

Groton Daily Independent

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Wednesday, Aug. 6

Senior Menu: Breaded pork cutlet, mashed potatoes with gravy, carrots, apple sauce, whole wheat bread.

Groton Chamber Meeting, Noon, City Hall.

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

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

Emmanuel Lutheran: Sara Circle, 5 p.m.

Thursday, Aug. 7

Senior Menu: Beef noodle stroganoff, broccoli, apricots, whole wheat bread.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Nigeria Circle, 7 p.m.

The wall activities calendars are being printed. It is now posted on-line. Just to to our home page and click on the link in the black bar.

**Groton Daily Independent
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Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460**

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1440

Why 1440? The printing press was invented around the year 1440, spreading knowledge to the masses and changing the course of history. More facts: In every day, there are 1,440 minutes. We're here to make each one count.

Trade Deficit Shrinks

The US trade deficit hit a nearly two-year low of \$60.2B in June, largely driven by a decline in imports and a narrowing trade shortfall with China.

The nation's trade deficit—the monetary value by which its imports exceed its exports—shrank 16% from May to June, with imports tumbling by \$12.8B. The drop in imports marks a reversal from earlier this year, when Americans front-loaded purchases ahead of the Trump administration's proposed tariffs, initially set for April. Many of those country-specific tariffs are now expected to take effect Thursday, with average rates on imports projected at 18.3%—the highest since 1934.

The trade gap with China closed roughly one-third in June to \$9.4B—its lowest level in over 21 years and down about 70% since January. Beijing and Washington appeared poised to stave off triple-digit tariffs threatened earlier this year for another 90 days, though China's dependence on Russian oil has reportedly complicated negotiations. Their current truce expires Aug. 12.

OceanGate Implosion Findings

The US Coast Guard released its report yesterday on the 2023 OceanGate submersible implosion, concluding the disaster was preventable and directly caused by the company's disregard for safety protocols. The Titan submersible imploded in the Atlantic Ocean during a paid trip to explore the Titanic wreck, killing all five passengers on board.

The 335-page report identifies eight primary engineering failures and four contributing factors, finding that OceanGate's leadership dismissed safety concerns, failed to properly test and certify the vessel, and intimidated employees who raised alarms—including by filing a SLAPP lawsuit against a whistleblower. The company operated Titan outside accepted deep-sea safety standards and exploited regulatory loopholes, neglecting independent certification and adequate life-cycle safety checks. Cost-cutting measures also likely compromised safety, such as storing Titan outdoors in the Canadian winter and using only four bolts to secure the forward dome instead of the required 18.

The report is separate from the National Transportation Safety Board investigation, which is expected to release its findings later this year.

80th Anniversary of Hiroshima

Today marks 80 years since the US dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima. The attack—the first military use of a nuclear bomb—precipitated the end of the US war with Japan and killed an estimated 140,000 people over several months.

On Aug. 6, 1945, US Col. Paul Tibbets flew a B-29 bomber from the island of Tinian to Hiroshima carrying a 9,700-pound uranium bomb nicknamed "Little Boy." At about 8:15 am, the bomb detonated roughly 1,900 feet over the city center, sending surface temperatures above 7,000 degrees Fahrenheit. Then-President Harry Truman had agreed to bomb Hiroshima, which had a civilian population of 300,000 and about 43,000 soldiers, to convince Japan to surrender.

The US followed the Hiroshima bombing with an atomic bomb targeting Nagasaki three days later. Japan surrendered on Aug. 15, 1945.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Department of Homeland Security revises eligibility rules for specific visa categories, which would ban transgender women from traveling to the US to compete in women's sports.

ESPN to acquire NFL Network and other NFL-owned assets in exchange for giving the NFL a 10% stake in ESPN.

Legendary rocker Ozzy Osbourne's cause of death revealed as a heart attack; death certificate also notes Osbourne suffered from coronary artery disease and Parkinson's disease.

Roku launches ad-free streaming service for \$2.99 per month, will include 10,000 hours of movie and TV content from Lionsgate and Warner Bros. Discovery.

Fox One to launch Aug. 21 at \$19.99 per month, will stream all sports and news programming across Fox's broadcast and cable channels.

Science & Technology

NASA acting administrator Sean Duffy announces fast-track plans to build a nuclear reactor on the moon by 2030; part of larger effort to build a permanent lunar base.

Google DeepMind unveils Genie 3, an AI-powered model that creates interactive 3D worlds in real time.

Pregnant roaches require additional sleep, similar to humans, new study shows; sleep deprivation impacted development of offspring.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close down (S&P 500 -0.5%, Dow -0.1%, Nasdaq -0.7%) as investors process weaker-than-expected jobs data and President Donald Trump floats new tariffs on semiconductors and pharmaceuticals.

Former X CEO Linda Yaccarino named chief executive of telehealth startup eMed, which is designing a population health management platform for GLP-1 weight-loss and diabetes drugs.

Chemical giants Chemours, DuPont, and Corteva to pay New Jersey \$875M over 25 years in forever chemicals settlement.

US credit card debt rises \$27B in Q2, totaling \$1.2T, per new report from the Federal Reserve Bank of New York; total is in line with last year's all-time high.

Exchange-traded funds: Tomorrow's Business & Finance newsletter explores the pooled investment vehicles popular with everyday investors. Sign up here to receive!

Politics & World Affairs

House Oversight Committee issues subpoena for records from the Justice Department over its probe into late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein; former President Bill Clinton, Hillary Clinton, and eight former law enforcement officials subpoenaed for depositions.

Hong Kong witnesses flooding, heaviest daily rainfall since the city began collecting records in 1884.

Japan records hottest temperature on record yesterday, reaching over 107 degrees Fahrenheit.

FBI data finds crime in the US went down in every category last year, including murder, violent crime, and theft; violent crime decreased 4.5%, with murder and manslaughter down 15%.

Name Released in Brule County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash

Where: I-90 at mile marker 268, 3 miles east of Chamberlain, South Dakota

When: 2:18 p.m., Friday, August 1, 2025

Driver 1: Manuel O. Acosta, 71-year-old male from Chicago, Illinois, fatal injuries

Vehicle 1: 2014 Harley Davidson FLHTCU

Brule County, S.D.- A Chicago, Illinois man died in a single-vehicle crash Friday afternoon August 1 near Chamberlain, South Dakota.

Preliminary crash information indicates Manuel O. Acosta, the driver of a 2014 Harley Davidson FLHTCU was traveling west on I-90 near mile marker 268. The motorcycle began wobbling and then went down separating Acosta from the motorcycle which entered the ditch. He was wearing a helmet. Acosta was transported to Chamberlain Hospital where he was pronounced deceased.

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

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

2025 Sturgis Motorcycle Rally Vehicle Count – Through Day Four

STURGIS, S.D. – The South Dakota Department of Transportation (SDDOT) will provide daily traffic counts at nine locations for vehicles entering Sturgis for the 85th Annual Sturgis Motorcycle Rally which runs from Aug. 1-10, 2025. The traffic counts to date for the nine locations entering Sturgis for the 2025 Rally are as follows:

Friday, Aug. 1, 2025: 56,000 vehicles entered
Up 8.2% from the previous five-year average

Saturday, Aug. 2, 2025: 62,500 vehicles entered
Up 12.5% from the previous five-year average

Sunday, Aug. 3, 2025: 60,495 vehicles entered
Up 2.4% from the previous five-year average

Monday, Aug. 4, 2025: 68,906 vehicles entered
Up 19% from the previous five-year average

2025 Total to Date (4-days): 247,901 Vehicles (Up 10.5%)
Previous Five-Year Average (2020-2024) 4-day total to date: 224,320 Vehicles

Once compiled, a full report (including traffic counts across the greater Black Hills area) will be available on the SDDOT website at <https://dot.sd.gov/transportation/highways/traffic-data/> during the week of Aug. 18, 2025.

To find additional information related to the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally such as reduced speed limit areas, temporary traffic signal locations, frequently asked questions, and more, please visit: <https://dot.sd.gov/travelers/travelers/sturgis-rally-travel-information-faq>.

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Highway Patrol Sturgis Rally Daily Information

Compiled from 6 a.m. Saturday, Aug. 2, 2025, to 6 a.m. Tuesday Aug. 5, 2025

Item	Sturgis	Rapid City District	District Total	Last Year to Date
DUI Arrests	44	9	53	69
Misd Drug Arrests	80	22	102	133
Felony Drug Arrests	39	7	46	75
Total Citations	388	308	696	646
Total Warnings	1,346	563	1,909	1,756
Cash Seized	0.00	0.00	0.00	\$11,094.00
Vehicles Seized	0	0	0	0
For Drug Poss.	0	0	0	0
For Serial No.	0	0	0	0
Non-Injury Accidents	6	3	9	19
Injury Accidents	14	21	35	18
Fatal Accidents	0	2	2	2
# of Fatalities	0	2	2	2

Fatal Crashes:

At 01:09pm, Monday, US Highway 16A, Mile marker 43: A 2019 Harley Davidson (Unit 1) was westbound on US 16A attempting to navigate a sharp right-hand corner. Unit 1 scraped on the bottom/side of the motorcycle as it made the turn. Unit 1 slid out and crossed the solid yellow center line. A 2000 Indian motorcycle (Unit 2) and a 2008 Can-Am Roadster (Unit 3) were eastbound about to enter the curve. Unit 1 slid into Unit 2 and Unit 3 in the eastbound lane of travel. Unit 1 continued into the ditch. Unit 2 and Unit 3 remained in the eastbound lane of travel. The 60-year-old male driver of Unit 1 sustained fatal injuries. The female passenger of unit 1 sustained life-threatening injuries and was flown to Rapid City Monument for treatment. The drivers of Unit 2 and Unit 3 both sustained serious non-life-threatening injuries and were both transported to Custer Monument Hospital for treatment.

None of the 4 persons involved were wearing a helmet.

Injury Crashes:

At 08:35am, Monday, Jolly Lane and South Dakota Highway 44: A 2011 Chevrolet Equinox (Unit 1) was traveling south on Jolly Lane. A 2012 Honda Accord (Unit 2) was traveling north on Jolly Lane near the intersection of SD Hwy 44. Unit 1 attempted to make a left turn on SD Hwy 44 from Jolly Lane. Unit 1 failed to yield the right of way to Unit 2. Unit 2 (Honda) continued straight through the intersection colliding with Unit 1 (Chevrolet) in the intersection. The driver of Unit 2 received minor injuries. The driver of Unit 1 was not injured. Both drivers were wearing seatbelts.

At 08:45am, Monday, US Highway 385, Mile marker 89: A 2009 Harley Davidson motorcycle was traveling south on US Hwy 385. This area is under construction with a grooved road surface. The motorcycle's back tire slid out due to the wet roadway, the driver kept it upright going off the road to the right into the

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mud, came back to the road, and over the other side of the road before laying it down in the ditch. The driver was not wearing a helmet. He received minor injuries.

At 11:03am, Monday, South Dakota Highway 89, Mile marker 45: A 2019 Harley Davidson (Unit 1) motorcycle was traveling behind a 2024 Ford F150 (Unit 2) pulling a trailer on SD Hwy 89. Unit 2 attempted to turn left into a field approach. Unit 1 (Harley) attempted to pass Unit 2 (Ford) in a no passing zone as Unit 2 was turning. Unit 1 collided with the driver side of Unit 2's trailer. The driver of Unit 1 was wearing a helmet and was transported to Custer Monument Health with serious non-life-threatening injuries. The driver of unit 2 was not injured and was wearing a seatbelt.

At 12:17pm, Monday, Vanocker Canyon Road and Alpine Road: A 2006 Honda (Unit 1) motorcycle was traveling southbound on Vanocker Canyon Road near Alpine Road in Meade County. Unit 1 failed to negotiate a curve in the roadway and crashed. The driver was wearing a helmet, sustained minor injuries, and was taken to Sturgis Monument Hospital by ambulance.

At 12:32pm, Monday, South Dakota Highway 87, Mile marker 74: A 2012 Harley Davidson (Unit 1) was traveling northbound on SD 87. Unit 1 failed to negotiate a curve, slid off the roadway, into a guardrail. The driver was wearing a helmet, sustained serious non-life-threatening injuries, and was transported to Monument Health in Custer.

At 12:49 pm, Monday, South Dakota Highway 87, Mile marker 62: A 2000 Indian motorcycle (Unit 1) was traveling northbound on SD hwy. 87. Near mile marker 62 Unit 1's driver failed to navigate a curve and rolled Unit 1 on its driver's side. Unit 1 slid before coming to rest in the roadway. Unit 1's driver was separated from the motorcycle and landed in the west side ditch, sustaining a serious non-life-threatening injury. The driver was not wearing a helmet and was transported by ambulance to Monument health in Custer.

