble that followed him from Idaho State.

Chiefs general manager Carl Peterson, who drafted Allen in the fourth round in 2004, soured on the prodigious pass rusher after two different citations for drunken driving in 2006 and declared him a "young man at risk." Allen was irked by the lack of front-office support and asked to be dealt, absent a new contract.

After accumulating 15 1/2 sacks in 14 games in 2007 after serving a two-game suspension, Allen finally got his wish. Having given up alcohol after the second arrest, he redoubled his conditioning efforts in determination to prove his worth.

"I loved Kansas City. I wanted to spend my whole career there. Unfortunately, you learn the business side of the game can be a little ruthless, and I'm just stubborn enough to want to get my way," Allen said.

The Vikings sent their first-round pick and two third-round picks in 2008 to the Chiefs, then signed Allen to a six-year, \$73 million deal that at the time was the largest in history for a defensive player. He earned every penny, too, without any salary reductions or early releases that often follow big-money contracts in a league that has little patience for declining production by players with large cap hits.

"With a contract like that and a trade like that comes a lot of pressure," Allen said. "It's not in my saddle to rest on my laurels. The most impressive thing was I was able to play it out. I think I represented myself well."

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Allen averaged more than 14 sacks per season over six years with the Vikings, including a career-best 22 sacks in 2011 that came within one-half of the record set by Michael Strahan and later matched by T.J. Watt.

Allen is officially 12th on the career sacks list, a statistic the NFL didn't compile until 1982. Research by Pro Football Reference on all games played before then produced a comprehensive list that has Allen with the 16th-most sacks in history, after winding down his career with the Chicago Bears in 2014 and being traded to the Carolina Panthers the following season.

While he ditched his drinking problem and cleaned up off the field, Allen never lost his thrill-seeking lifestyle, once running with the bulls in Spain, and killing a wild boar in Texas with a knife. He was a joke-cracking, wide-smiling life of the locker room with the Vikings, where he forged lifelong friendships that transcended the bitter disappointment of losing in overtime to the New Orleans Saints in the NFC championship game after the 2009 season.

Picked up at the airport in Minneapolis after the trade by defensive line coach Karl Dunbar and the alpha males of the position group, Kevin Williams and Pat Williams, Allen quickly knew he was in the right place.

"I am as competitive as they come, and it was brought to another level walking into that room," Allen said. "The minute I got into that car, Pat and Kevin started talking trash about how I couldn't play the run."

Allen formed the alpha center of those Vikings teams with the Williamses on one of the best defensive lines in the league. He frequently was at his best when the lights were on, including a 4 1/2-sack game on Green Bay's Aaron Rodgers when Brett Favre quarterbacked the Vikings to a 2009 victory in his first revenge matchup against the Packers.

The Vikings have a long history of dominant defensive linemen, with Alan Page, Carl Eller, Chris Doleman and John Randle all enshrined before Allen in Canton. The famed Purple People Eaters — Page, Eller, Jim Marshall and Gary Larsen — helped the Vikings reach four Super Bowls and set a high standard for their successor.

"You're never going to race 'em, but I wanted people to talk about myself, Pat and Kevin," Allen said. "We wanted to be the fiercest, nastiest front four you could be, and that was all to pay respect to the guys who did it before us."

Unknown gunmen kill 6, wound 20 in an attack on a court building in southeast Iran

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) —

Unknown attackers launched a gun and grenade attack on a court building in southeast Iran Saturday, killing six people including a child and wounding 20, state TV reported.

The report said security forces killed three of the gunmen in the armed clash in the country's restive southern province of Sistan and Baluchestan. It did not identify any of the victims.

State TV said the attack happened in the province's capital city of Zahedan. Police and security forces immediately took control of the site, 1,130 kilometers or 700 miles southeast of the capital, Tehran.

A report by the semiofficial Tasnim news agency, believed to be close to security forces, blamed the attack on the militant group Jaish al-Adl, which wants independence for Iran's eastern Sistan and Pakistan's southwestern Baluchistan provinces.

The province, bordering Afghanistan and Pakistan, has been the site of occasional deadly clashes involving militant groups, armed drug smugglers and Iranian security forces.

In October, an attack on an Iranian police convoy in the province killed at least 10 officers.

Sistan and Baluchistan province is one of the least developed parts of Iran. Relations between the predominantly Sunni Muslim residents of the region and Iran's Shiite theocracy have long been strained.

Suspect arrested after University of New Mexico dorm shooting leaves 1 dead

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By SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN and MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — A shooting early Friday at a University of New Mexico dormitory killed a 14-year-old boy, wounded a 19-year-old and prompted the evacuation of hundreds of students and a campuswide search for the suspect, who has since been taken into custody.

University officials lifted a shelter in place order late Friday afternoon, saying there was still an active investigation and that the main campus in Albuquerque would remain closed. They said students were allowed to eat at the dining hall and return to their dorms but otherwise should avoid the crime scene.

New Mexico State Police Chief Troy Weisler said officers took a male suspect, aged 18, into custody at about 2:30 p.m.

Four people, including the suspect, were playing video games inside a dorm room belonging to one of them when the shooting began, John Silva, chief of the University of New Mexico Police Department, said at a news conference.

The 14-year-old was fatally shot and the others fled the room, Weisler said. A 19-year-old male sought treatment at a hospital and said he was shot on campus.

Authorities were investigating why the suspect fired a gun, Weisler said. Police were working with prosecutors to draft charging documents, he said.

Officials issued an initial alert just before 3:30 a.m. that a shooting had taken place. Another alert asking people to shelter in place was sent out just after 6 a.m. Police evacuated parts of the campus.

"We had a student orientation going so there were like 400 kids in dorms, so we wanted to make sure they were safe," said Lt. Tim Delgado with the University of New Mexico Police Department.

For much of the day, authorities had the area around the student housing complex cordoned off with yellow tape as police vehicles blocked roadways and investigators gathered.

Mikey Beck, who was staying in student housing this week as part of new student orientation, said he heard gunshots overnight and saw what appeared to be an injured person hiding in some bushes. Two other people jumped out of a dorm window and ran, he said.

Beck said he was excited to start his freshman year but the incident was disconcerting.

"It's really sketchy out here. Just being in Albuquerque is really scary," he said.

Not far from the dorms, a line of university buses waited for students to board, many of them carrying backpacks and pulling small luggage carts with their belongings. The university was conducting a "staged, tactical evacuation," spokesperson Cinnamon Blair said in an emailed statement. People were told not to move without direction from campus police.

The university in central Albuquerque has about 23,000 students during the school year. New students like Beck have been visiting as part of scheduled orientations ahead of the fall semester, which begins in about three weeks.

An increased law enforcement presence on and around the campus was planned for coming days, university President Garnett Stokes said in a letter to the campus community.

"We understand this incident may be especially distressing for new students and their families who are here this week for orientation," Garnett wrote.

Mayor Tim Keller said his thoughts were with the victim's loved ones and the university community.

"We are heartbroken by the tragic loss of life that occurred today on the University of New Mexico campus," Keller said in a statement.

New Mexico's largest city has struggled with violent crime in recent years, particularly among juveniles. District Attorney Sam Bregman, who is running for the Democratic nomination for governor, has called for state lawmakers to do more to address what he describes as a crisis.

The plea for legislative action comes amid violence in New Mexico involving young suspects, including a fatal hit-and-run in Albuquerque and a shooting in Las Cruces in March that killed three and wounded 15 others.

Prosecutors, law enforcement and Republican lawmakers have pressed Democratic Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham to convene a special legislative session to address the state's crime problem. Despite voicing her

disappointment with the Democratic-controlled Legislature at the end of the last session, the governor has not given recent indications that she will be calling lawmakers back to Santa Fe.

The reverse migration: African Americans relocating to Kenya cite heritage and restoration

By EVELYNE MUSAMBI and DESMOND TIRO Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Kenneth Harris spent most of his days in Atlanta yearning for a life in a place where his dark skin color is not a source of suspicion, but a mark of a shared heritage. His chance came two years ago when he bought a one-way ticket to Kenya.

The 38-year-old retired veteran has found a community in the east African country's capital, where he now runs an Airbnb business. He loves admiring Nairobi's golden sunset from a rooftop terrace, and enjoys a luxurious lifestyle in a tastefully furnished apartment in an upmarket neighborhood.

Harris is part of a growing wave of African Americans who are relocating to Kenya, citing the need to connect with their ancestors — or "coming home," a phrase often used among the Black community.

Like dozens of other African Americans who have moved to Nairobi in recent years, Harris was attracted to Kenya's tropical climate and what he describes as the warmth and friendliness of the people he believes he shares a history and culture with.

In search of community and a better life

"I have always had that adventurous spirit, especially when I joined the military and got to go to different countries. So I am taking the opportunity to venture out to new places," he said. "That is what allowed me to make a home away from home and Kenya is my new home."

Some friends have reaching out to him to explore a "change from the U.S for their peace of mind," he said.

Several other African Americans who have "come home" like him have set up thriving businesses in Nairobi that include travel agencies, restaurants and farms.

Many African Americans who have sought a better life abroad or are considering it said President Donald Trump's administration — with its crackdown on diversity programs — isn't the main reason they want to move.

Rather, most say they had been mulling a move for some time, and the current political environment in the U.S. may be pushing them to act sooner than initially planned.

"I can't say the administration is the reason why the people I know want to part ways from America. Some are planning to move for a better quality of living life," Harris said.

Auston Holleman, an American YouTuber who has lived in various countries for almost a decade, said he settled on Kenya nine months ago because people "look like me."

"It is not like going to Europe or going to some Latin American countries where there are not many Black people," he said.

Holleman, who often films his daily life, said he felt that the social fabric in the U.S. was "broken." In contrast, he said he felt socially accepted in Kenya. He cited an experience when his taxi driver's car stopped, and in five minutes they got help from a random stranger.

"That made me realize I was in the right place," he said.

Growing numbers are interested in leaving the US

Other African countries have attracted even larger numbers of African Americans. Ghana, which launched a "Year of the Return" program to attract the Black diaspora in 2019, said last year it held a ceremony that granted citizenship to 524 people, mostly Black Americans.

African American businesses such as Adilah Relocation Services have seen a notable rise in the number of African Americans seeking to move to Kenya.

The company's founder, Adilah Mohammad, moved to Kenya four days after her mother's funeral in search of healing.

She says the peace and restoration she experienced in Kenya made her stay — and advocate for those searching for the same. Her company helps clients relocate by house hunting, shopping for furniture and

ensuring banking and medical services are seamless.

"There are 15 families that have come so far, and we have five more on the calendar that are coming in the next 90 days. We have people that have booked for 2026 with no date, they just know that they are leaving," she says.

Mohammad said many African Americans have been planning their move for decades.

"For me it is a movement. It is people deciding to make a choice for themselves, they are not being forced, shackles are being broken. When they say they are coming home, they are choosing to be free and it is mental freedom and so I am ecstatic," she says.

Experts say African economies are likely to benefit from these moves, especially from those willing to tackle corruption and create a healthy environment for investors.

Raphael Obonyo, a public policy expert at U.N-Habitat, says the U.S is losing resources — as well as the popular narrative that America is the land of opportunities and dreams.

"This reverse migration is denting that narrative, so America is most likely to lose including things like brain drain," he explained.

For Mohammad, the sense of belonging has given her peace within.

"I love being here. Returning to Africa is one thing, but finding the place that you feel like you belong is another," she said.

As the ADA turns 35, groups fighting for disability rights could see their federal dollars slashed

By JOHN HANNA and KENYA HUNTER Associated Press

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — Nancy Jensen believes she'd still be living in an abusive group home if it wasn't shut down in 2004 with the help of the Disability Rights Center of Kansas, which for decades has received federal money to look out for Americans with disabilities.

But the flow of funding under the Trump administration is now in question, disability rights groups nationwide say, dampening their mood as Saturday marks the 35th anniversary of the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act. Federal dollars pay for much of their work, including helping people who seek government-funded services and lawsuits now pushing Iowa and Texas toward better community services.

Documents outlining President Donald Trump's budget proposals show they would zero out funds earmarked for three grants to disability rights centers and slash funding for a fourth. Congress' first discussion of them, by the Senate Appropriations Committee, is set for Thursday, but the centers fear losing more than 60% of their federal dollars.

The threat of cuts comes as the groups expect more demand for help after Republicans' tax and budget law complicated Medicaid health coverage with a new work-reporting requirement.

There's also the sting of the timing: this year is the 50th anniversary of another federal law that created the network of state groups to protect people with disabilities, and Trump's proposals represent the largest potential cuts in that half-century, advocates said. The groups are authorized to make unannounced visits to group homes and interview residents alone.

"You're going to have lots of people with disabilities lost," said Jensen, now president of Colorado's advisory council for federal funding of efforts to protect people with mental illnesses. She worries people with disabilities will have "no backstop" for fighting housing discrimination or seeking services at school or accommodations at work.

The potential budget savings are a shaving of copper from each federal tax penny. The groups receive not quite \$180 million a year — versus \$1.8 trillion in discretionary spending.

Trump's administration touts flexibility for states

The president's Office of Management and Budget didn't respond to an email seeking a response to the disability rights groups' criticism. But in budget documents, the administration argued its proposals would give states needed flexibility.

The U.S. Department of Education said earmarking funds for disability rights centers created an un-

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necessary administrative burden for states. Trump's top budget adviser, Russell Vought, told senators in a letter that a review of 2025 spending showed too much went to "niche" groups outside government.

"We also considered, for each program, whether the governmental service provided could be provided better by State or local governments (if provided at all)," Vought wrote.

Disability rights advocates doubt that state protection and advocacy groups — known as P&As — would see any dollar not specifically earmarked for them.

They sue states, so the advocates don't want states deciding whether their work gets funded. The 1975 federal law setting up P&As declared them independent of the states, and newer laws reinforced that.

"We do need an independent system that can hold them and other wrongdoers accountable," said Rocky Nichols, the Kansas center's executive director.

Helping people with disabilities navigate Medicaid

Nichols' center has helped Matthew Hull for years with getting the state to cover services, and Hull hopes to find a job. He uses a wheelchair; a Medicaid-provided nurse helps him run errands.

"I need to be able to do that so I can keep my strength up," he said, adding that activity preserves his health.

Medicaid applicants often had a difficult time working through its rules even before the tax and budget law's recent changes, said Sean Jackson, Disability Rights Texas' executive director.

With fewer dollars, he said, "As cases are coming into us, we're going to have to take less cases."

The Texas group receives money from a legal aid foundation and other sources, but federal funds still are 68% of its dollars. The Kansas center and Disability Rights Iowa rely entirely on federal funds.

"For the majority it would probably be 85% or higher," said Marlene Sallo, executive director of the National Disability Rights Network, which represents P&As.

The Trump administration's proposals suggest it wants to shut down P&As, said Steven Schwartz, who founded the Center for Public Representation, a Massachusetts-based organization that works with them on lawsuits.

Investigating allegations of abuse and pushing states

Federal funding meant a call in 2009 to Disability Rights Iowa launched an immediate investigation of a program employing men with developmental disabilities in a turkey processing plant. Authorities said they lived in a dangerous, bug-infested bunkhouse and were financially exploited.

Without the dollars, executive director Catherine Johnson said, "That's maybe not something we could have done."

The Kansas center's private interview in 2004 with one of Jensen's fellow residents eventually led to long federal prison sentences for the couple operating the Kaufman House, a home for people with mental illnesses about 25 miles (40 kilometers) north of Wichita.

And it wasn't until Disability Rights Iowa filed a federal lawsuit in 2023 that the state agreed to draft a plan to provide community services for children with severe mental and behavioral needs.

For 15 years, Schwartz's group and Disability Rights Texas have pursued a federal lawsuit alleging Texas warehouses several thousand people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in nursing homes without adequate services. Texas put at least three men in homes after they'd worked in the Iowa turkey plant.

Last month, a federal judge ordered work to start on a plan to end the "severe and ongoing" problems. Schwartz said Disability Rights Texas did interviews and gathered documents crucial to the case.

"There are no better eyes or ears," he said.

Tens of thousands flee their homes as Thailand and Cambodia clash

By JINTAMAS SAKSORNCHAI and SOPHENG CHEANG Associated Press

SURIN, Thailand (AP) — Tens of thousands of people sought refuge as border fighting between Thailand and Cambodia entered its third day Saturday, heightening fears of an extended conflict with the total

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death toll reaching 32.

The U.N. Security Council held an emergency meeting behind closed doors late Friday in New York, while Malaysia, which chairs the 10-nation regional bloc that includes both countries, called for an end to hostilities and offered to mediate.

The council did not issue a statement but a council diplomat said all 15 members called on the parties to deescalate, show restraint and resolve the dispute peacefully. The council also urged the regional bloc, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations known as ASEAN, to help resolve the border fighting, the diplomat said, speaking on condition of anonymity because the meeting was private.

Cambodia's U.N. Ambassador Chhea Keo told reporters afterward that his country, which called for the emergency meeting, "asked for immediate ceasefires, unconditionally, and we also call for the peaceful solution to the dispute."

He responded to accusations that Cambodia attacked Thailand asking how a small country with no air force could attack a much larger country with an army three times its size, stressing, "We do not do that."

UN Security Council urges restraint by both sides

Keo said the Security Council called for both sides to exercise "maximum restraint and resort to diplomatic solution" which is what Cambodia is calling for as well.

Asked what he expects next, the ambassador said: "Let's see how the call can be heard by all the members there."

Thailand's U.N. ambassador left the meeting without stopping to talk to reporters.

The Thai Health Ministry on Friday said more than 58,000 have fled from villages to temporary shelters in four affected border provinces, while Cambodian authorities said more than 23,000 people have evacuated from areas near the border.

The latest flare-up in a long-running border dispute between the two countries has killed at least 19 people in Thailand — mostly civilians — while Cambodia said Saturday that 12 people more people have killed on its side, bringing its death toll to 13.

Thailand's acting prime minister, Phumtham Wechayachai, said Friday that Cambodia may be guilty of war crimes due to the deaths of civilians and damage caused to a hospital. He said Thailand had exercised the "utmost restraint and patience in the face of provocations and aggression" from Cambodia.

Tensions over a disputed border area erupted into fighting after a land mine explosion along the border wounded five Thai soldiers on Wednesday.

Clashes break out across border areas

The Thai military reported clashes early Friday in multiple areas along the border, including near the ancient Ta Muen Thom temple claimed by both sides. Associated Press reporters near the border could hear sounds of artillery from early morning hours.

The Thai army said Cambodian forces had used heavy artillery and Russian-made BM-21 rocket launchers, prompting what Thai officials described as "appropriate supporting fire" in return.

Thailand said six of its soldiers and 13 civilians were killed while 29 soldiers and 30 civilians were wounded.

Early Saturday, Cambodian Gen. Maly Socheata, spokesperson for the Ministry of National Defense, told reporters Saturday that seven more civilians and five soldiers have died from two days of fighting. It earlier reported one fatality — a man who was killed when the pagoda he was hiding in got hit by Thai rockets.

The Cambodian Education Ministry claimed that on Friday two Thai rockets had hit a school compound in Oddar Meanchey but caused no injuries. It said all schools in the province have been closed.

The Thai army denied it targeted civilian sites in Cambodia, and accused Cambodia of using "human shields" by positioning their weapons near residential areas.

Thousands flee villages near the border

As the fighting intensified, villagers on both sides have been caught in the crossfire, leading many to flee.

Around 600 people took shelter at a gymnasium in a university in Surin, Thailand, about 80 kilometers (50 miles) from the border. Evacuees sat in groups, on mats and blankets, and queued for food and drinks.

Seamstress Pornpan Sooksai was accompanied by four cats in two fabric carriers. She said she was doing laundry at her home near Ta Muen Thom temple when shelling began Thursday.

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"I just heard, boom, boom. We already prepared the cages, clothes and everything, so we ran and carried our things to the car. I was frightened, scared," she recalled.

Rattana Meeying, another evacuee, said she had also lived through the 2011 clashes between the two countries but described this flare-up as worse.

"Children, old people, were hit out of the blue," she said. "I never imagined it would be this violent."

At the nearby Phnom Dong Rak hospital, periodic explosions could be heard Friday, and a military truck arrived with three injured Thai soldiers, including one who had both legs severed. Thursday's shelling shattered windows at one of the hospital's buildings and damaged its roof.

In the neighboring Sisaket province, more villagers took their belongings and left homes in a stream of cars, trucks and motorbikes after they received an evacuation order on Friday.

Across the border in Cambodia, villages on the outskirts of Oddar Meanchey province were largely deserted. Homes stood locked, while chickens and dogs roamed outside.

Some villagers earlier dug holes to create makeshift underground bunkers, covering them with wood, tarpaulin and zinc sheets to shield themselves from shelling. Families with children were seen packing their belongings on home-made tractors to evacuate, though a few men refused to leave.

A remote Buddhist temple surrounded by rice fields accommodated several hundred evacuated villagers. Women rested in hammocks, some cradling babies, while children ran about. Makeshift plastic tents were being set up under the trees.

Veng Chin, 74, pleaded with both governments to negotiate a settlement "so that I can return to my home and work on the farm."

ASEAN chair calls for calm

The conflict marks a rare instance of armed confrontation between ASEAN member countries though Thailand has tangled with Cambodia before over the border and has had sporadic skirmishes with western neighbor Myanmar.

Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said Friday that Thailand and Cambodia had agreed to a ceasefire and to withdraw their troops from the border, but requested more time before implementing the action, according to a report by Malaysia's Bernama national news agency.

Anwar said he had spoken to both Cambodian leader Hun Manet and Thailand's Phumtham and urged them to open space for "peaceful dialogue and diplomatic resolution," while offering to have Malaysia facilitate talks.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has also called for restraint and urged both countries to resolve disputes through dialogue, according to U.N. deputy spokesman Farhan Haq.

It's the latest flareup in longstanding border tensions

The 800-kilometer (500-mile) frontier between Thailand and Cambodia has been disputed for decades, but past confrontations have been limited and brief. The last major flare-up in 2011 left 20 dead.

The current tensions broke out in May when a Cambodian soldier was killed in a confrontation that created a diplomatic rift and roiled Thailand's domestic politics.

Things got worse when a land mine wounded five Thai soldiers on Wednesday, leading Bangkok to close the border and expel the Cambodian ambassador. The next day, clashes broke out along the border.

A grenade is missing from the scene of an explosion that killed 3 LA deputies

By HALLIE GOLDEN Associated Press

A grenade is missing from the scene of an explosion at a Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department training facility that killed three members of its arson and explosives unit, authorities said Friday.

At the time of the July 18 blast, the veteran deputies were working on two "military-style" grenades that had been taken into custody by authorities. One of the grenades detonated, and the other is unaccounted for, Sheriff Robert Luna said, according to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. The agency is investigating the explosion and is expected to publish a final report in 45 days.

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Luna said authorities X-rayed special enforcement bureau vehicles, searched all around the blast area and examined office spaces and even the gym and haven't found it.

"You get the drift. We have looked at everything out there that we possibly could," he said, adding that no one from the public has had access to the area.

The day before the explosion, members of the sheriff's department's arson and explosives unit arrived at an apartment in Santa Monica to assist local police after a resident said they found what appeared to be two hand grenades in a tenant's storage unit in the underground parking garage, Luna said. The detectives X-rayed the devices and believed they were "inert," or inactive.

The devices were then taken to be "destroyed and rendered safe" at the Biscailuz Training Facility, he said.

It was not known whether the grenades had any connection to the military.

Luna said that since the explosion, he has called for an independent review of the policies and practices of the arson and explosives team and has already changed how they handle these types of situations.

"All future explosive devices, inert or not, will be treated as if they are all live and will be disposed of accordingly," he said.

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

The department identified the deputies who died as Detective Joshua Kelley-Eklund, Detective Victor Lemus and Detective William Osborn. They served 19, 22 and 33 years in the department respectively, Luna said.

"We're going to turn this upside down," he said. "We're going to look at everything we can. Why? Because we need to know what happened. We owe it to the families. And for God's sake, I never want this to happen again."

Southwest Airlines flight headed to Las Vegas takes dramatic plunge in response to nearby aircraft

By RIO YAMAT Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — A Southwest Airline jet heading to Las Vegas from Southern California took a dramatic plunge shortly after takeoff Friday in response to an alert about a nearby plane, sending some passengers flying out of their seats and injuring two flight attendants.

The plane suddenly jolted shortly after takeover then felt like it was falling, said Stef Zamorano, who was flying to Las Vegas with her husband to celebrate his birthday.

In front of her, Zamorano saw a woman who wasn't wearing her seat belt shoot up and out of her seat, her long hair flying in a tangled mess. The man seated next to her was clutching her arm, and she said the woman across the aisle was panicking.

"She was pretty much verbalizing how we all felt, saying, 'I want to get off this plane. I want to be on the ground,'" Zamorano told The Associated Press.

Data from the flight tracking site FlightAware shows it dropped roughly 300 feet (91.44 meters) in 36 seconds.

The Federal Aviation Administration said the flight, Southwest 1496, was responding to an onboard alert about another aircraft in its vicinity. The FAA is investigating. Southwest said the crew responded to two alerts that required the pilot to climb then descend. The flight departed from Hollywood Burbank Airport just before noon.

Still in shock, Zamorano said she could hardly make out what the pilot was saying when he later addressed the passengers.

Another passenger, comedian Jimmy Dore, posted on X that the pilot mentioned a near miss.

"Pilot said his collision warning went off & he needed to avoid plane coming at us," Dore posted.

The plane was in the same airspace near Burbank as a Hawker Hunter Mk. 58 just after noon local time, FlightAware shows. A Hawker Hunter is a British fighter plane. Records show it is owned by Hawker Hunter

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Aviation, a British defense contracting company. The company didn't immediately respond to messages seeking comment.

Mike Christensen, an airport spokesman for Hollywood Burbank, said that neither the control tower nor the operations department, which tracks planes departing and arriving, have any record of the Southwest flight plunging in their airspace.

Southwest said the flight continued to Las Vegas, "where it landed uneventfully." The airline said that it is working with the FAA "to further understand the circumstances" of the event.

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.

Israel says it is considering alternatives to ceasefire talks with Hamas, deepening uncertainty

By SAMY MAGDY and WAFAA SHURAFI Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Friday his government was considering "alternative options" to ceasefire talks with Hamas after Israel and the U.S. recalled their negotiating teams, throwing the future of the negotiations into further uncertainty.

Netanyahu's statement came as a Hamas official said negotiations were expected to resume next week and portrayed the recall of the Israeli and American delegations as a pressure tactic. Egypt and Qatar, which are mediating the talks alongside the United States, said the pause was only temporary and that talks would resume, though they did not say when.

The teams left Qatar on Thursday as President Donald Trump's special envoy, Steve Witkoff, said Hamas' latest response to proposals for a deal showed a "lack of desire" to reach a truce. Witkoff said the U.S. will look at "alternative options," without elaborating.

In a statement released by his office, Netanyahu echoed Witkoff, saying, "Hamas is the obstacle to a hostage release deal."

"Together with our U.S. allies, we are now considering alternative options to bring our hostages home, end Hamas's terror rule, and secure lasting peace for Israel and our region," he said. He did not elaborate. Israel's government didn't immediately respond to whether negotiations would resume next week.

Stall in talks comes as hunger worsens

A breakthrough on a ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas has eluded the Trump administration as experts warn Gaza is being pushed closer to famine, after months of Israel entirely blocking food or letting in only limited amounts. This month, deaths related to malnutrition have accelerated.

More than two dozen Western-aligned countries and more than 100 charity and human rights groups have called for an end to the war, harshly criticizing Israel's blockade and a new aid delivery model it has rolled out. The charities and rights groups said even their own staff were struggling to get enough food.

On Thursday, French President Emmanuel Macron announced that France would recognize Palestine as a state. "The urgent thing today is that the war in Gaza stops and the civilian population is saved," he said.

Jordan has requested to carry out airdrops of aid into Gaza "due to the dire situation," a Jordanian official said. The official said the airdrops will mainly be food and milk formula.

An Israeli security official said the military was coordinating the drops, which were expected in the coming days. The two officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the yet-to-be-finalized plans.

Desperate Palestinians gathered at a charity kitchen in Gaza City on Friday, clutching empty pots waiting for a share of watery lentil soup. Such kitchens distributing cooked meals have been a main source of food for many Palestinians, but the number of meals they produce every day has plummeted to 160,000 from more than a million in April, according to the U.N.

"We've been living three months without bread," said one woman in line, Riham Dwas. "We're relying on charity kitchens, surviving on a pot of lentils and there are many times when we don't even have that."

When she can't find food, she takes her children to a hospital to be put on saline IV drips for sustenance. Mourners carry the bodies of strike victims

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An Israeli airstrike hit a school-turned-shelter for displaced people in Gaza City, killing at least five people, including an 11-year-old boy, according to hospital officials. Afterwards, dozens of mourners marched carrying the bodies from Shifa Hospital as women nearby screamed and wept.

"Enough!" screamed Taraji Adwan, whose son and grandson were among the dead. She said the strike hit as she was filling up water jugs.

"Stop the war! Our children are dying from starvation, malnutrition, dehydration, lack of food, strikes, and dying from fear and destruction. Enough, Hamas! Enough, Israel! Enough, world!" she said.

The Gaza Health Ministry said around 80 people were killed since Thursday night, mostly in strikes but including nine killed while seeking aid.