At 12:57pm, Monday, US Highway 16A, Mile marker 51: A 2012 Harley Davidson (Unit 1) was traveling westbound on US 16A near MM 51 and was entering a sharp right curve in the roadway. The driver of unit 1 was unable to negotiate the turn, entered the eastbound lane and collided with a 2002 Harley Davidson (Unit 2). The driver of unit 2 sustained minor injuries, was not wearing a helmet, and refused medical treatment on scene. The driver of unit 1 was not wearing a helmet and was not injured.

At 01:58pm, Monday, Vanocker Canyon Road, Mile marker 10: A 2011 Harley Davidson (Unit 1) was traveling east on Vanocker Canyon Rd. A 2022 Harley Davidson (Unit 2) was traveling west on Vanocker Canyon Rd. Unit 1 crossed over into the westbound lane. Unit 2 was unable to avoid unit 1 and they side-swiped each other. The driver of Unit 2 sustained serious non-life-threatening injuries and the passenger of unit 2 had minor injuries. They were not wearing helmets and were both taken to the Sturgis Hospital. The driver of unit 1 was not wearing a helmet and was not injured.

At 02:59pm, Monday, US Highway 16A, Mile marker 50: A 2006 American Ironhorse motorcycle (Unit 1) was traveling westbound on US 16A near mile marker 50. As Unit 1 was passing motorcycles around a corner, the driver was unable to negotiate the curve. Unit 1 crossed the center line and left the roadway to the left. Unit 1 drove over the road edge and came to rest in the ditch. The operator of Unit 1 was not wearing a helmet and sustained minor injuries. The driver refused medical treatment.

At 04:11pm, Monday, Playhouse Road and South Dakota Highway 87: A 2022 Harley Davidson motorcycle (Unit 1) was stopped at the stop sign on Playhouse Rd and SD Highway 87. Unit 1 laid the bike down and both occupants fell off the motorcycle. The bike sustained no visible damage. The passenger was transported to Custer Hospital with minor injuries. Neither occupant was wearing a helmet.

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At 04:34pm, Monday, Nemo Road and Peterson Place: A 2007 Harley Davidson (Unit 1) was traveling northbound on Nemo Rd. Unit 1 was unable to negotiate a curve. Unit 1 then laid the motorcycle down and the driver separated from the motorcycle. Unit 1's passenger was not able to separate themselves from the motorcycle. Both the driver and passenger sustained minor injuries. Unit 1's passenger was transported to Monument Health in Rapid City. They were not wearing helmets.

At 04:38pm, Monday, Jackson Road and Plateau Loop: A 2024 Harley Davidson motorcycle (Unit 1) was eastbound on Jackson Road near Plateau Loop, 3 miles east of Whitewood. Unit 1 hit loose gravel and entered the ditch. Unit 1 and the driver became separated. The driver was wearing a helmet and sustained serious non-life-threatening injuries. The driver was transported by ambulance to Spearfish Monument Hospital.

At 05:33, Monday, South Dakota Highway 87, Mile marker 56: A 2022 KTM motorcycle (Unit 1) was traveling northbound on SD Highway 87. Unit 1 failed to negotiate a curve and struck the guardrail. The driver became separated from the motorcycle and sustained serious non-life-threatening injuries. The driver was wearing a helmet.

At 06:06pm, Monday, Vanocker Canyon Road, Mile marker 14: A 2005 Harley Davidson (Unit 1) was traveling northbound on Vanocker Canyon Rd. toward Sturgis. Unit 1 failed to negotiate the curve. The driver was not wearing a helmet and was life-flighted to Rapid City with life-threatening injuries.

At 06:10pm, Monday, Westview Drive near Westview Loop: A 1998 Dayton motorcycle (Unit 1) was westbound on Westview Drive near the intersection of Westview Loop. Unit 1 failed to negotiate a curve in the road. Unit 1 and both driver and passenger separated coming to final rest in the west ditch. The driver sustained life-threatening injuries. The passenger sustained serious non-life-threatening injuries. Neither was wearing a helmet. Both were transported to Spearfish Monument Hospital.

All information released so far is only preliminary.

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

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Groton Area Senior Citizens

July 14 Groton Seniors met for a meeting and cards. Twelve members were present. President Ruby Donovan opened the meeting with allegiance to the flag Secretary and treasurer read their report they were both accepted. A new member joined Terry Leety. Meeting was adjourned and cards were played. The winner of the games of Pinochle- John Aldrich, Wrist- Tony Goldage, Canasta- Pat Larson and Bev Sombke. Door prizes Ruby Donovan, Darlene Fischer, Bev Sombke. Lunch was served by John Aldrich.

July 21

Groton Seniors met to play cards. Ten members were present. President had the flag pledge. Had a short meeting. Meeting adjourned. Cards were played. The winners Pinochle-Don Hoops, Whist- Darlene Fischer, Canasta- Bev Sombke. Door prizes Elda Stange, Eunice McColistor Darlene Fischer. Lunch was served by Darlene Fischer.

July 28

Groton Seniors met for their pot luck dinner. Eleven members were present. President had the flag pledge and table prayer. Bingo was played after dinner David Kleinsauser won black out. Cards were played after bingo. Door prizes Pat Larson, Tony Goldage, Dick Donovan. Birthday cake and ice cream was served before going home. Decorated cake was baked by Bev Sombke.

Speed Limit Reduced around Bath

As of Aug. 4, 2025, the speed limit on U.S. Highway 12 east of Aberdeen has been reduced to 55 mph for about four miles, ending just past Bath.

This change follows last fall's reconstruction on Highway 12 and multiple requests from local businesses, residents, and government entities for a speed study. The SDDOT evaluated traffic volumes, speeds, road layout, turning movements, crash history, and access points. The results recommended lowering the speed limit to improve safety.

The change was reviewed by law enforcement, approved by the Transportation Commission, and went through a public comment period with no objections.

Speed limit adjustments like this are common as rural areas grow and see more turning traffic and access points, which increase crash risk.

Thanks to all commuters for following the new speed limit. The change adds only about 40 seconds to your trip. Your questions and feedback are always appreciated—our top priority is getting everyone home safely every day.



Saturday, Aug. 9th



**Come and help us celebrate the
“30th Anniversary of the
Groton Legion Lounge and Hall”**

5-7 p.m.

**free supper
until gone**

(Cody Keller's famous BBQ!)



9 p.m.

*Music on the patio with
Lizzy Hofer*

City Council approves bid for baseball complex concession stand, discusses traffic control concerns

By Elizabeth Varin

Construction, public safety and corn stalks?

The Groton City Council discussed a variety of topics at Tuesday's meeting, including city construction projects, traffic control concerns and swimming pool concerns.

A new concession stand and bathroom facility will soon take shape at the city's baseball complex after the council awarded bids for the project.

Blocker Construction will build the structure for \$75,004.21. Allied Climate Professionals (owned by Councilman Kevin Nehls) will provide HVAC installation services for \$40,312.32 and plumbing services for \$21,428.61. Locke Electric will do electrical work for \$12,000. Bahr Spray Foam (owned by Councilman Brian Bahr) will spray foam the building for \$9,952. S&S Lumber Company will provide materials for \$54,822.78.

Both Nehls and Bahr abstained from the vote due to conflicts of interest.

The total project is estimated to cost \$213,519.92, though some costs may drop as the supplies list included insulation, but spray foam insulation will be used instead.

Earlier in the meeting the fate of the current structure was discussed. Darrell Hillestad discussed plans to move the building to the Groton Airport. He told the council the longer he can wait to move the structure, the better it would be for him as he is waiting on the FAA to give the OK to pour a concrete foundation at the airport.

"If I can get a little more time, that would be good," he said. "But if you're ready to get it out of there, I'll get it out of there. I'll work with you."

Most of the equipment has been removed except for a water heater and air conditioning system, said Jarod Fliehs, Groton Baseball/Softball Foundation vice president. Utilities will also have to be shut off for the building before it is moved.

Fliehs said he would contact the contractor about the time frame for construction and when the current structure would need to be removed.

\$45,000 construction concern

One city construction project has stalled after a \$45,000 payment.

Finance Officer Douglas Heinrich told the council he has not been able to get in contact with Dakota Roofing about roof repairs to nine city structures.

The council awarded roof repair work to Dakota Roofing during its Feb. 25 meeting. The contractor was supposed to repair hail damage on the cemetery repair shop, police department, city shop, community center, park restroom, park picnic shelter, pool bathhouse, pool gazebo and pool storage shed. Dakota Roofing's bid totaled \$99,985.

Heinrich said he hasn't been able to get in contact with the contractor and there have been a lot of rumors about them going out of business. At this point, Heinrich said, he has informed the South Dakota Public Insurance Alliance about the issues.

City Attorney Chad Locken advised asking the insurance company how they would prefer to handle the situation.

"With the \$45,000 we paid him, I assume they (the South Dakota Public Insurance Alliance) would reimburse it and go after him," he said.

If the city wants to get the work done this year, the council would have to go out to bid and be advertised soon. However, the original agreement with Dakota Roofing specified work needed to be completed in 2025.

"We still technically have some time, but I think the writing's on the wall," he said. "He's flaked."

New stop sign discussed

A residential building project may lead to a new stop sign in town.

The council discussed adding a stop sign at the intersection of First Street and Second Avenue.

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Councilman Brian Bahr said the sign is in response to a deck planned at 116 North First Street. The city's Planning and Zoning Commission approved a variance to allow the deck to be built within eight feet of the lot line.

"It's going to be kind of a dangerous intersection because usually the set back is 30 feet," Bahr said. "...To me, it's a safety issue."

Mayor Scott Hanlon asked what the council could do about the project.

The Planning and Zoning Commission's decision to approve a variance and allow the deck to be built closer to the sidewalk could be appealed by a resident or city department. Bahr said he recommends the city see if it can appeal the variance decision.

Councilwoman Karyn Babcock asked, "would it be the end of the world to have another stop sign in town?"

Councilman Kevin Nehls replied that people would just use a different route to avoid the stop sign, which could cause issues on other streets.

Residents have 30 days from the issuance of the building permit to appeal the commission's decision.

While the stop sign discussion caused some disagreements, discussion of a permanent radar speed sign on the highways in town had more united opinions.

"I am 120 percent in favor of this," Babcock said.

The council unanimously decided to ask the Department of Transportation to add permanent radar signs on both Highway 12 and Highway 37.

Tempered glass a problem at city pool

Co-managers at the Groton Swimming Pool updated the council on paperwork to reduce the city's liability from those who hold pool parties and to get written reports for those who face disciplinary action.

Those facing disciplinary action could soon include people who bring goggles with tempered glass to the swimming pool.

Co-manager Tricia Keith said they've never really had a problem with tempered glass goggles before this year, but have found four pairs within the last few weeks. One of those included a pair that shattered as a child jumped from the diving board, belly flopping into the pool and shattering the glass goggle lens.

The 10-foot deep area had to be temporarily closed as lifeguard worked to clean up glass shards.

Keith and co-manager Kami Lipp told the council they want a sign up about glass goggles, spelling out the consequences of bringing them to the pool.

Mayor Scott Hanlon asked what consequences people should face if they bring in tempered glass goggles. He took a strong stance, saying they should face consequences the first time they bring them to the pool.

Councilman Brian Bahr recommended taking away the goggles on the first offense as a warning before taking more action should a person continue to bring glass to the pool.

Corn stalk concerns making mess in town

Another topic on the agenda was how to address corn stalks and residue blowing into town.

Mayor Scott Hanlon said he's had some residents concerned about corn stalks blowing into town.

"We're in rural South Dakota," replied Councilman Brian Bahr.

"What are they expecting us to do about that," Councilman Kevin Nehls added.

"I'm just saying could we just have at least the authority to say, 'can you at least go out and disc there,'" Hanlon said. "...If you don't try, you can't fail."

Councilman Jon Cutler replied, "I think that's just something you kind of deal with in small town South Dakota."

Councilwoman Karyn Babcock added, "this is a natural thing that's happening. It's a natural occurrence that's happening, and you can't keep a natural occurrence from happening. You just have to go out and clean it up.

"You have no control over the wind, or the weather, or the corn stalks," she said.