Talks have struggled over issue of ending the war

Hamas official Bassem Naim said Friday that the group was told that the Israeli delegation returned home for consultations and would return early next week to resume ceasefire negotiations.

Hamas said that Witkoff's remarks were meant to pressure the group for Netanyahu's benefit during the next round of talks and that in recent days negotiations had made progress. Naim said several gaps had been nearly solved, such as the agenda of the ceasefire, guarantees to continue negotiating to reach a permanent agreement and how humanitarian aid would be delivered.

In a joint statement, Egypt and Qatar also said progress had been made. "It is a natural to pause talks to hold consultations before the resumption of the dialogue once more," they said.

The sides have held weeks of talks in Qatar, reporting small signs of progress but no major breakthroughs. Officials have said a main sticking point is the redeployment of Israeli troops from positions in Gaza after any ceasefire takes place.

The deal under discussion is expected to include an initial 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 ceasefire.

The talks have been bogged down over competing demands for ending the war. Hamas says it will only release all hostages in exchange for a full Israeli withdrawal and end to the war. Israel says it will not agree to end the conflict until Hamas gives up power and disarms. The militant group says it is prepared to leave power but not surrender its weapons.

Hamas is believed to be holding the hostages in different locations, including tunnels, and says it has ordered its guards to kill them if Israeli forces approach.

Some 50 hostages remain in Gaza but fewer than half are believed to be alive. Their families say the start-stop talks are excruciating.

"I thought that maybe something will come from the time that the negotiation, Israeli team were in Doha," said Yehuda Cohen, whose son Nimrod is being held hostage. "And when I heard that they're coming back, I ask myself: When will this nightmare end?"

Lori Vallow Daybell receives additional life sentences in Arizona, ending legal saga

By JACQUES BILLEAUD and HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Lori Vallow Daybell was sentenced to life in prison Friday on two murder conspiracy convictions in Arizona, marking an end to a winding legal saga for the mother with doomsday religious beliefs who claimed people in her life had been possessed by evil spirits.

Vallow Daybell, already serving life sentences in Idaho in the killings of her two youngest children and a romantic rival, was convicted at separate trials this spring in Phoenix of conspiring to murder her estranged husband, Charles Vallow, and her niece's ex-husband, Brandon Boudreaux.

Vallow Daybell, who chose to represent herself in both Arizona cases even though she isn't a lawyer, used her final testimony to complain about the legal system and describe her belief that Jesus would free her from prison.

"If I were accountable for these crimes, I would acknowledge and let you know how sorry I was," she

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said.

Judge says Vallow Daybell should never be released

Judge Justin Beresky said Vallow Daybell has “shown blatant disregard for humanity,” and he refuted her claim that she didn’t get a fair trial in Arizona.

“You should never be released from prison,” Beresky said before handing down the sentence. “Eventually, the camera that you seek out, the media requests, will lessen over time and you will fade into obscurity.”

Authorities say Vallow Daybell carried out the plots with her brother Alex Cox, who acknowledged killing Vallow in July 2019 and was identified by prosecutors as the person who fired at Boudreaux months later but missed.

Prosecutors said Vallow Daybell conspired to kill Vallow so she could collect on his \$1 million life insurance policy and marry her then-boyfriend Chad Daybell, an Idaho author of religious novels about prophecies and the end of the world. They said Boudreaux suspected Vallow Daybell and Cox were responsible for Vallow’s death.

Maricopa County Attorney Rachel Mitchell said the trial was a long but necessary process to get justice for Vallow, Boudreaux and their families. Vallow Daybell will return to Idaho “knowing she didn’t get away with her crimes committed in Maricopa County,” Mitchell told reporters after the hearing.

Nearly two years ago, Vallow Daybell was sentenced to life in an Idaho prison for killing her children, 7-year-old Joshua “JJ” Vallow and 16-year-old Tylee Ryan, and conspiring to murder Daybell’s wife, Tammy. The children went missing for several months before their bodies were found buried on Daybell’s property in rural Idaho. Daybell was sentenced to death for the gruesome murders of his wife, Tylee and JJ.

Victims’ family members shed tears during Friday’s hearing

Vallow Daybell appeared in court Friday in an orange jail uniform as family members called her “evil,” “greedy” and a “monster” while describing their grief. The victims’ family members sat in the jury box, passing around tissues.

Vallow Daybell’s only surviving child — her adult son Colby Ryan — described how he “had to fight to stay alive after the pain” of losing his siblings and Vallow, his stepfather who he referred to as his dad.

Testifying by remote link, Ryan zeroed in on his mother, who has claimed the Arizona cases were family tragedies that shouldn’t have ended up in court. “I believe that Lori Vallow herself is the family tragedy,” Ryan said.

Vallow’s brother, Gerry Vallow, lobbed scathing comments at Vallow Daybell.

“She wrote her own make-believe story, and she wrote it in blood,” he said. “And she tried to kill Brandon when he started looking like the next available dollar sign.”

Charles Vallow was fatally shot in 2019

Vallow filed for divorce four months before he died. He said Vallow Daybell became infatuated with near-death experiences and claimed to have lived numerous lives on other planets. He told police she threatened to kill him and he was concerned for his children.

Vallow was shot when he went to pick up his son at Vallow Daybell’s home outside Phoenix, police said. Vallow Daybell’s daughter, Tylee, told police the sound of yelling woke her up, and she confronted Vallow with a baseball bat that he managed to take from her. Cox told police he shot Vallow after he refused to drop the bat and came after him.

Cox died five months later from a blood clot in his lungs. His self-defense claim was later called into question, with investigators saying Cox and Vallow Daybell waited more than 40 minutes before calling 911.

Just before his death, Vallow and his wife’s other brother, Adam Cox, planned an intervention to try to bring Vallow Daybell back into the mainstream of their shared faith in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Adam Cox, a witness for the prosecution, testified earlier in the trial that his sister told people Vallow was no longer living and that a zombie was inside her estranged husband’s body.

Prosecutor Treena Kay said Vallow Daybell twisted religion to justify her actions and dodged questions from Vallow’s sons about how he died after informing them via text message.

Brandon Boudreaux went into hiding after surviving attack

Almost three months after Vallow died, someone fired a shot at Boudreaux from an open window of a

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Jeep as he was driving up to his home in Gilbert, another Phoenix suburb. It narrowly missed Boudreaux, the ex-husband of Vallow Daybell's niece, Melani Pawlowski. Pawlowski had been attending religious meetings with her aunt and suggested to her husband that they stockpile food for the end of the world, Boudreaux said earlier in the trial.

Boudreaux described in court Friday how the attempt on his life caused immense stress and made him fear for his family's safety. His sisters told the judge that their brother went into hiding with his children after the attack.

Prosecutors tied the Jeep to Vallow Daybell and said she loaned it to Cox. The two bought a burner phone used to carry out the attack and tried to concoct an alibi for Cox to make it seem like he was in Idaho at the time, prosecutors said.

"No one deserves to live a life of fear and trauma," Boudreaux said tearfully. He said he has forgiven Vallow Daybell so he can be a better person and father but that he wouldn't feel safe if she had freedom.

After the sentencing, Boudreaux told reporters he's grateful that the justice system worked.

Education Department says it will release billions in remaining withheld grant money for schools

By COLLIN BINKLEY and ANNIE MA AP Education Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration is releasing billions of dollars in withheld grants for schools, the Education Department said Friday, ending weeks of uncertainty for educators around the country who rely on the money for English language instruction, adult literacy, and other programs.

President Donald Trump's administration had suspended more than \$6 billion in funding on July 1, as part of a review to ensure spending aligned with the White House's priorities.

The funding freeze had been challenged by several lawsuits as educators, Congress members from both parties and others called for the administration to release the money. Congress had appropriated the money in a bill signed this year by Trump.

Last week, the Education Department said it would release \$1.3 billion of the money for after-school and summer programming. Without the money, school districts and nonprofits such as the YMCA and Boys and Girls Club of America had said they would have to close or scale back educational offerings this fall.

The Office of Management and Budget had completed its review of the programs and will begin sending the money to states next week, the Education Department said.

Republican senators pressed the Trump administration to release the money

A group of 10 Republican senators on July 16 sent a letter imploring the administration to allow the frozen education money to be sent to states, saying the withheld money supported programs and services that are critical to local communities.

"The programs are ones that enjoy longstanding, bipartisan support," U.S. Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, R-W.Va., said Friday. She pointed to after-school and summer programs that allow parents to work while their children learn and classes that help adults gain new skills — contributing to local economies.

In withholding the funds, the Office of Management and Budget had said some of the programs supported a "radical leftwing agenda."

"We share your concern," the GOP senators had written. "However, we do not believe that is happening with these funds."

School superintendents had warned they would have to eliminate academic services without the money. On Friday, AASA, an association of superintendents, thanked members of Congress for pressing to release the money.

Grants supported camps and other programs for working families

In Harford County, Maryland, some of the withheld federal money made up more than half the budget for the district's annual summer camp for kids learning English. The money helps the district hire certified teachers to staff the camp, incorporating learning into children's play for four weeks during the summer. The program helps kids keep their English and academic momentum over the summer.

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The district serves roughly 1,100 students who are non-native English speakers. Many of them are born in the U.S. to parents who came to the area seeking job opportunities, often in the restaurants and warehouses that have popped up in the past decades in the region northeast of Baltimore. During the school year, the soon-to-be-released federal money pays for tutors for kids learning English.

On Thursday, more than 350 children filled the second floor of Bel Air High School for the second-to-last day of summer camp. Young learners crowded around an alphabet wheel, jostling with each other to push each letter button as they thought of foods starting with letters from A to Z.

Middle school students watched a robotics team demonstration, and a few sheepishly raised their hands when asked if they would be interested in joining. High school student volunteers, some of whom had been campers learning English themselves not many years ago, helped the youngest children with art projects.

The uncertainty around the funding was an unnecessary distraction for schools, said U.S. Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wa.

"Instead of spending the last many weeks figuring out how to improve after-school options and get our kids' reading and math scores up, because of President Trump, communities across the country have been forced to spend their time cutting back on tutoring options and sorting out how many teachers they will have to lay off," Murray said.

The grants that were under review included \$2 billion for teachers' professional development and efforts to reduce class size; \$1 billion for academic enrichment grants, often used for science and math education and accelerated learning; \$890 million for students who are learning English; \$376 million to educate the children of migrant workers; and \$715 million to teach adults how to read.

It added up to millions of dollars for the nation's largest school districts. Data available from the Census for three of the grant programs — teacher development, academic enrichment, and bilingual education — shows the Los Angeles Unified School District, for example, received \$62 million in the 2022-23 school year. Philadelphia's school district got \$28 million, while Miami's got over \$24 million.

Smaller districts got more modest amounts, but they still would have represented sizable gaps in their budgets. For example, schools in Burlington, Vermont; Pine Bluff, Arkansas; and Norristown, Pennsylvania, each got more than \$300 per student from the same three grant programs.

Takeaways: US military enters gray area with expanded role at Mexico-US border

By MORGAN LEE Associated Press

NOGALES, Ariz. (AP) — President Donald Trump has thrust the military into a central role in deterring illegal crossings into the U.S. at its southern border.

The strategy is playing out in Arizona's border community of Nogales, where an Army scout used an optical scope this week to find a man atop the border wall and sounded the alarm.

As the man lowered himself toward U.S. soil between coils of concertina wire, shouts rang out and a U.S. Border Patrol SUV sped toward the wall — warning enough to send the man scrambling back over it, disappearing into Mexico.

Such sightings of illegal entry are growing rarer and the rate of apprehensions at the border has fallen to a 60-year low.

"Deterrence is actually boring," 24-year old Army Sgt. Ana Harker-Molina said, voicing the tedium felt by some soldiers over the sporadic sightings during two days in which The Associated Press embedded with the military on the border.

Still, Harker-Molina, an immigrant who came from Panama at age 12 and is now a U.S. citizen, said she believes the deployment of U.S. troops discourages crossings by their mere presence.

Military mission expands

U.S. troop deployments at the border have tripled to 7,600 and include every branch of the military — even as the number of attempted illegal crossings plummets and Trump has authorized funding for an additional 3,000 Border Patrol agents, offering \$10,000 signing and retention bonuses.

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The military's expanded mission is guided from a new command center at a remote Army intelligence training base alongside southern Arizona's Huachuca Mountains.

A community hall there has been transformed into a bustling war room of battalion commanders and staff with digital maps pinpointing military camps and movements along the nearly 2,000-mile border.

Until now border enforcement had been the domain of civilian law enforcement, with the military only intermittently stepping in.

But since April, large swaths of border have been designated militarized zones, empowering U.S. troops to apprehend immigrants and others accused of trespassing on Army, Air Force or Navy bases, and authorizing additional criminal charges that can mean prison time.

The two-star general leading the new mission says troops work closely with U.S. Border Patrol agents in high-traffic areas for illegal crossings — and can deploy rapidly to remote, unguarded terrain.

"We don't have a (labor) union, there's no limit on how many hours we can work in a day, how many shifts we can man," said Army Maj. Gen. Scott Naumann. "We can fly people into incredibly remote areas now that we see the cartels shifting" course.

Stopping the 'got-aways'

At Nogales, Army scouts patrolled the border Tuesday in full battle gear — helmet, M4 service rifle, bullet-resistant vest — with the right to use deadly force if attacked under standing military rules integrated into the border mission. Underfoot, smugglers for decades routinely attempted to tunnel into stormwater drains to ferry contraband into the U.S.

Naumann's command post oversees an armada of 117 armored Stryker vehicles, more than 35 helicopters and a half-dozen long-distance drones that can survey the border day and night with sensors to pinpoint people wandering the desert. Marine Corps engineers are adding concertina wire to slow crossings, as the Trump administration reboots border wall construction.

Naumann said the focus is on stopping "got-aways" who evade authorities to disappear into the U.S. in a race against the clock that can last seconds in urban areas as people vanish into smuggling vehicles, or several days in the dense wetland thickets of the Rio Grande or the vast desert and mountainous wilderness of Arizona.

The rate of apprehensions at the border is slowing down, Naumann acknowledges. But, he says, it would be wrong to let up, that crossings may rebound with the end of scorching summer weather.

"We're having some successes, we are trending positively," he said of the mission with no fixed end-date.

Militarized zones are 'a gray area'

The Trump administration is using the military broadly to boost its immigration operations, from guarding federal buildings in Los Angeles against protests over ICE detentions, to assisting Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Florida to plans to hold detained immigrants on military bases.

Dan Maurer, a law professor at Ohio Northern University and a retired U.S. Army judge advocate officer, says it's all part of a "muscular" strategy by Trump to show his political base he is serious about a campaign promise to fix immigration.

The results are both norm-breaking and unusual, he said.

The militarized zones at the border sidestep the Posse Comitatus Act, an 1878 law that prohibits the military from conducting civilian law enforcement on U.S. soil.

"It's in that gray area, it may be a violation — it may not be. The military's always had the authority to arrest people and detain them on military bases," said Joshua Kastenber, a professor at the University of New Mexico School of Law and a former Air Force judge.

A man is halted climbing the US-Mexico border wall. Under new Trump rules, US troops sound the alarm

By MORGAN LEE Associated Press

NOGALES, Ariz. (AP) — Inside an armored vehicle, an Army scout uses a joystick to direct a long-range optical scope toward a man perched atop the U.S.-Mexico border wall cutting across the hills of this Ari-

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zona frontier community.

The man lowers himself toward U.S. soil between coils of concertina wire. Shouts ring out, an alert is sounded and a U.S. Border Patrol SUV races toward the wall — warning enough to send the man scrambling back over it, disappearing into Mexico.

The sighting Tuesday was one of only two for the Army infantry unit patrolling this sector of the southern border, where an emergency declaration by President Donald Trump has thrust the military into a central role in deterring migrant crossings between U.S. ports of entry.

"Deterrence is actually boring," said 24-year-old Army Sgt. Ana Harker-Molina, voicing the tedium felt by some soldiers over the sporadic sightings during two days in which The Associated Press embedded with the military on the border.

Still, she said she takes pride in the work, knowing that troops discourage crossings by their mere presence.

"Just if we're sitting here watching the border, it's helping our country," said Harker-Molina, an immigrant herself who came from Panama at age 12 and became a U.S. citizen two years ago while serving in the Army.

U.S. troop deployments at the border have tripled to 7,600 and include every branch of the military — even as the number of attempted illegal crossings plummet and Trump has authorized funding for an additional 3,000 Border Patrol agents, offering \$10,000 signing and retention bonuses.

The military mission is guided from a new command center at a remote Army intelligence training base alongside southern Arizona's Huachuca Mountains. There, a community hall has been transformed into a bustling war room of battalion commanders and staff with digital maps pinpointing military camps and movements along the nearly 2,000-mile border.

Until now border enforcement had been the domain of civilian law enforcement, with the military only intermittently stepping in.

But since April, large swaths of border have been designated militarized zones, empowering U.S. troops to apprehend immigrants and others accused of trespassing on Army, Air Force or Navy bases, and authorizing additional criminal charges that can mean prison time.

The two-star general leading the mission says troops are being untethered from maintenance and warehouse tasks to work closely with U.S. Border Patrol agents in high-traffic areas for illegal crossings — and to deploy rapidly to remote, unguarded terrain.

"We don't have a (labor) union, there's no limit on how many hours we can work in a day, how many shifts we can man," said Army Maj. Gen. Scott Naumann.

"I can put soldiers out whenever we need to in order to get after the problem and we can put them out for days at a time, we can fly people into incredibly remote areas now that we see the cartels shifting" course.

Patrols aimed at stopping 'got-aways'

At Nogales, Army scouts patrolled the border in full battle gear — helmet, M4 service rifle, bullet-resistant vest — with the right to use deadly force if attacked under standing military rules integrated into the border mission. Underfoot, smugglers for decades routinely attempted to tunnel into stormwater drains to ferry contraband into the U.S.

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Naumann said the focus is on stopping "got-aways" who evade authorities to disappear into the U.S. in a race against the clock that can last seconds in urban areas as people vanish into smuggling vehicles, or several days in the dense wetland thickets of the Rio Grande or the vast desert and mountainous wilderness of Arizona.

Meanwhile, the rate of apprehensions at the border has fallen to a 60-year low.

Naumann says the fall-off in illegal entries is the "elephant in the room" as the military increases pressure

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and resources aimed at starving smuggling cartels — including Latin American gangs recently designated as foreign terrorist organizations.

He says it would be wrong to let up, though, and that crossings may rebound with the end of scorching summer weather.

"We've got to keep going after it, we're having some successes, we are trending positively," he said of the mission with no fixed end-date.

Militarized zones are 'a gray area'

The Trump administration is using the military broadly to boost its immigration operations, from guarding federal buildings in Los Angeles against protests over ICE detentions, to assisting Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Florida to plans to hold detained immigrants on military bases in New Jersey, Indiana and Texas.

"It's all part of the same strategy that is a very muscular, robust, intimidating, aggressive response to this — to show his base that he was serious about a campaign promise to fix immigration," said Dan Maurer, a law professor at Ohio Northern University and a retired U.S. Army judge advocate officer.

"It's both norm-breaking and unusual. It puts the military in a very awkward position."

The militarized zones at the border sidestep the Posse Comitatus Act, an 1878 law that prohibits the military from conducting civilian law enforcement on U.S. soil.

"It's in that gray area, it may be a violation — it may not be. The military's always had the authority to arrest people and detain them on military bases," said Joshua Kastenber, a professor at the University of New Mexico School of Law and a former Air Force judge.

Michael Fisher, a security consultant and former chief of the Border Patrol from 2010-2016, calls the military expansion at the border a "force multiplier" as Border Patrol agents increasingly turn up far from the border.

"The military allows Border Patrol to be able to flex into other areas where they typically would not be able to do so," he said.

The strategy carries inherent moral challenges and political risks.

In 1997, an 18-year-old U.S. citizen was shot to death while herding goats by a Marine Corps unit on a border anti-drug patrol in the remote Big Bend Region of western Texas. Authorities say Esequiel Hernandez had no connection to the drug trade and was an honor student.

The shooting stoked anger along the border and prompted an end to then-President Bill Clinton's military deployment to the border.

In New Mexico, the latest restrictions barring access to militarized zones have made popular areas for hunting, hiking and offroad motorsports off-limits for recreation, leading to an outcry from some residents.

Naumann said adults can apply for access online, and by agreeing to undergo a criminal background check that he calls a standard requirement for access to military bases.

"We're not out to stop Americans from recreating in America. That's not what this is about," he said.

Military-grade equipment

At daybreak Wednesday, Border Patrol vehicles climbed the largely unfenced slopes of Mt. Cristo Rey, an iconic peak topped by a crucifix that juts into the sky above the urban outskirts of El Paso and Mexico's Ciudad Juárez — without another soul in sight.

The peak is at the conflux of two new militarized zones designated as extensions of Army stations at Fort Bliss in Texas and Fort Huachuca in Arizona. The Defense Department has added an additional 250-mile (400-kilometer) zone in Texas' Rio Grande Valley linked to an Air Force base.

The Navy will oversee the border near Yuma, Arizona, where the Department of Interior on Wednesday ceded a 32-mile (50-kilometer) portion of the border to the military.

At Mt. Cristo Rey, the Homeland Security Department has issued plans to close a 1.3-mile (2-kilometer) gap in the border wall over the objections of a Roman Catholic diocese that owns much of the land and says a wall would obstruct a sacred refuge for religious pilgrimages.

From a nearby mesa top, Army Spc. Luisangel Nito scanned the valley below Mt. Cristo Rey with an infrared scope that highlights body heat, spotting three people as they crossed illegally into the U.S. for

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the Border Patrol to apprehend. Nito's unit also has equipment that can ground small drones used by smugglers to plot entry routes.

Nito is the U.S.-born son of Mexican immigrants who entered the country in the 1990s through the same valleys he now patrols.

"They crossed right here," he said. "They told me to just be careful because back when they crossed they said it was dangerous."

Nito's parents returned to Mexico in 2008 amid the financial crisis, but the soldier saw brighter opportunities in the U.S., returned and enlisted. He expressed no reservations about his role in detaining illegal immigrants.

"Obviously it's a job, right, and then I signed up for it and I'm going to do it," he said.

At Mt. Cristo Rey and elsewhere, troops utilize marked Border Patrol vehicles as Naumann champions the "integration" of civilian law enforcement and military forces.

"If there's a kind of a secret sauce, if you will, it's integrating at every echelon," he said.

In Epstein furor, Trump struggles to shake off a controversy his allies once stoked

By CHRIS MEGERIAN and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Despite the sun bearing down on him and the sweat beading across his face, President Donald Trump still lingered with reporters lined up outside the White House on Friday. He was leaving on a trip to Scotland, where he would visit his golf courses, and he wanted to talk about how his administration just finished "the best six months ever."

But over and over, the journalists kept asking Trump about the Jeffrey Epstein case and whether he would pardon the disgraced financier's imprisoned accomplice, Ghislaine Maxwell.

"People should really focus on how well the country is doing," Trump insisted. He shut down another question by saying, "I don't want to talk about that."

It was another example of how the Epstein saga — and his administration's disjointed approach to it — has shadowed Trump when he's otherwise at the height of his influence. He's enacted a vast legislative agenda, reached trade deals with key countries and tightened his grip across the federal government. Yet he's struggled to stamp out the embers of a political crisis that could become a full-on conflagration.

Trump faces pressure from his own supporters

The Republican president's supporters want the government to release secret files about Epstein, who authorities say killed himself in his New York jail cell six years ago while awaiting trial for sex trafficking. They believe him to be the nexus of a dark web of powerful people who abused underage girls. Administration officials who once stoked conspiracy theories now insist there's nothing more to disclose, a stance that has stirred skepticism because of Trump's former friendship with Epstein.

Trump has repeatedly denied prior knowledge of Epstein's crimes and claimed he cut off their relationship long ago. For a president skilled at manipulating the media and controlling the Republican Party, it has been the most challenging test of his ability to shift the conversation in his second term.

Landing in Scotland offered no refuge for Trump. He faced another round of questions after stepping off Air Force One. "You're making a big thing over something that's not a big thing," he said to one reporter. He told another, "I'm focused on making deals, not on conspiracy theories that you are."

Republican strategist Kevin Madden called the controversy "a treadmill to nowhere."

"How do you get off of it?" he said. "I genuinely don't know the answer to that."

Trump has demanded his supporters drop the matter and urged Republicans to block Democratic requests for documents on Capitol Hill. But he has also directed the Justice Department to divulge some additional information in hopes of satisfying his supporters.

A White House official, who insisted on anonymity to discuss internal strategy, said Trump is trying to stay focused on his agenda while also demonstrating some transparency. After facing countless scandals and investigations, the official said, Trump is on guard against the typical playbook of drip-drip disclosures

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that have plagued him in the past.

It's clear Trump sees the Epstein case as a continuation of the "witch hunts" he's faced over the years, starting with the investigation into Russian interference during his election victory over Democrat Hillary Clinton nearly a decade ago. The sprawling inquiry led to convictions against some top advisers but did not substantiate allegations Trump conspired with Moscow.

Trump's opponents, he wrote on social media Thursday, "have gone absolutely CRAZY, and are playing another Russia, Russia, Russia Hoax but, this time, under the guise of what we will call the Jeffrey Epstein SCAM."

During the Russia investigation, special counsel Robert Mueller and his team of prosecutors were a straightforward foil for Trump to rail against. Ty Cobb, the lawyer who served as the White House's point person, said the president "never felt exposed" because "he thought he had a legitimate gripe."

The situation is different this time now that the Justice Department has been stocked with loyalists. "The people that he has to get mad at are basically his people as opposed to his inquisitors and adversaries," Cobb said.

It was Trump's allies who excavated the Epstein debacle

In fact, Trump's own officials are the most responsible for bringing the Epstein case back to the forefront.

FBI Director Kash Patel and his deputy, Dan Bongino, regularly stoked conspiracy theories about Epstein before assuming their current jobs, floating the idea the government had covered up incriminating and compelling information that needed to be brought to light. "Put on your big boy pants and let us know who the pedophiles are," Patel said in a 2023 podcast.

Attorney General Pam Bondi played a key role, too. She intimated in a Fox News Channel interview in February that an Epstein "client list" was sitting on her desk for review — she would later say she was referring to the Epstein files more generally — and greeted far-right influencers with binders of records from the case that consisted largely of information in the public domain.

Tensions spiked earlier this month when the FBI and the Justice Department, in an unsigned two-page letter, said that no client list existed, that the evidence was clear Epstein had killed himself and that no additional records from the case would be released to the public. It was a seeming backtrack on the administration's stated commitment to transparency. Amid a fierce backlash from Trump's base and influential conservative personalities, Bongino and Bondi squabbled openly in a tense White House meeting.

Since then, the Trump administration has scrambled to appear transparent, including by seeking the unsealing of grand jury transcripts in the case — though it's hardly clear that courts would grant that request or that those records include any eye-catching details anyway. Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche has taken the unusual step of interviewing the imprisoned Maxwell over the course of two days at a courthouse in Tallahassee, Florida, where her lawyer said she would "always testify truthfully."

All the while, Trump and his allies have resurfaced the Russia investigation as a rallying cry for a political base that has otherwise been frustrated by the Epstein saga.

Trump's director of national intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard, who just weeks ago appeared on the outs with Trump over comments on Iran's nuclear ambitions, seemed to return to the president's good graces this week following the declassification and release of years-old documents she hoped would discredit long-settled conclusions about Russian interference in the 2016 election.

The developments allowed Trump to rehash longstanding grievances against President Barack Obama and his Democratic advisers. Trump's talk of investigations into perceived adversaries from years ago let him, in effect, go back in time to deflect attention from a very current crisis.

"Whether it's right or wrong," Trump said, "it's time to go after people."

Federal regulators approve Paramount's \$8 billion deal with Skydance, capping months of turmoil

By WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS and MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — Federal regulators on Thursday approved Paramount's \$8 billion merger with Sky-

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dance, clearing the way to close a deal that combined Hollywood glitz with political intrigue.

The stamp of approval from the Federal Communications Commission comes after months of turmoil revolving around President Donald Trump's legal battle with "60 Minutes," the crown jewel of Paramount-owned broadcast network CBS. With the specter of the Trump administration potentially blocking the hard-fought deal with Skydance, Paramount earlier this month agreed to pay a \$16 million settlement with the president.

Critics of the settlement lambasted it as a veiled bribe to appease Trump, amid rising alarm over editorial independence overall. Further outrage also emerged after CBS said it was canceling Stephen Colbert's "Late Show" just days after the comedian sharply criticized the parent company's settlement on air. Paramount cited financial reasons, but big names both within and outside the company have questioned those motives.

In a statement accompanying the deal's approval, FCC Chairman Brendan Carr hailed the merger as an opportunity to bring more balance to "once-storied" CBS.

"Americans no longer trust the legacy national news media to report fully, accurately, and fairly. It is time for a change," Carr said.

While seeking approval, Skydance management assured regulators that it will carefully watch for any perceived bias at CBS News and hire an ombudsman to review any complaints about fairness. In a Tuesday filing, the company's general counsel maintained that New Paramount will embody "a diversity of viewpoints across the political and ideological spectrum" — and also noted that it plans to take a "comprehensive review" of CBS to make "any necessary changes."

The FCC approved the merger by a 2-1 vote, and the regulator who opposed it expressed disdain for how it all came together.