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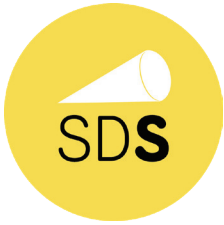
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- The council approved blocking Main Street from Railroad Avenue to Second Avenue from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. August 7 for Family Fun Fest.
- The council approved a \$14,000 agreement with Wright and Sudlow Concrete Contractors to remove and replace concrete in order to correct drainage issues on the south side of the Olde Bank Floral 'N More building at 101 North Main Street.
- The council will decide at an upcoming meeting whether to commit to transfer property at 105 North Third Street to the Groton Development Corp. to build an indoor playground. The commitment would be dependent on the development corporation being able to raise funds to construct the building by the end of 2026.
- The council accepted a \$780 bid from Ringwood Motors of Illinois for a 2017 Ford Interceptor SUV that had been declared surplus.
- The council accepted the only bid received for a 1982 International S1900 dump truck that had been declared surplus. The bid from Greg Bonn of Conde totaled \$4,501.



Walking Taco and a drink
Free Will Donation
Proceeds go to Groton's Angel Tree
15 N Main, St. #103
Groton Daily Independent
Suggested Donation: \$5

Family Fun Fest -Thursday, Aug. 7 ~ 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Gold exploration plan near Spearfish Canyon draws almost 2,000 comments

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - AUGUST 5, 2025 5:28 PM



A September 2021 view looking toward Spearfish Canyon in South Dakota's Black Hills. (Bonnie Jones, Black Hills National Forest/USDA Forest Service)

A planned gold exploration project in South Dakota's northern Black Hills has resulted in 1,774 written comments from local officials, tribal nations and others, including many who say the drilling would threaten Spearfish Canyon.

Solitario Resources, a Colorado-based company, plans up to 49 drill sites on public land. Many of the sites are just above and beyond the eastern rim of a canyon segment extending southwest from Cheyenne Crossing, 13 miles south of Spearfish. The company will study core samples from the drill-

ing to determine the potential for a mine.

The U.S. Forest Service has an obligation under the General Mining Law of 1872 to permit mineral exploration on federal lands that haven't been closed to exploration or mining. After an initial review of the project plan, the Forest Service said the project may not have enough extraordinary circumstances to require an environmental assessment. Opponents argue the location's geology and cultural significance meet the legal threshold for further environmental scrutiny.

The Forest Service received the written feedback during a recent public comment period.

In an opposition resolution signed July 21, Spearfish Mayor John Senden and the City Council noted the drill sites are within the Spearfish Creek watershed, a key recharge area for the Madison aquifer, which supplies the city's water. The resolution said that without a deeper study into the environmental impacts, the city opposes the project.

Some letters raised concern about the drilling happening near the canyon's fragile rock formations, and whether that might cause rocks to come tumbling down.

The Norbeck Society, a local conservation group, wrote that the Forest Service should take a "hard look" at the project's environmental impact.

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"The impacts on water quality and species viability of animals in the project and across the forest are concerning," the society wrote.

Some of the proposed drill sites are located near trails, which commenters said are used by hikers, hunters and off-road vehicle users year-round. Solitario's plan would disrupt the quiet area, some commenters wrote.

"Our organization exists to protect the outdoor heritage of hunting and fishing in a natural setting, and we do so through active stewardship of the wild public lands, waters, and wildlife that make these traditions possible," wrote Cody Grewing, chair of South Dakota Backcountry Hunters & Anglers. "As such, we are deeply concerned about the potential impacts that this project poses to the ecological, recreational, and cultural integrity of the northern Black Hills."

Solitario is not new to exploratory drilling near Spearfish Canyon. The company drilled 11 holes averaging 1,300 feet deep last year in another area near the canyon, after receiving approval for that plan in April 2024.

Chris Herald, Solitario Resources' chief executive officer, said further environmental studies are unnecessary and called the concerns regarding water impacts unfounded. He said drill holes are filled before the rig ever leaves the drill site, and the company has a \$125,000 reclamation bond to help cover any problems.

Solitario is one of several companies conducting exploratory drilling in various areas of the Black Hills, which has been mined continually since the late 1800s. Since the closure of the massive Homestake Mine, the only large-scale, active gold mine in the region is the Wharf Mine near Lead.

"The Homestake-Wharf district is one of the most important gold districts in the United States," Herald said. "If we do find a gold deposit, it will provide the highest paying jobs in the local area."

The Forest Service will now review the comments and determine whether to approve the plan with changes to minimize impacts identified by opponents, or whether enough extraordinary circumstances exist to require an environmental assessment.

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

Governor appoints legislator to open seat in northeastern South Dakota

BY: SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - AUGUST 5, 2025 1:01 PM

South Dakota Gov. Larry Rhoden announced a legislative appointment Tuesday to fill a position representing the northeastern corner of the state.

Rhoden appointed Nick Fosness, a Republican from Britton, to the state House of Representatives seat that was vacated in May when then-Rep. Chris Reder, R-Warner, resigned.

"Nick Fosness is a true South Dakotan," Rhoden said in a news release. "He believes in the importance of hard work, community and resilience – values that are essential to our state's way of life. I am confident that his leadership will help us keep South Dakota strong, safe, and free."

Fosness served as the CEO of Marshall County Hospital Healthcare Center Avera for the last 13 years and is the vice president and incoming chair of the board of directors for the South Dakota Association of Healthcare Organizations. He spent nine years serving on his local school board, including seven as president.

"I'm honored by Governor Rhoden's faith in me, and I look forward to working on issues that help my neighbors," Fosness said in the news release.

Fosness will represent District 1, which includes areas in Brown, Day, Marshall and Roberts counties.

States scramble to complete renewable energy projects before tax credits expire

Officials want to fast-track permitting and ensure projects can connect to the grid

BY: ALEX BROWN - AUGUST 5, 2025 8:54 AM

The abrupt termination of tax credits for clean energy projects is perhaps the most drastic blow that President Donald Trump has struck in his campaign against wind and solar electricity.

As states brace for the uncertainty ahead, they are scrambling to get pending projects off the ground before the tax credits expire.

"The real opportunities are making sure that the projects in the queue make their deadline," said Washington Democratic state Sen. Sharon Shewmake, who chairs the Senate Environment, Energy & Technology Committee. "Can we speed that up? Can we make that easier for them?"

Shewmake, and leaders in other states, say they're focused on fast-tracking permitting decisions and working with regulators to ensure projects can connect to the grid.

"Ironically, one of the impacts of the phaseout is that there's a rush to speed up the development of some projects in the short run," said Warren Leon, executive director of the Clean Energy States Alliance, a nonprofit coalition of state energy agencies.

The tax credits were the linchpin for countless wind and solar projects in states aiming to get a large portion of their power from renewable energy. Leaders and advocates in those states say that renewable sources remain the best way to meet their electricity needs. But the loss of the tax credits could mean that residents pay more on their utility bills.

"This will likely kill some projects," said Matt Abele, executive director of the North Carolina Sustainable Energy Association, an industry-supported nonprofit that backs clean energy policy. "The financial scenario for these projects is built around tax credits that were intended to be in place until the 2030s."

But once the dust settles, many officials expect state laws and market forces to continue driving the buildout of wind and solar.

"We still need to add electricity in this state, and wind and solar are still the cheapest way to do it," said Pete Wyckoff, deputy commissioner of energy resources with the Minnesota Department of Commerce. "It's a blow, but it doesn't change our energy policy, it doesn't change what is economically the right thing to do. But it's a big hit to our ratepayers."



A portion of the Wild Springs Solar project near New Underwood, just prior to going operational in March 2024. (Seth Tupper/South Dakota Searchlight)

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Tax credits axed

Under the Inflation Reduction Act, which President Joe Biden signed in 2022, developers received a 30% tax credit for investments in zero-emission energy projects, along with a production credit of up to 2.75 cents for every kilowatt-hour of clean electricity generated by the projects. Those tax credits were slated to extend into the 2030s.

State officials and renewable energy industry leaders say the credits have been a major driver in the nation's rapid buildout of wind and solar, along with corresponding growth in manufacturing jobs.

But the giant domestic policy measure Trump signed on July 4 abruptly ended those tax credits. Under the new law, projects must be up and running by the end of 2027 to qualify for the credits, or start construction by July 4, 2026. Projects that begin construction after that date must be operational by the end of 2027.

Trump has falsely claimed that wind and solar are "expensive and unreliable," and has at the same time worked to boost fossil fuel production. He has also taken aim at the fact that some renewable energy components are manufactured overseas, calling it a national security threat.

"Projects in early to mid-stage development are deeply in danger if not completely cut off," said Harry Godfrey, managing director with Advanced Energy United, an industry group focused on energy and transportation. "This administration is finding a variety of ways to pull the rug on wind and solar."

While there may be a short-term burst of projects before the credits expire, the landscape becomes much more uncertain after that.

"Certainly there will be some projects that are canceled, but the bigger issue is going to be new projects that don't get started because of the unfavorable environment for them," said Leon, of the Clean Energy States Alliance.

A slower, costlier transition

Industry leaders say it's too early to tell just how drastically the loss of the tax credits will slow their deployment of wind and solar. But they say states remain committed to laws that mandate a transition to clean energy. And building fossil fuel power, such as natural gas plants, is still slower and more costly.

"You don't build a natural gas plant overnight, and there are real supply chain constraints — you can't even get the parts," said Amisha Rai, senior vice president of advocacy with Advanced Energy United.

Rai and others noted that the country is seeing a surge in demand for new electricity, driven by the electrification of vehicles and buildings, as well as growth in data centers to support technologies like artificial intelligence.

"Market forces are going to continue to drive development of clean energy, the primary market force being significant demand for new electricity," said Abele, with the North Carolina group. "It's not going to come from natural gas, given that turbines are on back order through 2029. Solar, wind and battery storage are the quickest ways to add electrons to the grid."

Clean energy backers said Trump's efforts to block solar and wind undermine his "energy dominance" agenda at a time when more power is needed. Ultimately, they believe the loss of the tax credits will cause higher electricity bills.

"Just by the law of supply and demand, if you have growing demand and you don't have growing supply to keep up with it, that's going to lead to higher prices," Leon said.

According to a report from Energy Innovation Policy & Technology, a nonpartisan think tank, the loss of the tax credits could increase electricity rates 9-18% by 2035, raising household energy costs by \$170 annually.

Godfrey, the industry advocate, said that wind and solar projects may be canceled once the tax credits expire. But many of those same projects may be revived as rising electricity prices make their costs more viable.

Analysts have noted that the clean energy boom brought on by the Inflation Reduction Act has largely benefited Republican-led states. But some lawmakers fear that developers will now focus their investments on Democratic states, where laws mandating a transition to renewable sources provide more market

certainty.

"We'll probably see more of the investment go towards blue states that have those sorts of mandates," said Utah state Sen. Nate Blouin, a Democrat. "That's a loss for states like Utah, where we were seeing good new tax revenue, and agriculture folks making supplemental income [from wind and solar projects]."

Lawmakers in states that do have mandates say they're still committed to meeting their goals.

"When I heard that the Inflation Reduction Act was going to be repealed, I was devastated," said Shewmake, the Washington senator. "But then I started to look at the economics of the situation, and you realize this transition is going to happen. The federal government can slow it down, but this fight isn't lost."

Based in Seattle, Alex Brown covers environmental issues for Stateline. Prior to joining Stateline, Brown wrote for The Chronicle in Lewis County, Washington state.

US House panel subpoenas DOJ's Epstein files, Bill and Hillary Clinton

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - AUGUST 5, 2025 3:15 PM



Former President Bill Clinton and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton arrive at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 20, 2025 in Washington, D.C. , for the inauguration of Donald Trump as president. (Photo by Shawn Thew-Pool/Getty Images)

WASHINGTON — The House Committee on Oversight issued subpoenas Tuesday for testimony from former President Bill Clinton and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, among other ex-government officials from both Democratic and Republican administrations, regarding knowledge of Florida sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

Committee Chair James Comer of Kentucky also subpoenaed the U.S. Department of Justice for records of Epstein's federal sex trafficking investigation. Comer gave the department until Aug. 19 to turn over the files.

Comer issued the subpoenas following bipartisan committee support in late July to compel the release of records after President Donald Trump back-

tracked on his promise to open the files.

Epstein, who pleaded guilty to sex crimes in Florida in 2008, died in a New York City jail cell in August 2019 while awaiting federal trial on sex trafficking charges. Epstein's co-conspirator, Ghislaine Maxwell, daughter of a wealthy media mogul, is serving a 20-year sentence in federal prison for her role in the sex trafficking scheme.

The former financier had surrounded himself with wealthy and powerful figures, including Trump and the Clintons, among many other influential people.

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Subpoena list

In letters to several former government officials, Comer wrote that congressional oversight of the government's investigation of Epstein is "imperative."

"The Committee may use the results of this investigation to inform legislative solutions to improve federal efforts to combat sex trafficking and reform the use of non-prosecution agreements and/or plea agreements in sex-crime investigations. Given your past relationships with Mr. Epstein and Ms. Maxwell, the Committee believes that you have information regarding their activities that is relevant to the Committee's investigation," according to the letters.

In addition to the Clintons, Comer also subpoenaed testimony from:

Former U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland

Former U.S. Attorney General Bill Barr

Former U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions

Former U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch

Former U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder

Former U.S. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales

Former FBI Director James Comey

Former FBI Director Robert Mueller

Comer outlined a span of deadlines for the depositions into early October.

Comer previously subpoenaed Maxwell for an Aug. 11 deposition. The Kentucky lawmaker denied Maxwell's request for immunity but agreed to delay her testimony to the committee, according to multiple media reports.

Bondi won't release Epstein files

Attention on the federal case against Epstein swelled after the Justice Department, under current Attorney General Pam Bondi, declined to publicly release case files, as Trump had promised on the campaign trail.

According to an unsigned July 7 Justice Department memo, "a systemic review revealed no incriminating 'client list,'" and department and FBI officials concluded that "no further disclosure would be appropriate or warranted."

The declaration sparked an uproar among lawmakers and Trump's voter base, including some in his own administration. The president's supporters, and Trump himself, have long been fixated on what they describe as the "Epstein files," with some perpetuating conspiracy theories.

House Speaker Mike Johnson of Louisiana sent lawmakers home early for August break to avoid votes compelling the release of material.

Details of the president's past relationship with Epstein also surfaced, including a report from the Wall Street Journal that Trump gave the financier a 50th birthday note featuring a cryptic message and the outline of a naked woman with Trump's signature mimicking pubic hair. The president denied making the note and swiftly sued the Journal.

The outlet also reported that Bondi briefed Trump in May that his name appeared in the Epstein materials. The context in which Trump appeared in the files is unknown.

Trump has since called for the release of grand jury testimony in the case, which a Florida judge denied.

Trump also dispatched Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche, his former criminal defense lawyer, to interview Maxwell in Florida where she was being held.

The administration has since moved Maxwell to a Texas facility.

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

Trump pledges overhaul of school fitness tests

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - AUGUST 5, 2025 1:14 PM

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump is bringing back a physical fitness test to public schools after over a decade, but details of the new test, including timing and implementation, remain to be seen.

Trump signed an executive order July 31 that reestablished the Presidential Fitness Test — a source of both fear and achievement among youth — and committed to revitalizing the “President’s Council on Sports, Fitness, and Nutrition,” which would develop the test.

“Rates of obesity, chronic disease, inactivity, and poor nutrition are at crisis levels, particularly among our children,” the executive order notes. “These trends weaken our economy, military readiness, academic performance, and national morale.”

The president designated Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to administer the test.

The council is tasked with creating “school-based programs that reward excellence in physical education and develop criteria for a Presidential Fitness Award,” according to a White House fact sheet.



An elementary school student concentrates while performing a sit-up during physical education class.

(Photo via Getty Images)

Expert hopes for ‘holistic’ revamp

The order did not provide any details on what the test will look like or how or when it will roll out.

Laura Richardson, a clinical associate professor of kinesiology at the University of Michigan, said she hoped to see an updated version of the test that focused more on level of activity than on a student’s performance.

“I’m hopeful that maybe it will be reevaluated and revised and really have some tools that don’t just look at how fast you are or how strong you are, but more holistic in the tools we need to get our children to be active in childhood that should then continue through the trajectory into adulthood,” Richardson told States Newsroom.

Richardson added that testing alone would not be sufficient to see improvement in kids’ physical fitness, and called for increasing resources to schools to help students be more active.

“Sedentary behavior is really widespread — we’re seeing increasing obesity among all ages,” Richardson told States Newsroom. “We can test ... but if we’re not giving the tools to the teachers and the students and the parents, we may continue to see the same data.”

Bill would codify test

Rep. Jeff Van Drew announced last week that he will introduce a bill to codify Trump’s executive order. In a statement, the New Jersey Republican said he coordinated with the administration, including Kennedy, when writing the bill.

“Every parent wants their kid to grow up strong and healthy,” he added. “This bill is about making sure they are given the tools to do just that.”

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Latest version of test

The Presidential Fitness Test dates back to President Dwight Eisenhower, who set up the President's Council on Youth Fitness in 1956 following alarming findings on the state of youth fitness in the United States compared to youth in European nations.

The test initially included sit-ups, a mile run, a shuttle run, pull-ups or push-ups and a sit-and-reach, according to Harvard Health.

Since then, the test has seen several versions. The most recent major revamp was in 2012, when President Barack Obama's administration replaced the Presidential Fitness Test with the Presidential Youth Fitness Program, which aimed for a more individualized and health-focused approach.

The program, which came after criticism of the Presidential Fitness Test and concerns about its psychological effects on youth, aimed to minimize "comparisons between children and instead supports students as they pursue personal fitness goals for lifelong health," according to the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion within the Department of Health and Human Services.

President John F. Kennedy, an uncle of the current HHS secretary, expanded on Eisenhower's efforts. In a 1960 essay, "The Soft American," the president-elect at the time described physical fitness as a "vital prerequisite to America's realization of its full potential as a nation."

According to HHS' Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, President Kennedy also promoted "taking the 50 mile hikes previously required of U.S. Marine officers" in a national public service advertising campaign.

President Lyndon B. Johnson established the Presidential Physical Fitness Award Program in 1966 for "exceptional achievement by 10- to 17-year-old boys and girls," per HHS.

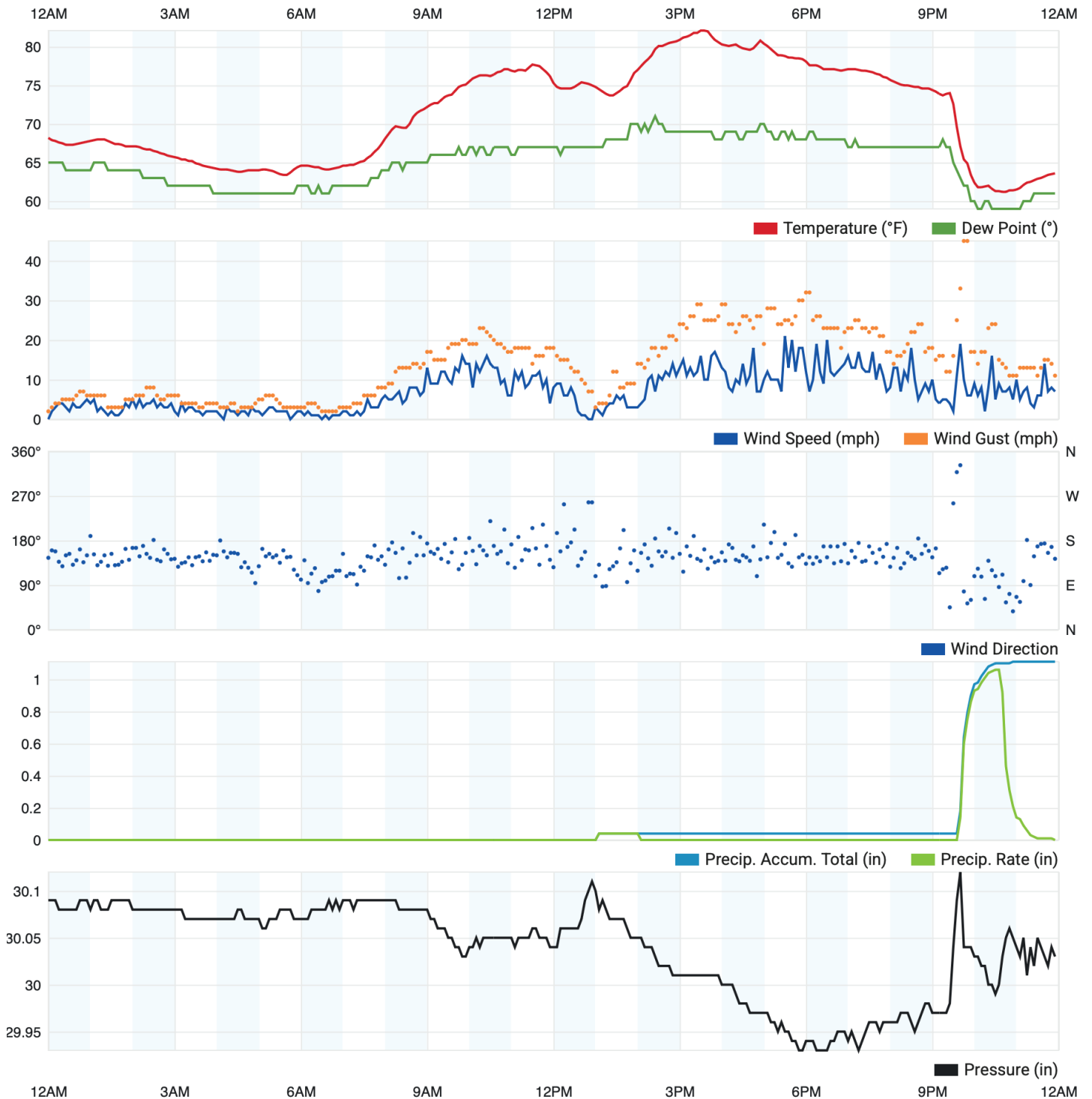
Shauneen Miranda is a reporter for States Newsroom's Washington bureau. An alumna of the University of Maryland, she previously covered breaking news for Axios.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

August 5, 2025



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Today



High: 86 °F

Decreasing
Clouds

Tonight



Low: 66 °F

Patchy Fog

Thursday



High: 91 °F

Patchy Fog
then Sunny

Thursday
Night



Low: 70 °F

Chance
T-storms

Friday



High: 90 °F

Hot



TODAY

WED 08/06

HIGH 85 °F

[15% Precip. / 0.00 in](#)

Cloudy skies this morning will become partly cloudy this afternoon. A stray shower or thunderstorm is possible. High around 85F. Winds SSW at 5 to 10 mph.



TONIGHT

WED 08/06

LOW 66 °F

[11% Precip. / 0.00 in](#)

Clear to partly cloudy. Low 66F. Winds SSE at 5 to 10 mph.



TOMORROW

THU 08/07

HIGH 88 | 69 °F

[15% Precip. / 0.00 in](#)

Sunshine and clouds mixed. A stray shower or thunderstorm is possible. High 88F. Winds SSE at 10 to 20 mph.

PRECIPITATION

15%

Slight rain chance in
the next 6 hours.

POLLEN

Moderate

Grass Pollen

AIR QUALITY

Good

Air Quality Index
31

UV INDEX ▲

High

Daytime UV
7

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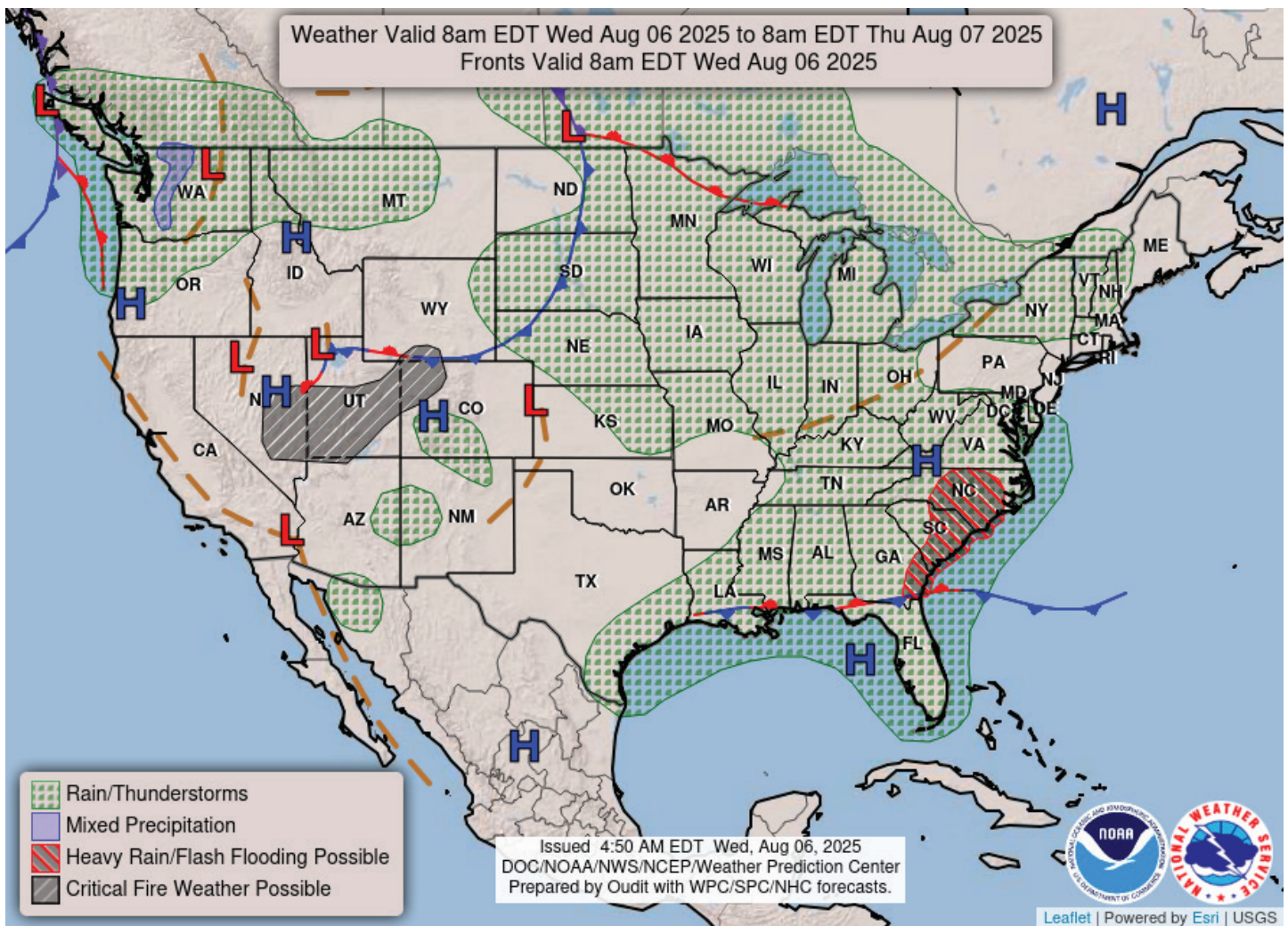
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 82 °F at 3:34 PM
Heat Index: 79 °F at 6:00 PM
Low Temp: 61 °F at 10:41 PM
Wind: 45 mph at 9:43 PM
Precip: : 1.11