"After months of cowardly capitulation to this administration, Paramount finally got what it wanted," FCC Commissioner Anna Gomez said in a statement. "Unfortunately, it is the American public who will ultimately pay the price for its actions." Gomez was appointed by former President Joe Biden.

Paramount and Skydance have said they wanted to seal the deal by this September, and now appear to be on a path to make it happen by then, if not sooner.

Over the past year the merger has periodically looked like it might fall apart as the two sides haggled over terms. But the two companies finally struck an accord that valued the combined company at \$28 billion, with a consortium led by the family of Skydance founder David Ellison and RedBird Capital agreeing to invest \$8 billion.

Signaling a shakeup would accompany the changing of the guard, Ellison stressed the need to transition into a "tech hybrid" to stay competitive in today's entertainment landscape. That includes plans to "rebuild" the Paramount+ streaming service, among wider efforts to expand direct-to-consumer offerings in a world with more entertainment options and shorter attention spans.

Ellison, who is poised to become CEO of the restructured Paramount, is the son of Larry Ellison, technology titan and co-founder of Oracle. Besides possessing an estimated \$288 billion fortune, Larry Ellison has been described as a friend by Trump.

While Paramount sweated out regulatory approval of the merger, one of TV's best-known and longest-running programs turned into a political hot potato when Trump sued CBS over the handling of a "60 Minutes" interview with his Democratic Party opponent in last year's presidential election, Kamala Harris. Trump accused "60 Minutes" of editing the interview in a deceptive way designed to help Harris win the election. After initially demanding \$10 billion in damages, Trump upped the ante to \$20 billion while asserting he had suffered "mental anguish."

The case quickly became a closely-watched test of whether a corporation would back its journalists and stand up to Trump. Editing for brevity's sake is commonplace in TV journalism and CBS argued Trump's claims had no merit. But reports of company executives exploring a potential settlement with Trump later piled up, particularly after Carr — appointed to lead the FCC by Trump — launched an investigation earlier this year.

By the start of July, Paramount agreed to pay Trump \$16 million. The company said the money would go to Trump's future presidential library and to pay his legal fees, but maintained that it was not apologizing

or expressing regret for the story.

The settlement triggered an outcry among critics who pilloried Paramount for backing down from the legal fight to increase the chances of closing the Skydance deal. U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass, said that the deal "could be bribery in plain sight" — and called for an investigation and new rules to restrict donations to presidential libraries.

Concerns about editorial independence at CBS had piled up even in the months before the deal was announced — with Paramount overseeing "60 Minutes" stories in new ways, as well as journalists at the network expressing frustrations about the changes on an award-winning program that has been a weekly staple for nearly 57 years

In April, then-executive producer of "60 Minutes" Bill Owens resigned — noting that it had "become clear that I would not be allowed to run the show as I have always run it." Another domino fell in May when CBS News CEO Wendy McMahon also stepped down, citing disagreements with the company "on the path forward," amid speculation of Paramount nearing a settlement with Trump. CBS has since appointed Tanya Simon as the top producer at "60 Minutes" — elevating a respected insider in a move that could be viewed as a way to calm nerves leading up to the changes that Skydance's Ellison is expected to make.

Federal regulators approve Paramount's \$8 billion deal with Skydance, capping months of turmoil

By WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS and MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — Federal regulators on Thursday approved Paramount's \$8 billion merger with Skydance, clearing the way to close a deal that combined Hollywood glitz with political intrigue.

The stamp of approval from the Federal Communications Commission comes after months of turmoil revolving around President Donald Trump's legal battle with "60 Minutes," the crown jewel of Paramount-owned broadcast network CBS. With the specter of the Trump administration potentially blocking the hard-fought deal with Skydance, Paramount earlier this month agreed to pay a \$16 million settlement with the president.

Critics of the settlement lambasted it as a veiled bribe to appease Trump, amid rising alarm over editorial independence overall. Further outrage also emerged after CBS said it was canceling Stephen Colbert's "Late Show" just days after the comedian sharply criticized the parent company's settlement on air. Paramount cited financial reasons, but big names both within and outside the company have questioned those motives.

In a statement accompanying the deal's approval, FCC Chairman Brendan Carr hailed the merger as an opportunity to bring more balance to "once-storied" CBS.

"Americans no longer trust the legacy national news media to report fully, accurately, and fairly. It is time for a change," Carr said.

While seeking approval, Skydance management assured regulators that it will carefully watch for any perceived bias at CBS News and hire an ombudsman to review any complaints about fairness. In a Tuesday filing, the company's general counsel maintained that New Paramount will embody "a diversity of viewpoints across the political and ideological spectrum" — and also noted that it plans to take a "comprehensive review" of CBS to make "any necessary changes."

The FCC approved the merger by a 2-1 vote, and the regulator who opposed it expressed disdain for how it all came together.

"After months of cowardly capitulation to this administration, Paramount finally got what it wanted," FCC Commissioner Anna Gomez said in a statement. "Unfortunately, it is the American public who will ultimately pay the price for its actions." Gomez was appointed by former President Joe Biden.

Paramount and Skydance have said they wanted to seal the deal by this September, and now appear to be on a path to make it happen by then, if not sooner.

Over the past year the merger has periodically looked like it might fall apart as the two sides haggled over terms. But the two companies finally struck an accord that valued the combined company at \$28 bil-

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lion, with a consortium led by the family of Skydance founder David Ellison and RedBird Capital agreeing to invest \$8 billion.

Signaling a shakeup would accompany the changing of the guard, Ellison stressed the need to transition into a "tech hybrid" to stay competitive in today's entertainment landscape. That includes plans to "rebuild" the Paramount+ streaming service, among wider efforts to expand direct-to-consumer offerings in a world with more entertainment options and shorter attention spans.

Ellison, who is poised to become CEO of the restructured Paramount, is the son of Larry Ellison, technology titan and co-founder of Oracle. Besides possessing an estimated \$288 billion fortune, Larry Ellison has been described as a friend by Trump.

While Paramount sweated out regulatory approval of the merger, one of TV's best-known and longest-running programs turned into a political hot potato when Trump sued CBS over the handling of a "60 Minutes" interview with his Democratic Party opponent in last year's presidential election, Kamala Harris. Trump accused "60 Minutes" of editing the interview in a deceptive way designed to help Harris win the election. After initially demanding \$10 billion in damages, Trump upped the ante to \$20 billion while asserting he had suffered "mental anguish."

The case quickly became a closely-watched test of whether a corporation would back its journalists and stand up to Trump. Editing for brevity's sake is commonplace in TV journalism and CBS argued Trump's claims had no merit. But reports of company executives exploring a potential settlement with Trump later piled up, particularly after Carr — appointed to lead the FCC by Trump — launched an investigation earlier this year.

By the start of July, Paramount agreed to pay Trump \$16 million. The company said the money would go to Trump's future presidential library and to pay his legal fees, but maintained that it was not apologizing or expressing regret for the story.

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Disgraced former US Rep. George Santos reports to NJ federal prison to serve 7-year fraud sentence

By PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Disgraced former U.S. Rep. George Santos reported to a federal prison in New Jersey on Friday to begin serving a seven-year sentence for the fraud charges that got him ousted from Congress.

The federal Bureau of Prisons confirmed that the New York Republican was in custody at the Federal Correctional Institution in Fairton, in southern New Jersey.

Santos pleaded guilty last summer to federal wire fraud and aggravated identity theft charges for deceiving donors and stealing people's identities in order to fund his congressional campaign.

His lawyer Joe Murray, when asked for comment Friday, responded with a brief, all-caps text: "FREE

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GEORGE SANTOS."

The ever-online Santos, who turned 37 years old on Tuesday, hosted a farewell party for himself on the social media platform X on Thursday night.

"Well, darlings ... The curtain falls, the spotlight dims, and the rhinestones are packed," he wrote in a post afterwards. "From the halls of Congress to the chaos of cable news what a ride it's been! Was it messy? Always. Glamorous? Occasionally. Honest? I tried ... most days."

Santos will serve his time in a minimum security camp at the all-male facility, which also includes a larger medium security prison, according to the Bureau of Prisons.

In a Thursday interview, he didn't name the prison where he was serving his sentence, but described the camp setting as a "big upgrade" from the medium-security lockup he was initially assigned to.

Among the other notable inmates serving time at Fairton is Lamor Miller-Whitehead. The Brooklyn preacher, known for his flashy lifestyle and friendship with New York City Mayor Eric Adams, was sentenced to nine years in prison last year for fraud.

In April, a federal judge declined to give Santos a lighter two-year sentence that he sought, saying she was unconvinced he was truly remorseful. In the weeks before his sentencing, Santos said he was "profoundly sorry" for his crimes, but he also complained frequently that he was a victim of a political witch hunt and prosecutorial overreach.

Santos was elected in 2022, flipping a wealthy district representing parts of Queens and Long Island for the GOP. But he served for less than a year and became just the sixth member of the House to be ousted by colleagues after it was revealed he had fabricated much of his life story.

During his winning campaign, Santos painted himself as a successful business owner who worked at prestigious Wall Street firms when, in reality, he was struggling financially.

He also falsely claimed to have been a volleyball star at a college he never attended and referred to himself as "a proud American Jew" before insisting he meant that he was "Jew-ish" because his Brazilian mother's family had a Jewish background.

The cascade of lies eventually led to congressional and criminal inquiries into how Santos funded his campaign and, ultimately, his political downfall.

Since his ouster from Congress, Santos has been making a living hosting a podcast called "Pants on Fire with George Santos" and hawking personalized video messages on Cameo.

He has also been holding out hope that his unwavering support for President Donald Trump might help him win a last-minute reprieve.

The White House said this week that it "will not comment on the existence or nonexistence" of any clemency request.

In media appearances this month, the former lawmaker wasn't shy about sharing his morbid fears about life behind bars.

"I'm not trying to be overdramatic here. I'm just being honest with you. I look at this as practically a death sentence," Santos told Tucker Carlson during an interview. "I'm not built for this."

On social media, his recent musings have sometimes taken a dark turn.

"I'm heading to prison, folks and I need you to hear this loud and clear: I'm not suicidal. I'm not depressed. I have no intentions of harming myself, and I will not willingly engage in any sexual activity while I'm in there," Santos said on X. "If anything comes out suggesting otherwise, consider it a lie ... full stop."

Hulk Hogan's death resurfaces painful contradictions for Black wrestling fans

By SAFIYAH RIDDLE Associated Press

One of Kazeem Famuyide's earliest memories is sitting on his father's lap watching Hulk Hogan wrestle in the 1988 Survivor Series.

His love of Hogan in the ring became inextricable from what would become a lifelong obsession with the sport — including a yearlong role touring the country and writing scripts for WWE's top talent.

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"He was a superhero to a lot of people, including myself," said Famuyide, who is Black and now co-hosts the WWE-themed podcast "The Ringer Wrestling Show." He remembers Hogan telling audiences to "train, say your prayers and eat your vitamins," often in front of giant American flags.

But for the 38-year-old Famuyide and other Black wrestling fans and sports commentators, Hogan's death this week at 71 has resurfaced an irreconcilable contradiction in the iconic wrestler's legacy: Hogan's undeniable role in broadening wrestling's appeal to fans of all backgrounds versus his well-documented racism.

"You never really got the feeling that Hulk Hogan truly felt remorse," Famuyide said.

Reactions to Hogan's death reflect American divide on race

"The Right Time" podcast host Bomani Jones noted there were two sharply different reactions to Hogan's death. Remembrances have split between those who see no need to harp on past controversies and those who struggle with his behavior that once got him banned from the WWE.

"This was never going to be one where people were going to mourn quietly," Jones said.

Hogan's death drew remembrances from politicians, celebrities and fans alike, celebrating his accolades. Many applauded how he was able to parlay his wrestling persona into movie appearances, brand deals, a reality television show and notable political influence.

On Friday, Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, whose fame arguably rivals Hogan's acclaim, paid tribute. Johnson, the son of pioneering wrestler Rocky Johnson, one of the WWE's first Black champions, said Hogan was a hero "to millions of little kids."

"You may have 'passed the torch' to me," Johnson wrote under a 2002 video showing him and Hogan facing off at Wrestlemania.

"But you, my friend...you 'drew the house' meaning you sold out every arena and stadium across the country in your prime as Hulk Hogan, on your way of becoming the greatest of all time."

Other notable Black professional wrestlers, from Booker T and Mark Henry, to Jacqueline Moore and Carlene "Jazz" Moore-Begnaud, have found success and fame in the WWE.

But just as many people took Hogan's death as an opportunity to recount Hogan's more controversial behavior.

In 2016, a Florida jury awarded Hogan over \$115 million against Gawker Media, after Hogan sued them for posting a video of him having sex with his former best friend's wife. The litigation led to the discovery that Hogan had used racial slurs in 2007 to describe his daughter's Black ex-boyfriend.

"I am a racist, to a point," Hogan said, before adding the slur against Black people, according to a transcript.

Hogan apologized at the time and called the language "unacceptable."

Around the same time, some outlets reported that Hogan used the same slur on a recorded phone call with his son.

Hogan's enthusiastic endorsement of conservative political figures like longtime friend President Donald Trump made many people doubt the sincerity of that apology, Jones said.

"It's one thing to get caught on tape saying these things in private. It's another thing for you to decide publicly to align yourself with a cause that many Black people find antagonistic toward us," Jones said.

Professional wrestling has a history of reckoning on racist tropes

For many Black wrestling enthusiasts, Hogan's death brings up familiar contradictions in how the sport deals with race.

Lyric Swinton, 27, a freelance wrestling writer, first fell in love with the sport when she was 8. She describes wrestling as "the most nuanced and colorful" form of storytelling.

Although she feels representation has improved, Swinton remembers WWE use racist tropes in Black wrestlers' plot lines. Swinton recalls Shelton Benjamin having a "mammy," played by Thea Vidale, invoking a racist caricature.

Swinton considers Benjamin one of the most talented wrestlers at the time, but feels he never got the recognition that his contemporaries did, in part because he was scripted to those roles.

"I kind of felt like I had to check my Blackness at the door," she said.

Hogan hasn't tarnished sport for all Black fans

For WWE enthusiast and sports journalist Master Tesfatsion, the mixed reactions to Hogan's death mirror fault lines that exist throughout the country, and highlight how central wrestling has become in pop culture.

Growing up, Tesfatsion, who is Black, remembers watching Vince McMahon, the company's co-founder and former chairman, use a racial slur in a match with John Cena in 2005; or the storyline in 2004 when wrestler John Layfield chased Mexicans across the border.

"In some strange way, the WWE always had a pulse on where America stood," Tesfatsion said. "You cannot tell the history of America without all these issues, just like you cannot tell the history of the WWE without these issues."

Tesfatsion was in the audience at Hogan's last appearance at a professional match in January. He was one of the many who booed Hogan. After decades of fandom, it was his first time seeing Hogan live.