Day length: 14 hours, 33 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 108 in 1941
Record Low: 44 in 1902
Average High: 84
Average Low: 59
Average Precip in August.: 0.44
Precip to date in August: 1.15
Average Precip to date: 14.54
Precip Year to Date: 16.21
Sunset Tonight: 8:54:59 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:22:42 am



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Today in Weather History

August 6, 1962: Wind damaged farm buildings and hail damaged crops over a large area. The area affected was northern Faulk, portions of Spink, Northern Clark, Codington, and Grant, along with Day County.

August 6, 1969: During the day and evening hours, two relatively large storms brought destructive weather to much of Minnesota. The northern storm area moved in from North Dakota between Fargo and Grand Forks. The southern storm rapidly developed north of Wadena. These two storms combined to cause twelve tornadoes, two vast areas of wind and hail damage, and one waterspout. The storms killed 15 people, injured 106, and caused 4.8 million dollars in property and public utility damage.

August 6, 1969: The first report of high winds was southeast of Piedmont with gusts of 65 to 70 mph estimated by a National Weather Service employee. Damage in that area included several downed trees and leveled gardens. As the storm moved east, large hail was reported. The first wind gust at Ellsworth AFB was 89 mph at 1918 MST on the northwest end of the runway. By 1925 MST, sustained winds were over 50 mph for nearly 10 minutes, and the peak gust was 114 mph. The sensor on the southeast end of the runway, 2.5 miles away, recorded a wind gust of 114 mph at 1929 MST. The damage on the base included several large trees blown over and snapped in half and roof damage to base housing units. A few tents set up on the taxiways for an air show were blown around, but not significantly damaged. A survey by base meteorologists indicated the main downburst winds hit over open prairie surrounding the runway, where there are no trees or structures. Also between 1920 and 1930 MST, a meteorology student estimated winds between 70 and 80 mph at Box Elder, where gardens were leveled, and wooden fences and roofs were damaged.

1959: Hurricane Dot crossed Kauai in the Hawaiian Islands producing sustained winds of 105 mph with gusts to 125 mph. Over 6 inches of rain fell with over 9 inches on the big island of Hawaii. The sugar cane crop on Kauai sustained \$2.7 million in damages.

1890 - Thunderstorms left four inches of hail covering the ground in Adair County and Union County in Iowa. The hail drifted into six foot mounds, and in some places remained on the ground for twenty- six days. (The Weather Channel)

1918 - Unusually hot weather began to overspread the Atlantic Coast States, from the Carolinas to southern New England. The temperature soared to an all-time record high of 106 degrees at Washington D.C., and Cumberland and Keedysville hit 109 degrees to establish a state record for Maryland. Temperatures were above normal east of the Rockies that month, with readings much above normal in the Lower Missouri Valley. Omaha NE reached 110 degrees. (David Ludlum)

1959 - A bucket survey showed that thunderstorms dropped 16.70 inches of rain on parts of Decatur County IA. The total was accepted as Iowa's 24 hour rainfall record. (The Weather Channel)

1986 - Evening thunderstorms produced wind gusts to 100 mph at Winner SD damaging two hundred homes. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1987 - Afternoon thunderstorms deluged Milwaukee, WI, with 6.84 inches of rain, including more than five inches in two hours, breaking all previous rainfall records for the city. Floodwaters were four feet deep at the Milwaukee County Stadium, and floodwaters filled the basement of the main terminal at the airport. Flooding caused 5.9 million dollars damage, and claimed the life of one person. Death Valley, CA, reported a morning low of 97 degrees. A midday thunderstorm deluged Birmingham AL with nearly six inches of rain in one hour. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Severe thunderstorms produced large hail and damaging winds in Pennsylvania and New York State. A cold front crossing the northwestern U.S. produced wind gusts to 66 mph at Livingston MT. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1993: Virginia experienced its worst tornado outbreak ever as 18 tornadoes ripped through the state in 5 hours. The most devastating tornado caused severe damage in the historic part of Petersburg. The storm then moved on to Pocahontas Island and into Colonial Heights. There, the storm ripped apart a WalMart store, killing three people and injuring nearly 200. The F4 twister was the first known violent tornado in Virginia history. It killed a total of 4 people and injured 246 along its 12-mile path. Total damages were near \$50 million.



FROM TRIAL TO TRIUMPH

Lord Kelvin is recognized as one of the greatest Scottish engineers, mathematicians, and physicists of his day. He had a profound influence on the scientific thought of his generation.

On one occasion, while he was conducting an experiment with his students, it turned into a disaster. Looking at each student individually he said, "Gentlemen, when you are face to face with a difficulty, you are up against a discovery."

This is not only true in learning, it is true in living. When David was face to face with a major difficulty, he made a discovery that lasted throughout his entire life. Faced with a dilemma he cried to God, "Give me relief from my distress, be merciful to me and hear my prayer, O God."

If it had not been for the pain he was experiencing, we would not have his psalms of praise that originated in his pain. If he had not been tested and tried through his trials, we would not understand the triumphs he enjoyed. If he had not struggled to survive, we would not understand the strength he received from God.

Joseph began his path to a palace from a prison. He became the prime minister of Egypt after he served a sentence as a prisoner. Can anyone forget the boils of Job? Ultimately, they became a blessing to him. And, do not forget the letters the Apostle Paul wrote from a cell.

Whatever God brings into our lives is not to destroy or defeat us, but to develop us and our faith and to enable us to discover His goodness and grace.

Prayer: Father, we thank You for working in us, with us, and through us to develop us into the likeness of Your Son. Give us courage, grace, trust, and hope. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Answer me when I call to you, O God who declares me innocent. Free me from my troubles. Have mercy on me and hear my prayer. Psalm 4:1

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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 08.05.25

12 27 42 59 65 2

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$166,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 25 Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 08.04.25

1 8 18 22 42 8

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$3,990,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 40 Mins 11 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 08.05.25

17 27 32 37 39 15

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 55 Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 08.02.25

10 14 15 16 21

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$79,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 55 Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 08.04.25

7 18 41 42 62 3

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 24 Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 08.04.25

8 9 19 31 38 21

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$449,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 24 Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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Upcoming Groton Events

08/07/2025 Family Fun Fest, Downtown Main Street 5:30-7:30pm
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

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Trump's envoy meets Putin ahead of Russia-Ukraine peace deadline, the Kremlin says

Russian President Vladimir Putin held talks with U.S. President Donald Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff in Moscow on Wednesday, the Kremlin said, days before the White House's deadline for Russia to reach a peace deal with Ukraine or potentially face severe economic penalties that could also hit countries buying its oil.

The Kremlin did not immediately provide more details of the meeting. Earlier, Witkoff took an early morning stroll through Zaryadye Park, a stone's throw from the Kremlin, with Kirill Dmitriev, the Russian president's envoy for investment and economic cooperation, footage aired by TASS showed.

Dmitriev played a key role in three rounds of direct talks between delegations from Russia and Ukraine in Istanbul in recent months, as well as discussions between Russian and U.S. officials. The negotiations have made no progress on ending the three-year war following Russia's invasion of its neighbor.

Trump's deadline for Putin ends on Friday. Washington has threatened "severe tariffs" and other economic penalties if the killing doesn't stop.

Trump has expressed increasing frustration with Putin over Russia's escalating strikes on civilian areas of Ukraine, intended to erode morale and public appetite for the war. The intensified attacks have occurred even as Trump has urged the Russian leader in recent months to relent.

Overnight from Tuesday to Wednesday, Russian forces hit a recreational center in Ukraine's southern Zaporizhzhia region, killing two people and injuring 12, including two children, regional Gov. Ivan Fedorov said Wednesday.

Russian forces launched at least four strikes on the area and initially attacked with powerful glide bombs.

"There is zero military sense in this strike. Only cruelty to intimidate," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in a post on Telegram.

Western analysts and Ukrainian officials say Putin is stalling for time and avoiding serious negotiations while Russian forces push to capture more Ukraine land. A Russian offensive that started in the spring and is expected to continue through the fall is advancing faster than last year's push but is making only slow and costly gains and has been unable to take any major cities.

The situation on the front line is critical for Ukrainian forces but defenses are not about to collapse, analysts say.

On Tuesday, Trump said "we'll see what happens" regarding his threat to slap tariffs on nations that buy Russian oil, which could increase import taxes dramatically on China and India.

"We have a meeting with Russia tomorrow," Trump said. "We're going to see what happens. We'll make that determination at that time."

The president said that he has not publicly committed to a specific tariff rate.

Stepping up diplomatic and economic pressure on the Kremlin risks stoking international tensions amid worsening Russia-U.S. relations.

The Washington-based Center for European Policy Analysis warned in an assessment this week that there are "clear signs that the Kremlin is preparing for a broader confrontation with NATO," including a military build-up along Russia's western flank with alliance countries in recent years.

Putin has given no hint that he might be ready to make concessions. Instead, the Russian leader and senior Kremlin officials have talked up the country's military strength.

Putin announced last week that Russia's new hypersonic missile, which he says cannot be intercepted by current NATO air defense systems, has entered service.

Former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, meantime, warned that the Ukraine war could bring Russia and the U.S. into armed conflict. Trump responded to that by ordering the repositioning of two U.S. nuclear submarines.

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Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov on Monday welcomed Witkoff's visit. "We consider (talks with Witkoff) important, substantive and very useful," he said.

Trump initially gave Moscow a 50-day deadline, but later moved up his ultimatum as the Kremlin continued to bomb Ukrainian cities.

However, Trump himself doubted their effectiveness, saying Sunday that Russia has proven to be "pretty good at avoiding sanctions."

"They're wily characters," he said of the Russians.

The Kremlin has insisted that international sanctions imposed since its February 2022 invasion of its neighbor have had a limited impact.

Ukraine maintains the sanctions are taking their toll on Moscow's war machine and wants Western allies to ramp them up.

Trump-backed Nawrocki assumes the Polish presidency and could steer a more nationalist course

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — Conservative Karol Nawrocki was inaugurated Wednesday as Poland's new president, which could set the country on a more nationalist course and cast doubt on the viability of the centrist government of Prime Minister Donald Tusk.

Most day-to-day power in Poland rests with the prime minister, chosen by the parliament. However, the president holds the power to influence foreign policy and veto laws.

Nawrocki, who was supported by U.S. President Donald Trump ahead of a narrow victory in a runoff election in June, is a 42-year-old historian who had no political experience prior to campaigning. He was not even a political party member until being approached by the conservative Law and Justice party that governed Poland from 2015 to 2023.

Welcomed to the Sejm, Poland's parliament, by uproarious chants of "Karol, Karol" and rhythmic clapping Wednesday, Nawrocki raised his right hand and took the oath of office to kick off a five-year term.

"The free choice of a nation has put me before you today," Nawrocki said in a raspy, deep voice during his inauguration speech.

He lashed out at "electoral propaganda" and "lies" during the campaign that culminated in the June 1 runoff vote, but added: "As a Christian, I forgive with peace of mind and from the bottom of my heart all this contempt, and what happened during the elections."

He alluded to Poland's membership in the 27-member European Union and Poland's role in NATO as an indication of his international agenda. Poland has strongly supported Ukraine in its defense against Russia since President Vladimir Putin ordered his troops to invade its southern neighbor 3 1/2 years ago.

"I will of course support relations within the European Union, but I will never agree to the European Union taking competences away from Poland, especially in matters that are not enshrined in the European treaties," he said.

Nawrocki said he would "strive to make the Polish army the largest NATO force in the European Union" and said Poles were "responsible for building the strength of NATO's eastern flank."

Nawrocki's supporters describe him as the embodiment of traditional, patriotic values. Many of them oppose abortion and LGBTQ+ visibility and say Nawrocki reflects the values they grew up with.

The U.S. conservative group CPAC held its first meeting in Poland during the campaign to give him a boost. Kristi Noem, the U.S. Homeland Security secretary and a Trump ally, praised Nawrocki and urged Poles to vote for him.

His campaign echoed themes popular on the U.S. right. A common refrain from his supporters is that Nawrocki will restore "normality," as they believe Trump has done. U.S. flags appeared at his rallies.

Nawrocki's quick political rise has not been without controversy, with reports linking him to underworld figures whom he met while boxing or working as a hotel security guard in the past.

Nawrocki has also been linked to a scandal involving the acquisition of a Gdansk apartment from a retiree. Allegations suggest Nawrocki promised to care for the man in return but failed to fulfill the commitment,

leading the man to end up in a publicly funded retirement home.

Nawrocki's shifting explanations raised questions about his transparency and credibility. After the scandal erupted, he donated the apartment to a charity.

Hiroshima marks 80 years since atomic bombing as aging survivors worry about growing nuke threat

HIROSHIMA, Japan (AP) — Hiroshima on Wednesday marked the 80th anniversary of the U.S. atomic bombing of the western Japanese city, with many aging survivors expressing frustration about the growing support of global leaders for nuclear weapons as a deterrence.

With the number of survivors rapidly declining and their average age now exceeding 86, the anniversary is considered the last milestone event for many of them.

"There will be nobody left to pass on this sad and painful experience in 10 years or 20 years," Minoru Suzuto, a 94-year-old survivor, said after he knelt down to pray at the cenotaph. "That's why I want to share (my story) as much as I can."

The bombing of Hiroshima on Aug. 6, 1945, destroyed the city and killed 140,000 people. A second bomb dropped three days later on Nagasaki killed 70,000. Japan surrendered on Aug. 15, ending World War II and Japan's nearly half-century of aggression in Asia.

Mayor says world should have learned from tragedy

Hiroshima Mayor Kazumi Matsui warned against a growing acceptance of military buildups and of using nuclear weapons for national security during Russia's war in Ukraine and conflicts in the Mideast, with the United States and Russia possessing most of the world's nuclear warheads.

"These developments flagrantly disregard the lessons the international community should have learned from the tragedies of history," he said. "They threaten to topple the peacebuilding frameworks so many have worked so hard to construct."

He urged younger generations to recognize that such "misguided policies" could cause "utterly inhumane" consequences for their future.

"We don't have much time left, while we face a greater nuclear threat than ever," said Nihon Hidankyo, a Japanese grassroots organization of survivors that won the Nobel Peace Prize last year for its pursuit of nuclear abolishment.

"Our biggest challenge now is to change, even just a little, nuclear weapons states that give us the cold shoulder," the organization said in its statement.

Prayers, tributes and hope

About 55,000 people, including representatives from a record 120 countries and regions, including Russia and Belarus, attended the ceremony. A minute of silence was held while a peace bell rang out at 8:15 a.m., the time when a U.S. B-29 dropped the bomb on the city.

Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba, the city's mayor and other officials laid flowers at the cenotaph. Dozens of white doves, a symbol of peace, were released after the mayor's speech.

Hours before the official ceremony, as the sun rose over Hiroshima, survivors and their families started paying tribute to the victims at the Peace Memorial Park, near the hypocenter of the nuclear blast 80 years ago.

Kazuo Miyoshi, a 74-year-old retiree, came to honor his grandfather and two cousins who died in the bombing and prayed that the "mistake" will never be repeated.

"We do not need nuclear weapons," Miyoshi said.

"There is hope," U.N. Secretary General Antonio Guterres said in a statement read by Izumi Nakamitsu, U.N. Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, noting Nihon Hidankyo's Nobel Peace Prize and countries' re-commitment to a nuclear free world in "the Pact for the Future" adopted last year.

Guterres stressed the importance to carry forward the survivors' testimony and message of peace and added: "Remembering the past is about protecting and building peace today and in the future."

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Near Hiroshima's iconic Atomic Bomb Dome under high security, more than 200 protesters gathered, holding posters and flags carrying messages such as "No Nuke, Stop War" and "Free Gaza! No more genocide" while chanting slogans. Local police said two people were arrested in separate cases, each on suspicion of assaulting a security guard.

Survivors want nuclear abolishment, not deterrence

Wednesday's anniversary comes at a time when possession of nuclear weapons for deterrence is increasingly supported by the international community, including Japan.

Some survivors said they were disappointed by President Donald Trump's recent remark justifying Washington's attack on Iran in June by comparing it to the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the mild response from the Japanese government.

"It's ridiculous," said Kosei Mito, a 79-year-old former high school teacher who was exposed to radiation while he was still in his mother's womb. "I don't think we can get rid of nuclear weapons as long as it was justified by the assailant."

In the Vatican, Pope Leo XIV said Tuesday that he was praying that the 80th anniversary of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima "will serve as a call to the international community to renew its commitment to pursuing peace for our own human family."

Japan seeks US nuclear protection

Japan's government has rejected the survivors' request to sign the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons or attend its meetings as observers because it is under the protection of the U.S. nuclear umbrella.

Matsui, the city's mayor, in his speech Wednesday, urged Japan's government to sign and ratify the nuclear weapons ban treaty, a request also made by several groups of survivors in their meeting with Ishiba after the ceremony.

Ishiba, in a speech, reiterated his government's pledge to work toward a world without nuclear weapons, but did not mention the treaty and again indicated his government's support for nuclear weapons possession for deterrence.

At a news conference later Wednesday, Ishiba justified Japan's reliance on U.S. nuclear deterrence, saying Japan, which follows a non-nuclear principle, is surrounded by neighbors that possess nuclear weapons. The stance, he said, does not contradict Japan's pursuit of a nuclear-free world.

Past prime ministers have stressed Japan's status as the world's only country to have suffered nuclear attacks and have said Japan is determined to pursue peace, but survivors say it's a hollow promise.

The Japanese government has only paid compensation to war veterans and their families, even though survivors have sought redress for civilian victims. They have also sought acknowledgment by the U.S. government of its responsibility for the civilian deaths.

Rescuers search for dozens missing after deadly flash floods kill 4 in northern India

LUCKNOW, India (AP) — Rescuers were scouring a devastated Himalayan village in northern India to find dozens of missing people, a day after flash floods killed at least four people and left many others trapped under debris, officials said Wednesday.

Flood waters triggered by intense rains gushed down the narrow mountains Tuesday into Dharali, a mountain village in Uttarakhand state, sweeping away homes, roads and a local market.

Teams of army and disaster force rescuers were searching for dozens, including at least 11 Indian army soldiers, who are believed to be trapped under the rubble. Authorities said rescue workers had recovered four bodies by Wednesday.

"The search for others is still underway," said Dilip Singh, a disaster management official. Singh said at least 60 people have been rescued so far and moved to safer locations, but adverse weather conditions, damaged roads and rugged terrain were hampering rescue efforts.

An Indian army camp in Harsil, some 7 kilometers (4.3 miles) from the flooded village of Dharali, was also hit by flash floods and 11 army personnel were missing, said Col. Harshvardhan, who was leading

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rescue efforts.

"The conditions are extremely challenging, but our teams are staying put," said Lt. Col. Manish Srivastava, a defense spokesperson.

The flooding in northern India is the latest in a series of disasters that have battered the Himalayan mountains in the last few months.

Sudden, intense downpours over small areas known as cloudbursts are increasingly common in Uttarakhand, a Himalayan region prone to flash floods and landslides during the monsoon season. Cloudbursts have the potential to wreak havoc by causing intense flooding and landslides, impacting thousands of people in the mountainous regions.

Similar incidents were recorded in Dharali in 1864, 2013 and 2014. More than 6,000 people died and 4,500 villages were affected when a similar cloudburst devastated Uttarakhand state in 2013.

Experts say cloudbursts have increased in recent years partly due to climate change, while damage from the storms also has increased because of unplanned development in mountain regions.

"This village sits on a ticking time bomb," said geologist S.P. Sati. "It is in a highly fragile zone."

Uttarakhand, known for its rugged terrain, spiritual pilgrimage sites and popular tourist destinations, has witnessed a growing number of extreme weather events in recent years.

Lokendra Bisht, a local lawmaker who runs a homestay in the area, said people ran for their lives, but the flood waters came so fast that "there was nothing anyone could do."

"The whole of Dharali village was wiped out," he said.

Asian shares trade mostly higher after stocks on Wall Street extend losses

TOKYO (AP) — Asian shares were mostly higher in muted trading Wednesday, after discouraging signs about the U.S. economy sent Wall Street shares declining, and

Investors are sifting through a slew of corporate earnings reports to assess how businesses may have been affected by U.S. President Donald Trump's tariffs.

Among Japanese companies, automakers Honda Motor Co. and Toyota Motor Corp. will report fiscal first quarter results this week, as will electronics and entertainment company Sony Corp.

Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 rose 0.6% to finish at 40,794.86. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 added 0.8% to 8,843.70. South Korea's Kospi was little changed, gaining less than 0.1% to 3,198.14.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng rose 0.2% to 24,958.75, while the Shanghai Composite gained 0.8% to 3,633.99. U.S. futures were up 0.5%.

On Tuesday, the S&P 500 fell 0.5% to 6,299.19, coming off a whipsaw stretch where it went from its worst day since May to its best since May. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 0.1% to 44,111.74, and the Nasdaq composite fell 0.7% to 20,916.55.

A weaker-than-expected report on activity for U.S. businesses in services industries like transportation and retail added to worries that Trump's tariffs may be hurting the economy. But conversely such indicators raise hopes the Federal Reserve may cut interest rates. That along with a stream of stronger-than-expected profit reports from U.S. companies helped to keep losses in check. The S&P 500 remains within 1.4% of its record.

The pressure is on companies to report bigger profits after the U.S. stock market surged to record after record from a low point in April. The big rally fueled criticism that the broad market had become too expensive.

For stock prices to look like better bargains, companies could produce bigger profits, or interest rates could fall. The latter may happen in September, when the Fed has its next policy meeting.

Expectations have built sharply for a rate cut at that meeting since a report on the U.S. job market on Friday came in much weaker than economists expected. Lower interest rates would make stocks look less expensive, while also giving the overall economy a boost. The potential downside is that they could push

inflation higher.

Treasury yields sank sharply after Friday's release of the jobs report, and they haven't recovered. The yield on the 10-year Treasury eased to 4.19% from 4.22% late Monday and from 4.39% just before the release of the jobs report. That's a significant move for the bond market.

In energy trading, benchmark U.S. crude rose 57 cents to \$65.73 a barrel. Brent crude, the international standard, added 64 cents to \$68.28 a barrel.

In currency trading, the U.S. dollar edged up to 147.66 Japanese yen from 147.61 yen. The euro cost \$1.1575, down from \$1.1579.

Teacher fights discrimination against the Roma people, one Elvis song at a time

BUCHAREST, Romania (AP) — Tudor Lakatos is fighting discrimination against the Roma people, one Elvis Presley song at a time.

Decked out in a rhinestone shirt and oversized sunglasses, with his black hair slicked back into a 1950s-style quiff, Lakatos swivels his hips and belts out his own idiosyncratic versions of hits like "Blue Suede Shoes" at venues throughout Romania.

But don't call him an Elvis impersonator. Lakatos prefers to say that he "channels" the King of rock 'n' roll's global appeal to break down stereotypes about the Roma and provide a positive role model for Roma children.

"I never wanted to get on stage, I didn't think about it," Lakatos, 58, said after a recent gig at a restaurant in the capital, Bucharest. "I only wanted one thing — to make friends with Romanians, to stop being called a Gypsy," he added, using an often derided term for people belonging to the Roma ethnic group.

The Roma, an ethnic group that traces its roots to South Asia, have been persecuted across eastern Europe for centuries and are still associated with high rates of poverty, unemployment and crime. They account for about 7% of the population of Romania, where a fifth say they have faced discrimination in the past year, according to a recent survey by the European Union.