"I never thought that I would see 'The Hulk' in person, and that I would resort to bullying him. But that's what his actions made me do."

Still, Tesfatsion said he will never stop being a super fan.

"I still love America, I still love the WWE. It's an emotional contradiction that I choose to deal with because I still find value in it," he said.

Deportation flights from Florida's 'Alligator Alcatraz' detention center have begun, DeSantis says

BY JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

Deportation flights from the remote Everglades immigration lockup known as Alligator Alcatraz have begun and are expected to increase soon, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis said Friday.

The first flights operated by the Department of Homeland Security have transferred about 100 detainees from the immigration detention center to other countries, DeSantis said during a news conference near the facility.

"You're going to see the numbers go up dramatically," he said.

Two or three flights have already departed, but officials didn't say where those flights headed.

Critics have condemned the South Florida facility as cruel and inhumane. DeSantis and other Republican officials have defended it as part of the state's aggressive push to support President Donald Trump's crackdown on illegal immigration.

Building the facility in the Everglades and naming it after a notorious federal prison were meant as deterrents, DeSantis and other officials have said.

The White House has delighted in the area's remoteness — about 50 miles (80 kilometers) west of Miami — and the fact that it is teeming with pythons and alligators. It hopes to send a message that repercussions will be severe if U.S. immigration laws are broken.

Trump has suggested that his administration could reopen Alcatraz, the notorious island prison in San Francisco Bay. The White House also has sent some immigrants awaiting deportation to a detention lockup in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, and others to a megaprison in El Salvador.

The Everglades facility was built in a matter of days over 10 square miles (26 square kilometers). It features more than 200 security cameras and more than 5 miles (8 kilometers) of barbed wire. An adjacent runway makes it more convenient for homeland security officials to move detainees in and out of the site.

It currently holds about 2,000 people, with the potential to double the capacity, Florida Emergency Management Director Kevin Guthrie said Friday.

DeSantis wants the U.S. Justice Department to allow an immigration judge on site to speed up the deportation process.

"This was never intended to be something where people are just held," he said. "The whole purpose is to be a place that can facilitate increased frequency and numbers of deportations."

Critics have challenged federal and state officials' contention that the detention center is just run by the state of Florida. Environmental groups suing to stop further construction and expansion demanded

Thursday to see agreements or communications between state and federal officials and to visit the site. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement operates deportation flights mainly from a few hubs, including Harlingen, Texas; Alexandria, Louisiana; and Mesa, Arizona. Others are scattered across the country. There were just over 200 flights in June, according to Witness at the Border, an advocacy group that analyzes flight data. It was the highest tally since the group started keeping track in January 2020.

Epstein ex-girlfriend Ghislaine Maxwell finishes interviews with Justice Department officials

By KATE PAYNE and ED WHITE Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Ghislaine Maxwell, the imprisoned former girlfriend of convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, finished 1 1/2 days of interviews with Justice Department officials on Friday, answering questions "about 100 different people," her attorney said.

"She answered those questions honestly, truthfully, to the best of her ability," David Oscar Markus told reporters outside the federal courthouse in Tallahassee, Florida, where Maxwell met with Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche.

"She never invoked a privilege. She never refused to answer a question, so we're very proud of her," Markus said.

Maxwell is serving a 20-year sentence and is housed at a low-security federal prison in Tallahassee. She was sentenced three years ago after being convicted of helping Epstein, a wealthy, well-connected financier, sexually abuse underage girls.

Officials have said Epstein killed himself in his New York jail cell while awaiting trial in 2019, but his case has generated endless attention and conspiracy theories because of his and Maxwell's links to famous people, such as royals, presidents and billionaires, including Donald Trump.

In a social media post this week, Blanche said Maxwell would be interviewed because of President Trump's directive to gather and release any credible evidence about others who may have committed crimes.

Trump has denied prior knowledge of Epstein's crimes and claimed he cut off their relationship long ago. But he faces ongoing questions about the Epstein case, overshadowing his administration's achievements. On Friday, reporters pressed the Republican president about pardoning Maxwell, but he deflected, emphasizing his administration's successes.

Markus said Maxwell "was asked maybe about 100 different people."

"The deputy attorney general is seeking the truth," Markus said. "He asked every possible question, and he was doing an amazing job."

Markus said he didn't ask for anything for Maxwell in return, though he acknowledged that Trump could pardon her.

"Listen, the president this morning said he had the power to do so. We hope he exercises that power in the right and just way," Markus said.

Earlier this month, the Justice Department said it would not release more files related to the Epstein investigation, despite promises that claimed otherwise from Attorney General Pam Bondi. The department also said an Epstein client list does not exist.

Maxwell is appealing her conviction, based on the government's pledge years ago that any potential Epstein co-conspirators would not be charged, Markus said. Epstein struck a deal with federal prosecutors in 2008 that shifted his case to Florida state court, where he pleaded guilty to soliciting and procuring a minor for prostitution.

Epstein in 2019 and Maxwell in 2020 were charged in federal court in New York.

Israel says hundreds of truckloads of aid are waiting to enter Gaza. Why can't the UN bring them in?

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — The United Nations and experts say that Palestinians in Gaza are at risk of famine, with reports of increasing numbers of people dying from causes related to malnutrition.

Yet Israel says hundreds of truckloads of aid are waiting at the border for the U.N. to distribute in Gaza. On Thursday, Israel's military took journalists to the Gaza side of the Kerem Shalom crossing where hundreds of boxes of aid were on pallets filling a huge lot.

Israel says it has allowed in around 4,500 aid trucks since it lifted a total blockade in May —around 70 truckloads a day, one of the lowest rates of the war and far less than the several hundred the U.N. says are needed each day.

Israel says it lets in enough aid and faults U.N. agencies for not doing enough to retrieve and get it to those in need. The U.N. says it is hampered by Israeli military restrictions on its movements and incidents of criminal looting.

Here's a look at why the aid can't be delivered.

Unsafe routes, bureaucracy and access denials

To retrieve the aid at the border — or move around most of the Gaza Strip — U.N. trucks must enter zones controlled by the military after obtaining its permission. Once the aid is loaded, the trucks must get safely to the population. The whole trip can take 20 hours, the U.N. says.

Large crowds of desperate people, as well as criminal gangs, overwhelm trucks as they enter and strip off the supplies. Witnesses say Israeli troops regularly open fire on the crowds, causing deaths and injuries.

"Taken together, these factors have put people and humanitarian staff at grave risk and forced aid agencies on many occasions to pause the collection of cargo from crossings controlled by the Israeli authorities," said Olga Cherevko, a spokesperson for the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, or OCHA.

At least 79 Palestinians were killed while trying to get aid entering Gaza this week, according to Gaza's health ministry. A U.N. official who was not authorized to discuss the issue publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity, said Israeli forces opened fire toward crowds who tried to take food from an entering truck convoy. Israel's military said soldiers shot at a gathering of thousands of Palestinians in northern Gaza who posed a threat, and it was aware of some casualties.

On its website, OCHA said there is a breakdown of law and order, which is partly due to the collapse of Gaza's Hamas-run civilian police force, leading to insecurity at the crossings and for convoys moving within Gaza. It said this is further compounded by the increase of armed gangs.

The military frequently assigns routes for trucks to use that are "unsuitable, either impassable for long truck convoys, passing through crowded markets, or controlled by dangerous gangs," OCHA said. When the U.N. objects to a route, the military provides few alternatives, it said.

The U.N. also struggles with facilitation from the military. It says more than half its movement requests, 506 out of 894, were either denied or impeded by the military in May, June and July.

There are also regular delays by Israel's forces in coordination. The delays result in lost time, difficulty planning and wasted resources as convoys spend hours waiting for the "green light to move only to be denied," OCHA said.

Israel says it imposes no limit on aid trucks entering Gaza

Israel says it doesn't limit the truckloads of aid coming into Gaza and that assessments of roads in Gaza are conducted weekly where it looks for the best ways to provide access for the international community.

Col. Abdullah Halaby, a top official in COGAT, the Israeli military agency in charge of transferring aid to the territory, said there are several crossings open.

"We encourage our friends and our colleagues from the international community to do the collection, and to distribute the humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza," he said.

An Israeli security official who was not allowed to be named in line with military procedures told report-

ers this week that the U.N. wanted to use roads that were not approved.

He said the army offered to escort the aid groups but they refused.

U.N. says letting enough aid in daily will solve the problem

For much of the war, U.N. agencies were able to safely deliver aid to those who need it, despite Israeli restrictions and occasional attacks and looting. The Hamas-run police provided public security. But as Israeli airstrikes targeted the police force, it has been unable to operate.

The U.N. says being escorted by Israel's army could bring harm to civilians, citing shootings and killings by Israeli troops surrounding aid operations.

The U.N. and aid groups also say that looting of trucks lessens or stops entirely when enough aid is allowed into Gaza.

"The best protection for us is community buy-in," said U.N. spokesperson Stephane Dujarric. "And to get that community buy-in, communities have to understand that trucks will come every day, that food will come every day."

"That's what we're asking for," he said.

A science journal pulled a controversial study about a bizarre life form against the authors' wishes

By ADITHI RAMAKRISHNAN AP Science Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — A microscopic discovery in a California lake sparked buzz and controversy more than a decade ago when it was first revealed.

Scientists said they'd discovered bacteria that used the element arsenic — poisonous to life as we know it — to grow. If true, it expanded the possibilities for where life could exist on Earth — or on other worlds.

Several research groups failed to replicate the results, and argue it's not possible for a living thing to use something so toxic to make DNA and proteins. Some scientists have suggested the results of the original experiments may have been skewed by undetected contaminants.

On Thursday, the journal Science, which first published the research, retracted it, though not because of misconduct on the researchers' part.

"If the editors determine that a paper's reported experiments do not support its key conclusions, even if no fraud or manipulation occurred, a retraction is considered appropriate," the journal's editor-in-chief Holden Thorp wrote in the statement announcing the retraction.

The researchers disagree with the journal's decision and stand by their data. It's reasonable to pull a paper for major errors or suspected misconduct — but debates and disagreements over the findings are part of the scientific process, said study co-author Ariel Anbar of Arizona State University.

"One doesn't retract a paper because the interpretation is controversial, or even because most disagree with the interpretation," wrote Anbar in an email. "At least, that hasn't been the case until now."

Science has more frequently retracted papers for reasons beside fraud in recent years, wrote Thorp and Vada Vinson, Science's executive editor, in a blog post.

NASA helped fund the original work. The space agency's science mission chief Nicky Fox said in a statement that NASA does not support the retraction and encourages Science to reconsider.

UK, French and German leaders press Israel over Gaza aid after Macron backs a Palestinian state

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The leaders of Britain, France and Germany demanded Israel allow unrestricted aid into Gaza to end a "humanitarian catastrophe," after French President Emmanuel Macron announced that his country will become the first major Western power to recognize a Palestinian state.

The joint statement, issued after a call between Macron, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, called for an immediate ceasefire and said that "withholding essential hu-

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humanitarian assistance to the civilian population is unacceptable," though it broke no new diplomatic ground.

The leaders said they "stand ready to take further action to support an immediate ceasefire and a political process that leads to lasting security and peace for Israelis, Palestinians and the entire region," but did not say what that action might be.

France's move exposes European divisions

Macron's surprise announcement exposed differences among the European allies, known as the E3, over how to ease the worsening humanitarian crisis and end the Israel-Hamas war.

All three support a Palestinian state in principle, but Germany said it has no immediate plans to follow France's step, which Macron plans to formalize at the United Nations General Assembly in September.

Britain has not followed suit either, but Starmer is under mounting pressure to formally recognize Palestinian statehood, both from opposition lawmakers and from members of his own Labour Party government. Health Secretary Wes Streeting on Tuesday called for an announcement "while there's still a state of Palestine left to recognize."

On Friday, 221 of the 650 lawmakers in the House of Commons signed a letter urging Starmer to recognize a Palestinian state.

"Since 1980 we have backed a two-state solution. Such a recognition would give that position substance," said the letter, signed by legislators from several government and opposition parties.

After the E3 call on Friday, Starmer condemned "the continued captivity of hostages, the starvation and denial of humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people, the increasing violence from extremist settler groups, and Israel's disproportionate military escalation in Gaza."

He said that "recognition of a Palestinian state" must be one of the steps on a pathway to peace.

"I am unequivocal about that. But it must be part of a wider plan which ultimately results in a two-state solution and lasting security for Palestinians and Israelis," he said.

More than 140 countries recognize a Palestinian state, including a dozen in Europe. But France is the first Group of Seven country and the largest European nation to take that step.

Israel and the United States both denounced France's decision.

Britain has long supported the idea of an independent Palestinian state existing alongside Israel, but has said recognition should come as part of a negotiated two-state solution to the conflict.

Any such solution appears far off. There had been no substantive Israel-Palestinian negotiations for years even before the Oct. 7, 2023 Hamas attack on Israel that killed 1,200 people and sparked the current war.

Humanitarian crisis alarms Israel's allies

The worsening humanitarian crisis in Gaza, where hunger is spreading and children have starved to death, has caused alarm even among Israel's closest allies.

Germany has traditionally been a particularly staunch ally of Israel in Europe, with relations rooted in the history of the Holocaust. It says recognizing a Palestinian state should be "one of the concluding steps" in negotiating a two-state solution and it "does not plan to recognize a Palestinian state in the short term."

But Berlin, too, has sharpened its tone recently, describing the Israeli military's actions in Gaza as unacceptable and pushing for greater humanitarian aid, but still appears to favor trying to influence Israeli officials by direct contact.

The German government said in a statement on Friday that it is in a "constant exchange" with the Israeli government and other partners on issues that include a ceasefire in Gaza and the need to drastically improve humanitarian aid. It said it is "prepared to increase the pressure" if there is no progress, but didn't elaborate on how.

Britain has halted some arms sales to Israel, suspended free trade talks and sanctioned far-right government ministers and extremist settlers, but Starmer is under intense pressure to do more.

Also weighing on Starmer is his desire to maintain good relations with the U.S. administration, which has strongly criticized France's decision. The British leader is due to meet President Donald Trump in the next few days while the president is in Scotland visiting two golf courses he owns there.

Yossi Mekelberg, a Middle East expert at the international affairs think-tank Chatham House, said Macron's decision to defer finalizing recognition until September "creates some space" for other countries to

get on board.

"We know that the U.K. is close, but not there," he said. "This might encourage Starmer, who we know is not one to rush such a decision. ... This might create some momentum, some dynamic, for the U.K."

France's highest court upholds some of Bashar Assad's legal protections, but permits future warrants

By SAM McNEIL and JEFFREY SCHAEFFER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — France's highest court on Friday upheld some of Syrian ex-leader Bashar Assad's personal immunity as a head of state while green-lighting possible future war crime warrants, drawing criticism from human rights lawyers and Syrian activists.