Lakatos' quest to change that began in the early 1980s when he was an art student and Romania was ruled by the hard-line communist regime of Nicolae Ceausescu.

At a time when anti-Roma discrimination was mainstream, Lakatos found that singing Elvis songs was a way to connect with ethnic Romanian students while rock music was a symbol of rebellion against the oppressive government.

Four decades later, he's added a new audience.

A school teacher for the past 25 years, Lakatos uses his music to show his students that they can aspire to something more than the dirt roads and horse driven carts of their village in northwestern Romania.

"The adjective Gypsy is used everywhere as a substitute for insult," Lakatos said. "We older people have gotten used to it, we can swallow it, we grew up with it. I have said many times, 'Call us what you want, dinosaur and brontosaurus, but at least join hands with us to educate the next generation.'"

But Lakatos still crisscrosses the country to perform at venues large and small.

On a hot summer evening, that journey took Lakatos to Terasa Florilor in Bucharest, a neighborhood joint whose owner takes pride in offering live music by local artists who perform on a stage made of wooden beams painted in vivid colors.

The audience included those who came for the show and others attracted by the sausages, pork roast and Moldavian meatballs on the menu. A few danced and others took selfies as they enjoyed Lakatos' trademark "Rock 'n' Rom" show, a mix of Elvis songs delivered in the Romani language, Romanian and English.

The eclectic mix of languages can sometimes lead to surprises because there isn't always a literal translation for Elvis' 1950s American English.

For example, "Don't step on my blue suede shoes" doesn't make sense to many of the children he teaches because they are so poor, Lakatos said.

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In his version, the lyric Elvis made famous becomes simply "don't step on my bare feet."

It's a message that Elvis — born in a two-room house in Tupelo, Mississippi, during the Great Depression — probably would have understood.

RFK Jr. pulls \$500 million in funding for vaccine development

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Department of Health and Human Services will cancel contracts and pull funding for some vaccines that are being developed to fight respiratory viruses like COVID-19 and the flu.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. announced in a statement Tuesday that 22 projects, totaling \$500 million, to develop vaccines using mRNA technology will be halted.

Kennedy's decision to terminate the projects is the latest in a string of decisions that have put the longtime vaccine critic's doubts about shots into full effect at the nation's health department. Kennedy has pulled back recommendations around the COVID-19 shots, fired the panel that makes vaccine recommendations, and refused to offer a vigorous endorsement of vaccinations as a measles outbreak worsened.

The health secretary criticized mRNA vaccines in a video on his social media accounts, explaining the decision to cancel projects being led by the nation's leading pharmaceutical companies, including Pfizer and Moderna, that offer protection against viruses like the flu, COVID-19 and H5N1.

"To replace the troubled mRNA programs, we're prioritizing the development of safer, broader vaccine strategies, like whole-virus vaccines and novel platforms that don't collapse when viruses mutate," Kennedy said in the video.

Infectious disease experts say the mRNA technology used in vaccines is safe, and they credit its development during the first Trump administration with slowing the 2020 coronavirus pandemic. Future pandemics, they warned, will be harder to stop without the help of mRNA.

"I don't think I've seen a more dangerous decision in public health in my 50 years in the business," said Mike Osterholm, a University of Minnesota expert on infectious diseases and pandemic preparations.

He noted mRNA technology offers potential advantages of rapid production, crucial in the event of a new pandemic that requires a new vaccine.

The shelving of the mRNA projects is short-sighted as concerns about a bird flu pandemic continue to loom, said Dr. Paul Offit, a vaccine expert at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

"It's certainly saved millions of lives," Offit said of the existing mRNA vaccines.

Scientists are using mRNA for more than infectious disease vaccines, with researchers around the world exploring its use for cancer immunotherapies. At the White House earlier this year, billionaire tech entrepreneur Larry Ellison praised mRNA for its potential to treat cancer.

Traditionally, vaccines have required growing pieces of viruses, often in chicken eggs or giant vats of cells, then purifying that material. The mRNA approach starts with a snippet of genetic code that carries instructions for making proteins. Scientists pick the protein to target, inject that blueprint and the body makes just enough to trigger immune protection — producing its own vaccine dose.

In a statement Tuesday, HHS said "other uses of mRNA technology within the department are not impacted by this announcement."

The mRNA technology is used in approved COVID-19 and RSV shots, but has not yet been approved for a flu shot. Moderna, which was studying a combination COVID-19 and flu mRNA shot, had said it believed mRNA could speed up production of flu shots compared with traditional vaccines.

The abandoned mRNA projects signal a "shift in vaccine development priorities," the health department said in its statement, adding that it will start "investing in better solutions."

"Let me be absolutely clear, HHS supports safe, effective vaccines for every American who wants them," Kennedy said in the statement.

Speaking hours later Tuesday at a news conference in Anchorage, Alaska, alongside the state's two Republican U.S. senators, Kennedy said work is underway on an alternative.

He said a "universal vaccine" that mimics "natural immunity" is the administration's focus.

"It could be effective — we believe it's going to be effective -- against not only coronaviruses, but also

flu," he said.

4 people die in crash of medical transport plane on Navajo Nation in northern Arizona

A small medical transport plane crashed and caught fire Tuesday on the Navajo Nation in northern Arizona, killing four people, the tribe said in a statement.

A Beechcraft King Air 300 from the CSI Aviation company left Albuquerque, New Mexico, with two pilots and two health care providers, according to the Federal Aviation Administration and CSI Aviation. It crashed in the early afternoon near the airport in Chinle, about 300 miles (483 kilometers) northeast of Phoenix.

"They were trying to land there and unfortunately something went wrong," district Police Commander Emmett Yazzie said.

The crew was planning pick up a patient who needed critical care from the federal Indian Health Service hospital in Chinle, said Sharen Sandoval, director of the Navajo Department of Emergency Management. She said the plan was to return to Albuquerque. The patient's location and condition were not known Tuesday evening.

Tribal authorities began receiving reports at 12:44 p.m. of black smoke at the airport, Sandoval said. The cause of the crash wasn't known, the tribe said. The National Transportation Safety Board and the FAA are investigating.

CSI Aviation officials "with great sadness" confirmed the deaths in an emailed statement and extended condolences to the families, friends and loved ones of the people killed. Their names haven't been released.

The company is cooperating with the investigation, according to the statement.

Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren said in a social media post that he was heartbroken to learn of the crash.

"These were people who dedicated their lives to saving others, and their loss is felt deeply across the Navajo Nation," he said.

Medical transports by air from the Navajo Nation are common because most hospitals are small and do not offer advanced or trauma care. The Chinle airport is one of a handful of airports that the tribe owns and operates on the vast 27,000 square-mile (70,000 square-kilometer) reservation that stretches into Arizona, New Mexico and Utah -- the largest land base of any Native American tribe.

In January, a medical transport plane crashed in Philadelphia, killing eight people. The National Transportation Safety Board, which is investigating the crash, has said the voice recorder on that plane was not working.

Tennessee man noted intense pain during lethal injection without deactivating defibrillator

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — A man convicted of killing his girlfriend and her two young daughters in the 1980s said he was "hurting so bad" while he was given a lethal injection Tuesday in Tennessee, where authorities had refused to deactivate his implanted defibrillator despite claims it might cause unnecessary, painful shocks as the drugs were administered.

Black's attorney said they will review data kept by the device as part of an autopsy.

Black died at 10:43 a.m., prison officials said. It was about 10 minutes after the execution started and Black talked about being in pain.

Asked for any last words, he replied, "No sir."

Black looked around the room as the execution started, lifting his head off the gurney multiple times, and could be heard sighing and breathing heavily. All seven media witnesses to the execution agreed he appeared to be in discomfort. Throughout the execution, a spiritual adviser prayed and sang over Black, at one point touching his face.

"Oh, it's hurting so bad," Black said, as he lay with his hands and chest restrained to the gurney, a sheet

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covering up past his lower half, and an IV line in his arm.

"I'm so sorry. Just listen to my voice," the adviser responded.

Black was executed after a back-and-forth in court over whether officials would need to turn off his implantable cardioverter-defibrillator, or ICD. Black, 69, was in a wheelchair, suffering from dementia, brain damage, kidney failure, congestive heart failure and other conditions, his attorneys have said.

The nonprofit Death Penalty Information Center said it's unaware of any other cases with similar claims to Black's about ICDs or pacemakers. Black's attorneys said they haven't found a comparable case, either.

Black killed his girlfriend and her 2 daughters

Black was convicted in the 1988 shooting deaths of his girlfriend Angela Clay, 29, and her two daughters, Latoya Clay, 9, and Lakeisha Clay, 6. Prosecutors said he was in a jealous rage when he shot the three at their home. At the time, Black was on work-release while serving time for shooting Clay's estranged husband.

Clay's sister said Black will now face a higher power.

"His family is now going through the same thing we went through 37 years ago. I can't say I'm sorry because we never got an apology," Linette Bell, Angela Clay's sister, said in a statement read by a victim's advocate after the execution.

Black's lawyer said the execution was shameful.

"Today, the state of Tennessee killed a gentle, kind, fragile, intellectually disabled man in a violation of the laws of our country simply because they could," attorney Kelley Henry said.

The legal fight over Black's defibrillator

In mid-July, a trial court judge agreed with Black's attorneys that officials must have the defibrillator deactivated to avert the risk that it could cause unnecessary pain and prolong the execution. But Tennessee's Supreme Court overturned that decision Thursday, saying the other judge lacked authority to order the change.

The state disputed that the lethal injection would cause Black's defibrillator to shock him and said he wouldn't feel them regardless.

Henry said Black's defense team will carefully review autopsy results, EKG data from Black and information from the defibrillator to determine what exactly happened during the execution. The lethal injection protocol is still being challenged in court.

She said she was especially concerned about his head movement and complaints of pain because the massive dose of pentobarbital used to kill inmates is supposed to rapidly leave them unconscious.

"The fact that he was able to raise his head several times and express pain tells you that the pentobarbital was not acting the way the state's experts claim it acts," Henry said.

Prison officials did not comment on witnesses and Black's attorney saying he appeared conscious or his complaints of pain.

It was Tennessee's second execution since May, after a pause for five years, first because of COVID-19 and then because of missteps by state corrections officials.

Twenty-eight men have died by court-ordered execution so far this year in the U.S., and nine other people are scheduled to be put to death in seven states during the remainder of 2025. The number of executions this year exceeds the 25 carried out last year and in 2018. It is the highest total since 2015, when 28 people were put to death.

Black's condition

Black had an implantable cardioverter-defibrillator, which is a small, battery-powered electronic device that is surgically implanted in the chest. It served as a pacemaker and an emergency defibrillator. Black's attorneys have said a doctor can send it a deactivation command without surgery.

The legal case also spurred a reminder that most medical professionals consider participation in executions a violation of health care ethics.

Intellectual disability claim

In recent years, Black's legal team has unsuccessfully tried to get a new hearing about an intellectual

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disability they say he's exhibited since childhood. People with intellectual disabilities are constitutionally barred from execution.

His attorneys have said that if they had delayed a prior attempt to seek his intellectual disability claim, he would have been spared under a 2021 state law. That is because the 2021 law denies a hearing to people on death row who have already filed a similar request and a court has ruled on it "on the merits."

A judge denied Nashville District Attorney Glenn Funk's attempt to get Black a new hearing. Funk focused on input from an expert for the state in 2004 who determined back then that Black didn't meet the criteria for what was then called "mental retardation." But she concluded that Black met the new law's criteria for a diagnosis of intellectual disability.

NFL and ESPN reach nonbinding agreement for sale of NFL Network and other media assets

Ever since the NFL announced it was looking to sell NFL Network and other media assets, ESPN had been seen as one of the favorites to make a deal.

Nearly five years later, a framework is finally in place.

The NFL announced Tuesday night that it has entered into a nonbinding agreement with ESPN. Under the terms, ESPN will acquire NFL Network, NFL Fantasy and the rights to distribute the RedZone channel to cable and satellite operators and the league will get a 10% equity stake in ESPN.

The league and ESPN still have to negotiate a final agreement and get approval from NFL owners. The agreement will also have to undergo regulatory approvals.

"Sometimes great things take a long time to get to the point where it's right. And we both feel that it is at this stage," NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell said in a call with The Associated Press.

Along with the sale of NFL Network, the NFL and ESPN will have a second nonbinding agreement where the NFL will license to ESPN certain NFL content and other intellectual property that can be used by NFL Network and other assets that have been purchased.

"We have been talking about it in earnest for the last few years. But interestingly enough, we started talking about this over a decade ago but nothing really ended up happening. And we got back at it when I came back to Disney after my retirement," Disney CEO Bob Iger said in a call with the AP.