The Cour de Cassation upheld Assad's head-of-state immunity, but added that since he is no longer in office, "new arrest warrants may have been or may be issued against him for acts that may constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity."

The decision is a blow to activists who had hoped the court would set aside the immunity, a decision that could have had far-reaching consequences for other leaders accused of atrocities.

"From our side as a victim, this is a huge mistake. This will support another dictatorship to keep doing this kind of crime — they know they will enjoy immunity," said Mazen Darwish, president of the Syrian Center for Media, which collected evidence of war crimes.

"It is a sad day for us," Darwish said.

'Missed opportunity for justice'

The president of the Cour de Cassation, Christophe Soulard, said in the ruling that 19 judges had declined to lift Assad's immunity, but that a new arrest warrant could be issued to pave the way for his trial in absentia in France over the use of chemical weapons in Ghouta in 2013.

Human rights lawyers had sought to enable prosecution of leaders linked to atrocities while they are in power, not just when they leave. But international law currently forbids it.

"Under current international law, crimes against humanity and war crimes are not exceptions to the principle of jurisdictional immunity for sitting foreign heads of state," Soulard said.

Assad, the former leader of Syria now in exile in Russia, retained no lawyers for these charges and has denied that he was behind the chemical attacks.

"The court's ruling is a missed opportunity for justice," said Mariana Pena, a lawyer with the Open Society Justice Initiative, which helped bring the case to the court. But she said that the ruling "leaves the door open to the prosecution of Assad."

Silver lining for some

The court also ruled on a case against a former Syrian government finance minister in Assad's government, allowing that he could be prosecuted. Adib Mayaleh's lawyers have argued that he too had immunity under international law. That is to some a silver lining in the court's ruling by establishing in France the right for courts to go after heads of state when they leave office and even current high-ranking officials. "This is a huge step, but not an absolute victory in the fight against impunity," said lawyer Clémence Witt, who with Jeanne Sulzer brought the case against Assad to the court. She said that the French courts can now for the first time issue warrants for high-ranking officials currently in power with adequate evidence.

"Every official — except head of state, head of government and head of foreign affairs — can be prosecuted in France if we have evidence of genocide, war crimes or crimes against humanity," Witt said.

War crimes accusations

For more than 50 years, Syria was ruled by Hafez Assad and then his son Bashar. During the Arab Spring, rebellion broke out against their tyrannical rule in 2011 across the country of 23 million people, igniting a brutal 13-year civil war that killed more than 500,000 people, according to the Syrian Observatory of Human Rights.

Millions more fled to Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Europe. The Assad dynasty manipulated sectarian tensions to stay in power, a legacy driving renewed violence in Syria against minority groups, despite

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promises that the country's new leaders will carve out a political future for Syria that includes and represents all of its communities.

The International Criminal Court isn't bound by head of state immunity and has issued arrests warrants for leaders accused of atrocities — like Russian President Vladimir Putin in Ukraine, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Gaza, and Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines.

The Syrian government denied in 2013 that it was behind the Ghouta attack, an accusation that the opposition rejected, because Assad's forces were the only side in the brutal civil war to possess sarin.

Assad held onto power, aided militarily by Russia and Iranian-backed proxies, until late 2024, when a surprise assault by rebels swept into Aleppo and then Damascus, driving Assad to flee to safety to Russia on Dec. 8, 2024.

Possibility of warrants

New warrants after Friday's ruling in France could lay the groundwork for the former leader's trial in absentia or potential arrest, if he travels outside Russia.

Any trial of Assad, whether in absentia or if he leaves Russia, would mean this evidence could then "be brought to light," Pena said, including an enormous trove of classified and secret evidence amassed by the judges during their investigations.

Syrians often took great personal risk to gather evidence of war crimes. Darwish said that in the aftermath of a chlorine gas attack in Douma, for example, teams collected witness testimonies, images of devastation and soil samples. Others then tracked down and interviewed defectors to build a "chain of command" for the Syrian government's chemical weapons production and use.

"We link it directly to the president himself, Bashar al-Assad," he said.

Fighting against impunity

Syria today remains beholden to many awful legacies of the Assad dynasty. Poverty, sectarianism, destruction and violence still haunt the country.

Syrian authorities are now investigating nearly 300 people for crimes during several days of fighting on the coast earlier this year. The new interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa in Damascus have pledged to work with the United Nations on investigating further war crimes of the Assad government and the civil war.

While disappointed in the verdict in France, Darwish is working on 29 cases against Assad and other figures who have fled to Russia, the Gulf, Lebanon and Europe. He said that many Syrians hope Assad sits for a fair trial in Syria.

"It should be done in Damascus, but we need also a lot of guarantees that we will have a fair trial even for this suspect," he said.

His organization has already received requests to bring to court war crimes accusations against those involved in recent bloodshed in southern Syria.

"So anyone, whatever his name, or the regime, or their authority, we will keep fighting this type of crime," Darwish said.

'Why isn't he paying?' Trump's golf visit to cost Scottish taxpayers

By KWIYEON HA and BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

TURNBERRY, Scotland (AP) — It may not be typical golf attire, but one of the most ubiquitous outfits seen on U.S. President Donald Trump's golf course Friday ahead of his visit was the reflective yellow vest worn by Scottish police.

The standard issue garb that is far removed from the traditional Turnberry tartan was highly visible on the dunes, the beaches and the grass as thousands of officers secured the course in advance of protests planned during the president's visit to two of his Scottish golf resorts.

Trump was expected to arrive Friday evening to a mix of respect and ridicule.

His visit requires a major police operation that will cost Scottish taxpayers millions of pounds as protests are planned over the weekend. The union representing officers is concerned they are already overworked and will be diverted from their normal duties and some residents are not happy about the cost.

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"Why isn't he paying for it himself? He's coming for golf, isn't he?" said Merle Fertuson, a solo protester in Edinburgh holding a hand-drawn cardboard sign that featured a foolishly grinning Trump likeness in a tuxedo. "It's got nothing whatsoever to do with public money, either U.S. or U.K."

Policing for Trump's four-day visit to the U.K. in 2018 cost more than 14 million pounds (\$19 million), according to Freedom of Information figures. That included more than 3 million pounds (\$4 million) spent for his two-day golf trip to Turnberry, the historic course and hotel in southwest Scotland that he bought in 2014.

Police Scotland would not discuss how many officers were being deployed for operational reasons and only said the costs would be "considerable."

"The visit will require a significant police operation using local, national and specialist resources from across Police Scotland, supported by colleagues from other U.K. police forces as part of mutual aid arrangements," Assistant Chief Constable Emma Bond said.

Scottish First Minister John Swinney said the visit would not be detrimental to policing.

"It's nonsensical to say it won't impact it," said David Kennedy, general secretary of the Scottish Police Federation, the officers' union.

Kennedy said he expects about 5,000 officers to take part in the operation.

He said a force reduction in recent years has police working 12-hour shifts. Communities that are understaffed will be left behind with even fewer officers during Trump's visit.

"We want the president of the United States to be able to come to Scotland. That's not what this is about," Kennedy said. "It's the current state of the police service and the numbers we have causes great difficulty."

The Stop Trump Scotland group has planned demonstrations Saturday in Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Dumfries. The group encouraged people to "show Trump exactly what we think of him in Scotland."

Trump should receive a much warmer welcome from U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who is expected to meet with him during the visit. Swinney, the left-leaning head of Scottish government and former Trump critic, also plans to meet with the president.

Trump administration clears way to keep Alina Habba as New Jersey's top federal prosecutor

By MIKE CATALINI Associated Press

TRENTON, N.J. (AP) — President Donald Trump has moved to keep his former defense attorney Alina Habba on the job as the top federal prosecutor in New Jersey, even though a panel of judges refused to extend her tenure.

Habba's term was set to expire this week, and federal judges in New Jersey had moved to appoint someone else to the position. But the Republican president on Thursday withdrew Habba's nomination to hold the role permanently, setting in motion a series of steps that allow her to transition from being an interim U.S. attorney to an acting U.S. attorney and remain in the job for the next 210 days.

"Donald J. Trump is the 47th President. Pam Bondi is the Attorney General. And I am now the Acting United States Attorney for the District of New Jersey," Habba posted on X. "I don't cower to pressure. I don't answer to politics. This is a fight for justice. And I'm all in."

The Trump administration's decision resolves what had threatened to become a high-profile clash over who would serve as New Jersey's top prosecutor, a post with sweeping authority over public corruption, violent crime and organized crime cases. The move allows Habba, one of the most visible and controversial U.S. attorneys in the country, to remain in charge and cements the administration's preference for loyalists in key Justice Department positions.

Habba, who became interim U.S. attorney for the state in March, appeared to lose the position on Tuesday when judges in the district declined to keep her in the post while she awaited confirmation by the U.S. Senate. Instead, the judges appointed one of Habba's subordinates, Desiree Leigh Grace, to take her place.

But hours later, Bondi removed Grace, accusing the judges who replaced Habba of being "rogue" and

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“politically minded.”

In a post on LinkedIn, Grace addressed her appointment by the district’s judges, saying it would “forever be the greatest honor that they selected me on merit.”

Habba, whose term as interim U.S. attorney was set to end Friday, was designated as acting United States attorney, a Justice Department official said. Federal law would have precluded her from serving as acting U.S. attorney while her nomination for the role was pending in the Senate.

During her four months as interim U.S. attorney, Habba’s office tangled with two prominent New Jersey Democrats — Newark Mayor Ras Baraka and U.S. Rep. LaMonica McIver — over their actions during a chaotic visit to a privately operated immigration detention center in the state’s largest city.

Baraka was arrested on a trespass charge stemming from his attempt to join a congressional visit of the facility. Baraka denied any wrongdoing, and Habba eventually dropped that charge. U.S. Magistrate Judge Andre Espinosa rebuked Habba’s office over the arrest and short-lived prosecution, calling it a “worrisome misstep.” Baraka is now suing Habba over what he says was a “malicious prosecution.”

Habba then brought assault charges against McIver, whose district includes Newark, over physical contact she made with law enforcement officials as Baraka was being arrested.

The prosecution, which is pending, is a rare federal criminal case against a sitting member of Congress for allegations other than fraud or corruption. McIver denies that anything she did amounted to assault.

Besides the prosecution of McIver, Habba had announced she launched an investigation into New Jersey’s Democratic governor, Phil Murphy, and attorney general, Matt Platkin, over the state’s directive barring local law enforcement from cooperating with federal agents conducting immigration enforcement.

In social media posts, Habba highlighted her office’s prosecution of drug traffickers, including against 30 members of a fentanyl and crack cocaine ring in Newark.

Trump had formally nominated Habba as his pick for U.S. attorney on July 1, but the state’s two Democratic U.S. senators, Cory Booker and Andy Kim, signaled their opposition to her appointment. Under a long-standing Senate practice known as senatorial courtesy, a nomination can stall out without backing from home state senators, a phenomenon facing a handful of other Trump picks for U.S. attorney.

How views of the Supreme Court have changed since 2022 abortion ruling, according to AP-NORC polling

By MARK SHERMAN and AMELIA THOMSON-DEVEAUX Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Americans’ views of the Supreme Court have moderated somewhat since the court’s standing dropped sharply after its ruling overturning *Roe v. Wade* in 2022, according to a new poll. But concern that the court has too much power is rising, fueled largely by Democrats.

The survey from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that about a third of U.S. adults have “hardly any confidence at all” in the court, but that’s down from 43% three years ago. As the new AP-NORC polling tracker shows, about half of Americans have “only some confidence” in the court, up from 39% in July 2022, while a relatively small number, about 1 in 5, have “a great deal of confidence,” which hasn’t shifted meaningfully in the past few years.

The moderate increase in confidence is driven by Republicans and independents.

Still, views of the nation’s highest court remain more negative than they were as recently as early 2022, before the high-profile ruling that overturned the constitutional right to abortion. An AP-NORC poll conducted in February 2022 found that only around one-quarter of Americans had hardly any confidence in the court’s justices.

Persistent divide between Republicans and Democrats

The partisan divide has been persistent and stark, particularly since the *Dobbs* ruling, when Democrats’ confidence in the nine justices plummeted. The survey shows Republicans are happier than Democrats and independents with the conservative-dominated court, which includes three justices appointed by President Donald Trump, a Republican.

Few Republicans, just 8%, view the court dimly, down from about 1 in 5 in July 2022. For independents,

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the decline was from 45% just after the Dobbs ruling to about 3 in 10 now. The views among Democrats were more static, but they are also slightly less likely to have low confidence in the justices, falling from 64% in summer 2022 to 56% now.

In recent years, the court has produced historic victories for Republican policy priorities. The justices overturned Roe, leading to abortion bans in many Republican-led states, ended affirmative action in college admissions, expanded gun rights, restricted environmental regulations and embraced claims of religious discrimination.

Many of the court's major decisions from this year are broadly popular, according to a Marquette Law School poll conducted in July. But other polling suggests that most don't think the justices are ruling neutrally. A recent Fox News poll found that about 8 in 10 registered voters think partisanship plays a role in the justices' decisions either "frequently" or "sometimes."

Last year, the conservative majority endorsed a robust view of presidential immunity and allowed Trump to avoid a criminal trial on election interference charges.

In recent months, the justices on the right handed Trump a string of victories, including a ruling that limits federal judges' power to issue nationwide injunctions.

Katharine Stetson, a self-described constitutional conservative from Paradise, Nevada, said she is glad that the court has reined in "the rogue judges, the district judges around the country" who have blocked some Trump initiatives.

Stetson, 79, said she is only disappointed it took so long. "Finally. Why did they allow it get out of hand?" she said.

Growing concerns the court is too powerful

Several recent decisions were accompanied by stinging dissents from liberal justices who complained the court was giving Trump too much leeway and taking power for itself.

"Perhaps the degradation of our rule-of-law regime would happen anyway. But this court's complicity in the creation of a culture of disdain for lower courts, their rulings, and the law (as they interpret it) will surely hasten the downfall of our governing institutions, enabling our collective demise," Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson wrote when the court ruled on nationwide injunctions.

The July AP-NORC poll found a growing similar sentiment. About 4 in 10 U.S. adults now say the court has "too much" power in the way the federal government operates these days. In April, about 3 in 10 people were concerned about the court's power.

The shift is largely due to movement among Democrats, rising from about one-third in April to more than half now.

Debra A. Harris, a 60-year-old retired state government worker who now lives in Winter Haven, Florida, said the court's decisions in recent years "just disgust me to my soul."

Harris said the court has changed in recent years, with the addition of the three justices appointed by Trump.

"I find so much of what they're doing is based so much on the ideology of the Republican ticket," Harris said, singling out last year's immunity decision. "We don't have kings. We don't have dictators."

George Millsaps, who flew military helicopters and served in Iraq, said the justices should have stood up to Trump in recent months, including on immigration, reducing the size of the federal workforce and unwinding the Education Department.

"But they're bowing down, just like Congress apparently is now, too," said Millsaps, a 67-year-old resident of Floyd County in rural southwest Virginia.

'South Park' co-creator jokes he's 'terribly sorry' over premiere that drew White House anger

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

SAN DIEGO (AP) — "South Park" co-creator Trey Parker had the briefest of responses Thursday to an-

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ger from the White House over the season premiere of the animated institution, which showed a naked President Donald Trump in bed with Satan.

"We're terribly sorry," Parker said, followed by a long, deadpan-comic stare.

Parker was asked for his reaction to the fracas as he sat on the stage at San Diego's Comic-Con International at the beginning of a Comedy Central animation panel that also included his "South Park" partner Matt Stone, "Beavis and Butt-Head" creator Mike Judge, and actor Andy Samberg, who co-created the animated "Digman!"

Earlier in the day, the White House issued a statement on the 27th season premiere, which aired Wednesday night.

"This show hasn't been relevant for over 20 years and is hanging on by a thread with uninspired ideas in a desperate attempt for attention," White House spokesperson Taylor Rogers said in the statement. "President Trump has delivered on more promises in just six months than any other president in our country's history – and no fourth-rate show can derail President Trump's hot streak."

Later in the panel, Parker said they did get a note from their producers on Tuesday night's episode.

"They said, 'OK, but we're gonna blur the penis,' and I said, 'No you're not gonna blur the penis,'" Parker said.

The premiere also took aim at Paramount and its \$16 million recent settlement with Trump just hours after Parker and Stone signed a five-year deal with the company for 50 new episodes and streaming rights to previous seasons. The Los Angeles Times and other outlets report the deal was worth \$1.5 billion.

In the episode, Trump sues the town of South Park when its residents challenge the presence of Jesus Christ – the actual person – in its elementary school.

Jesus tells them they ought to settle.

"You guys saw what happened to CBS? Yeah, well, guess who owns CBS? Paramount," Jesus says. "Do you really want to end up like Colbert?"

CBS and parent Paramount Global canceled Stephen Colbert's "Late Show" last week, days after Colbert sharply criticized Paramount's settlement of Trump's lawsuit over a "60 Minutes" interview.

CBS and Paramount executives said it was a financial decision to axe "The Late Show."

The efficiency of "South Park" production, and the brinksmanship of its creators, allow it to stay incredibly current for an animated series.

"I don't know what next week's episode is going to be," Parker said at Comic-Con. "Even just three days ago, we were like, 'I don't know if people are going to like this.'"

From Benjamin Franklin to Pony Express to anthrax: How the US Postal Service shaped a nation

By SUSAN HAIGH Associated Press

The one government agency that still reaches nearly every American daily — undeterred by rain, sleet, snow or even gloom of night — turns 250 on Saturday.

Established in 1775, when the Second Continental Congress appointed Benjamin Franklin as postmaster general, the postal service predates the United States. It was launched nearly a year before the colonies declared their break from British rule.

"The country may not even have come into existence but for the Postal Service," said Stephen Allen Kochersperger, the postal service historian and a former local postmaster.

While it now grapples with concerns over its financial viability in the modern era, the agency has had a long and colorful history that helped shape the nation. It has grown from serving the 13 colonies to delivering more mail than any other postal system in the world, reaching nearly 169 million addresses and employing more than 635,000 people.

A new postal service

In those early days, creating an American postal system was a key priority for the nation's founders, who

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needed to communicate with the Continental Army and the colonies. When the Continental Congress met in 1775, it appointed Franklin as the first postmaster because he had served in the British postal service for North America.

The early postal system also became crucial to unifying the diverse, fragmented colonies into a nation by spreading ideas of liberty and independence through letters, newspapers and pamphlets.

"People were reading, getting ideas of what it would be like to be an independent country," Kochersperger said.

Westward expansion

When the U.S. Constitution was ratified, Congress was granted power to establish post offices and mail routes that were first used by mail carriers on horseback and later upgraded for stagecoaches. Some evolved into highways still used today.

Initially running north-south along the East Coast, post roads later extended westward. Historians have said this aided settler expansion into Native lands and was intertwined with the displacement of tribes.

As western migration accelerated, mail was sent by ship from New York to Central America and on to California. Delivery typically took two to three months.

The Pony Express, operated by private carriers, was started to speed things up. A relay system of riders on horseback carried mail from California to Missouri, the furthest westward railroad stop. The 1,800-mile (2,900-kilometer) journey took 10 days.

While legendary, it only lasted about 18 months, until Oct. 26, 1861. The service was scuttled by the Civil War and made obsolete with the advent of the telegraph, said Daniel Piazza, chief curator of philately at the Smithsonian National Postal Museum.

Later, the transcontinental railroad reduced mail delivery from months to days.

New types of delivery

Free mail delivery to homes began in earnest in 1863 in the nation's largest cities. It was initially created as a response to grief during the Civil War. At the time, the only communication from a father, brother, husband or son usually came through letter-writing. Women lined up daily at post offices, awaiting word. They sometimes got their own letters back, with a note saying their loved one had been killed.

Postal officials in Cleveland decided to take mail to people's homes out of compassion.

Enthusiasm for home delivery spread quickly, and people living in rural areas wanted it, too. Despite logistical challenges, rural free delivery began expanding rapidly around 1900. By the 1920s, mail carriers mostly had replaced horse-drawn wagons with automobiles.

Around that time, mail started being sent by airplane as well. The nation's first regularly scheduled airmail service began on May 15, 1918. The initial routes were between Washington, D.C., Philadelphia and New York, using Army pilots and planes.

The post office soon took over air mail, running operations for nine years until turning to fledgling private airline companies, some of which remain major airlines.

In the early days, flights were so dangerous that some pilots dubbed themselves the Suicide Club. Thirty-two pilots were killed.

Major changes to the system

The postal service saw major growth during President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's time in office. His New Deal plan to address the Great Depression put people to work building 2,000 new post offices.

After World War II, a booming economy and growing population led to a surge in mail. To handle the increasing volume, the post office needed a faster alternative to manual sorting.

So, on July 1, 1963, each post office was given a five-digit ZIP code. Previously, clerks had to memorize thousands of points of address information so they could sort the mail, Kochersperger said.

The public was skeptical at first, balking at more numbers. So, the post office came up with a friendly cartoon character named Mr. ZIP, who helped convince people their mail would arrive faster.

By 1970, postal workers were angry over low wages and a strike was called by leaders of the National Association of Letter Carriers union in New York. Eventually about 200,000 workers joined the postal

stoppage, which led to the Postal Reorganization Act of 1970. It authorized collective bargaining rights for postal workers and transformed the taxpayer-supported Post Office Department into the United States Postal Service, a financially self-sustaining and independent agency within the executive branch.

In more recent times, U.S. Postal Service workers have faced various threats, including anthrax, a serious infectious bacterial disease. Weeks after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, four threatening letters contaminated with anthrax were sent through the mail. Two workers at a mail distribution center in Washington, D.C. died after breathing in the spores, and thousands were potentially exposed.

Three other people were killed, and more than a dozen were sickened.

The anthrax scare led to major changes in how mail was monitored and sorted and how USPS workers protected themselves. Years later, they'd be designated essential workers during the COVID-19 pandemic and don protective gear again.

European and Iranian diplomats meet in Istanbul as return of sanctions looms over nuclear deadlock

By ANDREW WILKS and STEPHANIE LIECHTENSTEIN Associated Press

ISTANBUL (AP) — Talks between Iranian and European diplomats in Istanbul ended Friday with the sides agreeing to meet again to seek to unpick the deadlock over Tehran's nuclear program.

Representatives from Britain, France and Germany, known as the E3 nations, gathered at the Iranian Consulate building for the first talks since Iran's 12-day war with Israel in June, which involved U.S. bombers striking nuclear-related facilities.

The talks, which ended after four hours, centered on the possibility of reimposing sanctions on Iran that were lifted in 2015 in exchange for Iran accepting restrictions and monitoring of its nuclear program.

Iranian negotiator, Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi, said that the "serious, frank and detailed" meeting focused on the nuclear issue and the status of sanctions while agreeing to further discussions.

Snapback mechanism

The E3 nations had earlier warned that sanctions could return under a process known as the "snapback" mechanism, which allows one of the Western parties to reimpose U.N. sanctions if Tehran doesn't comply with its requirements.

"Both sides came to the meeting with specific ideas," Gharibabadi said in a social media post. "It was agreed that consultations on this matter will continue."

As the talks were ongoing, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Esmail Baghaei, said that he hoped that the meeting would see the E3 nations reassess their "previous unconstructive attitude."

European leaders have said sanctions will resume by the end of August, if there is no progress on containing Iran's nuclear program.

The snapback mechanism "remains on the table," a European diplomat said on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the talks,

"A possible delay in triggering snapback has been floated to the Iranians on the condition that there is credible diplomatic engagement by Iran, that they resume full cooperation with the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency), and that they address concerns about their highly-enriched uranium stockpile," the diplomat said prior to Friday's negotiations.

Rebuilding trust

Tehran, meanwhile, has said that Washington, which withdrew from the 2015 deal during the first term of U.S. President Donald Trump, needs to rebuild faith in its role in negotiations.

Gharibabadi previously said that Iran's engagement was dependent on "several key principles" that included "rebuilding Iran's trust — as Iran has absolutely no trust in the United States."

In a social media post on Thursday, he also said that the talks shouldn't be used "as a platform for hidden agendas such as military action." Gharibabadi insisted that Iran's right to enrich uranium "in line with its legitimate needs" be respected, and sanctions removed.

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Iran has repeatedly threatened to leave the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, which commits it to refrain from developing nuclear weapons, if sanctions return.

Europe's role

Friday's talks were held at the deputy ministerial level, with Iran sending Gharibabadi and a fellow deputy foreign minister, Majid Takht-e Ravanchi. A similar meeting was held in Istanbul in May. The identity of the E3 representatives weren't immediately clear, but the European Union's deputy foreign policy commissioner was thought to be attending.

The U.K., France and Germany were signatories to the 2015 deal, alongside the U.S., Russia and China. When Washington withdrew in 2018, Trump insisted the agreement wasn't tough enough. Under the original deal, neither Russia nor China can veto reimposed sanctions.

Since the Israeli and U.S. strikes on Iran, which saw American B-52 bombers hit three nuclear sites, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has accused the E3 of hypocrisy, saying that they failed to uphold their obligations while supporting Israel's attacks.

Uncertainty ahead

Against the backdrop of the conflict, in which Iran responded with missile attacks on Israel and a strike on a U.S. base in Qatar, the road ahead remains uncertain.

While European officials have said they want to avoid further conflict and are open to a negotiated solution, they have warned that time is running out.

Tehran maintains that it's open to diplomacy, though it recently suspended cooperation with the IAEA.

A central concern for Western powers was highlighted when the IAEA reported in May that Iran's stockpile of uranium enriched to 60% — just below weapons-grade level — had grown to more than 400 kilograms (nearly 900 pounds).

In an interview with Al Jazeera that aired Wednesday, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said that Iran is prepared for another war and reiterated that its nuclear program will continue within the framework of international law, while adding that the country had no intention of pursuing nuclear weapons.

Restarting inspections

IAEA Director-General Rafael Mariano Grossi, meanwhile, said that no date had been set yet to restart inspections of Iran's nuclear facilities.

Speaking during a visit to Singapore on Friday, he warned that if inspectors "do not return soon, there will be a serious problem, because this is an international obligation of Iran."

While he was "encouraged" by Tehran's readiness to engage with the IAEA, Grossi said that the sides needed "to move from words to the reality."

Today in History: July 25, Tuskegee Syphilis Study exposed

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, July 25, the 206th day of 2025. There are 159 days left in the year.

Today in History:

On July 25, 1972, the notorious Tuskegee syphilis experiment came to light as The Associated Press reported that for the previous four decades, the U.S. Public Health Service, in conjunction with the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, had been allowing poor, rural Black male patients with syphilis to go without treatment, even allowing more than 100 of them to die, as a way of studying the disease.

Also on this date:

In 1866, Ulysses S. Grant was named General of the Army of the United States, the first officer to hold the rank.

In 1943, Benito Mussolini was dismissed as premier of Italy by King Victor Emmanuel III, and placed under arrest. (He was later rescued by the Nazis and re-asserted his authority.)

In 1946, the United States detonated an atomic bomb near Bikini Atoll in the Pacific in the first underwater test of the device.

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In 1956, the Italian liner SS Andrea Doria collided with the Swedish passenger ship Stockholm off the New England coast late at night and began sinking; 51 people — 46 from the Andrea Doria, five from the Stockholm — were killed. (The Andrea Doria capsized and sank the following morning.)

In 1960, a Woolworth's store in Greensboro, North Carolina, that had been the scene of nearly six months of sit-in protests against its whites-only lunch counter dropped its segregation policy.

In 1978, Louise Joy Brown, the first "test tube baby," was born in Oldham, England; she'd been conceived through the technique of in vitro fertilization.

In 1994, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Jordan's King Hussein signed a declaration at the White House ending their countries' 46-year-old formal state of war.

In 2000, a New York-bound Air France Concorde crashed outside Paris shortly after takeoff, killing all 109 people on board and four people on the ground; it was the first-ever crash of the supersonic jet.

In 2010, the online whistleblower Wikileaks posted some 90,000 leaked U.S. military records that amounted to a blow-by-blow account of the Afghanistan war, including unreported incidents of Afghan civilian killings as well as covert operations against Taliban figures.

In 2019, President Donald Trump had a second phone call with the new Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, during which he solicited Zelenskyy's help in gathering potentially damaging information about former Vice President Joe Biden; that night, a staff member at the White House Office of Management and Budget signed a document that officially put military aid for Ukraine on hold.

In 2022, on a visit to Canada, Pope Francis issued a historic apology for the Catholic Church's cooperation with the country's "catastrophic" policy of Indigenous residential schools, saying the forced assimilation of Native peoples into Christian society destroyed their cultures, severed families and marginalized generations.

Today's Birthdays: Folk-pop singer-musician Bruce Woodley (The Seekers) is 83. Rock musician Jim McCarty (The Yardbirds) is 82. Reggae singer Rita Marley is 79. Musician Verdine White (Earth, Wind & Fire) is 74. Model-actor Iman is 70. Rock musician Thurston Moore (Sonic Youth) is 67. Celebrity chef/TV personality Geoffrey Zakarian is 66. Actor Matt LeBlanc is 58. Actor Wendy Raquel Robinson is 58. Actor David Denman is 52. Actor Jay R. Ferguson is 51. Actor James Lafferty (TV: "One Tree Hill") is 40. Actor Meg Donnelly (TV: "American Housewife") is 25.