What ESPN gets

ESPN is expected to launch its direct-to-consumer service before the end of September. The service would give cord-cutters access to all ESPN programs and networks for \$29.99 per month. The addition of more NFL programming increases the value.

Many viewers will receive the service for free as part of their subscription to cable, satellite and most streaming services.

"When I came back to Disney and assessed essentially the future of ESPN, it became clear that ESPN had to launch a bigger and more robust and digital or direct-to-consumer product, not only for the sake of ESPN's business, but for the sports fan," Iger said. "And obviously, when you start thinking about high-quality sports content, your eyes immediately head in the direction of the NFL because there's really nothing more valuable and more popular than that."

NFL Network — which has nearly 50 million subscribers — would be owned and operated by ESPN and would be included in ESPN's direct-to-consumer product.

The NFL RedZone channel would be distributed by ESPN to cable and satellite operators. However, the NFL will continue to own, operate and produce the channel as well as retain the rights to distribute the channel digitally. ESPN would also get rights to the RedZone brand, meaning RedZone channels for college football and basketball or other sports could be coming in the future.

NFL Fantasy Football would merge with ESPN Fantasy Football, giving ESPN the official fantasy football game of the league.

NFL Network will still air seven games per season. Four of ESPN's games, including some that are in overlapping windows on Monday nights, would move to NFL Network. ESPN will license three additional

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games that will be carried on NFL Network.

What the NFL receives (and retains)

The league gets a 10% equity stake in ESPN. Aidan O'Connor, a senior vice president at the Prosek Partners marketing firm, estimates the value of that would be \$2.2 billion to \$2.5 billion.

ESPN is currently 80% owned by ABC Inc. as an indirect subsidiary of The Walt Disney Company. The other 20% is owned by Hearst. Once the deal is official and approved, the breakdown of ESPN will be 72% ABC Inc., 18% Hearst and 10% NFL.

This isn't the first time the league has had an equity stake in a digital or communications business. It had that in the past with Sirius Satellite Radio and SportsLine. The NFL could also have equity in the newly formed "Paramount Skydance Corporation," which owns CBS, due to the league's partnership with Skydance.

"This is new as far as a partner now operating a business that we built, ran and grew," said Hans Schröder, the NFL's executive vice president of media distribution. "It'll also be a little bit new again with some of the dynamics here, but we'll continue to balance that in a really arm's length way where we'll think about how we manage and work across to all our partners."

The league will continue to own and operate NFL Films, NFL+, NFL.com, the official websites of the 32 teams, the NFL Podcast Network and the NFL FAST Channel (a free ad-supported streaming channel).

"The moves align with the NFL's longstanding ambition to reach \$25 billion in annual revenue by 2027 — a target first set in 2010, when league revenue stood at approximately \$8.5 billion," O'Connor said. "Financially, the move also signals to investors that ESPN is doubling down on differentiation and content stickiness by offering a scarce and premium product in a crowded marketplace. Intentionally ceding equity to the NFL transforms ESPN from a media licensee into a true platform partner — with few properties rivaling the league in terms of cultural significance, appointment viewing, audience reach, and monetization efficiency."

No major changes yet

Viewers will likely not see any immediate impacts until next year once everything is approved.

Besides ESPN, the biggest winner in this could be NFL Network, which had seen reductions in original programming the past couple years. "Total Access," the network's flagship show since its launch in 2003, ended in May 2024 amid a series of layoffs and cost-cutting moves. "Good Morning Football" also moved from New York, where it had been since its start in 2016, to Southern California last year.

NFL Network moved to a broadcast facility across the street from SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, California, in 2021.

"The thing that's exciting for us is that we have put a lot into the network. I think it's been very effective for fans. We know it's in good hands," Goodell said. "They're innovative, they recognize great production and know how to produce it. They will do a fantastic job of operating the network and taking it to another level."

'Ketamine Queen' accused of selling Matthew Perry fatal dose gets September trial date

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A woman charged with selling Matthew Perry the dose of ketamine that killed him is headed for a September trial.

Jasveen Sangha's trial — the only one forthcoming in the death of the "Friends" star after four other defendants reached plea agreements with prosecutors — is now set to begin Sept. 23 after an order Tuesday from a federal judge in Los Angeles.

The 42-year-old Sangha, who prosecutors say was known to her customers as "The Ketamine Queen," is charged with five counts of ketamine distribution, including one count of distribution resulting in death. She has pleaded not guilty and has been held in federal custody since her arrest last year.

Her trial had been scheduled to start Aug. 19, but the judge postponed it for the fourth time since her April 2024 indictment after both sides agreed it should be moved.

Sangha's lawyers said they needed the time to go through the huge amount of evidence they have re-

ceived from the prosecution and to finish their own investigation.

Sangha was one of the two biggest targets in the investigation of Perry's death, along with Dr. Salvador Plasencia, who pleaded guilty to ketamine distribution last month. Perry's personal assistant, his friend and another doctor also entered guilty pleas and are cooperating with prosecutors. All are awaiting sentencing.

Perry, who was found dead at age 54 at his home on Oct. 23, 2023, had been getting ketamine from his regular doctor for treatment of depression, an increasingly common off-label use for the surgical anesthetic.

But prosecutors say when the doctor wouldn't give Perry as much as he wanted, he illegally sought more from Plasencia, then still more from Sangha, who they say presented herself as "a celebrity drug dealer with high quality goods."

Perry's assistant and friend said in their plea agreements that they acted as middlemen to buy large amounts of ketamine for Perry from Sangha, including 25 vials for \$6,000 in cash a few days before his death. Prosecutors allege that included the doses that killed Perry.

Epstein's ex, Ghislaine Maxwell, doesn't want grand jury transcripts released

NEW YORK (AP) — Jeffrey Epstein's former girlfriend, Ghislaine Maxwell, wants to keep grand jury records secret in the sex trafficking case that sent her to prison, her lawyers said Tuesday as prosecutors continued urging a court to release some of those records in the criminal case-turned-political fireball.

Maxwell hasn't seen the material herself, her attorneys said — the grand jury process is conducted behind closed doors. But she opposes unsealing what her lawyers described as potentially "hearsay-laden" transcripts of grand jury testimony, which was given in secret and without her lawyers there to challenge it.

"Whatever interest the public may have in Epstein, that interest cannot justify a broad intrusion into grand jury secrecy in a case where the defendant is alive, her legal options are viable and her due process rights remain," attorneys David O. Markus and Melissa Madrigal wrote.

Prosecutors declined to comment.

Government attorneys have been trying to quell a clamor for transparency by seeking the transcripts' release — though the government also says the public already knows much of what's in the documents.

Most of the information "was made publicly available at trial or has otherwise been publicly reported through the public statements of victims and witnesses," prosecutors wrote in court papers Monday. They noted that the disclosures excluded some victims' and witnesses' names.

Prosecutors had also said last week that some of what the grand jurors heard eventually came out at Maxwell's 2021 trial and in various victims' lawsuits. There were only two grand jury witnesses, both of them law enforcement officials, prosecutors said.

Prosecutors made clear Monday that they're seeking to unseal only the transcripts of grand jury witnesses' testimony, not the exhibits that accompanied it. But they are also working to parse how much of the exhibits also became public record over the years.

While prosecutors have sought to temper expectations about any new revelations from the grand jury proceedings, they aren't proposing to release a cache of other information the government collected while looking into Epstein.

The transcript faceoff comes six years after authorities said Epstein killed himself while awaiting trial on sex trafficking charges and four years after Maxwell was convicted of grooming underage girls to participate in sex acts with him. The British socialite denied the allegations and has appealed her conviction, so far unsuccessfully.

Some of President Donald Trump's allies spent years suggesting there was more to the Epstein saga than met the eye and calling for more disclosures. A few got powerful positions in Trump's Justice Department — and then faced backlash after it abruptly announced that nothing more would be released and that a long-rumored Epstein "client list" doesn't exist.

After trying unsuccessfully to change the subject and denigrating his own supporters for not moving on, the Republican president told Attorney General Pam Bondi to ask courts to unseal the grand jury

transcripts in the case.

A top Justice Department official, Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche, interviewed Maxwell late last month, at the government's request. Last week, she was moved from a federal prison in Florida to a prison camp in Texas to continue serving her 20-year sentence. Officials didn't explain why.

Trump said Tuesday that he didn't know ahead of time about Maxwell's prison transfer and hadn't spoken to Blanche about his conversation with her.

"I think he probably wants to make sure that people should not be involved, or aren't involved, are not hurt by something that would be very, very unfortunate, very unfair to a lot of people," Trump said in a news conference Tuesday.

The Epstein uproar also has reached Congress, where the House Oversight Committee subpoenaed the Justice Department on Tuesday for files in the case. The committee also issued subpoenas to conduct sworn questioning of former President Bill Clinton, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and eight former top law enforcement officials.

Bill Clinton, a Democrat, was among a number of Epstein's famous former friends; so was Trump, a Republican. Both men have said they knew nothing of Epstein's crimes until he was charged, and Epstein's accusers have not alleged any wrongdoing by Trump or Clinton.

Trump's redistricting fight could broaden and last a while with Texas and California as epicenters

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — The two most populous U.S. states — California and Texas — are grappling for political advantage ahead of the 2026 elections, setting up a national proxy war as Democrats and Republicans vie for control of Congress in the latter half of Donald Trump's second presidency.

Texas Democrats on Tuesday again delayed their state's House of Representatives from moving forward with a redrawn congressional mapsought by Trump to shore up Republicans' midterm prospects as his political standing falters. For a second day, Democrats forced a quick adjournment by denying the GOP majority the required attendance to take votes.

In California, Democrats encouraged by Gov. Gavin Newsom are considering new political maps that could slash Republican-held House seats in the left-leaning state while bolstering Democratic incumbents in battleground districts. The move is intended to counter any GOP gains in Texas — though California Democrats could face even more complex legal and logistical hurdles.

Under existing maps, Democrats are within three seats of reclaiming the U.S. House majority.

For years, the two behemoth states have set competing political and cultural curves, dueling over jobs, innovation, prestige and ideology. Now, the rivalry is at the center of the two major parties' scramble to win an edge in 2026.

"We are entitled to five more seats" in Texas, Trump insisted Tuesday in a CNBC interview. He pointed to California's existing maps, which are drawn by an independent commission unlike the Texas maps drawn by a partisan legislature: "They did it to us."

National Democratic Chairman Ken Martin said Trump and compliant Republicans are subverting democracy out of fear given the president's lagging approval ratings and voter angst over the massive tax and policy bill he signed last month.

"Republicans are running scared that voting for this monstrosity will make them lose their majority, and it certainly will," Martin said in Illinois, where multiple Texas Democrats have settled temporarily to deny their Republican colleagues a quorum in Austin.

Though the two states are seeking similar outcomes, Texas is in the final stages of its effort while California is just embarking on a path riddled with obstacles. Both states are likely to face well-funded legal challenges should they move ahead with new maps. The fight could spill over to other statehouses.

Texas Democrats block GOP power play — for now

After dozens of Democrats left Texas, the Republican-dominated House remains unable to establish the

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quorum of lawmakers required to do business.

The House issued civil arrest warrants for absent Democrats and Republican Gov. Greg Abbott ordered state troopers to find and arrest them, but lawmakers physically outside Texas are beyond state authorities' jurisdiction. Democrats' retort that Abbott is blustering about legal authority he does not have.

House Speaker Rep. Dustin Burrows said Tuesday that Texas officers are continuing efforts to corral lawmakers but offered no details.

Abbott, for his part, has derided absent Democrats as "un-Texan." Democrats cast the governor and his ally, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, as Trump lackeys.

"When Donald Trump calls, they say, 'Yes, sir. Right away,'" Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker said Tuesday.

Republicans currently hold 25 of Texas' 38 U.S. House seats. The GOP replacement map is drawn to give Republicans five more seats. Republicans' current advantage of nearly 2-to-1 already is a wider partisan gap than the 2024 presidential results: Trump won 56.1% of Texas ballots, while Democrat Kamala Harris received 42.5%.

The Texas House will convene again Friday.

California's effort is just beginning

In California, Democrats are looking into a plan to secure 48 of 52 congressional seats. That's up from the 43 seats. The existing party gap outpaces the statewide presidential split in 2024: Harris got 58.5% of the vote to Trump's 38.3%.

Newsom has said he won't move ahead if Texas pauses its efforts. But he and legislative Democrats face a tight timeline to advance their plan. Once they hit go, several hurdles await.

Unlike Texas, which only requires legislative approval on the maps, California's maps would also need support from voters. They may be skeptical to give it after handing redistricting power to an independent commission years ago. The governor said he'd call a special election for the first week of November. Voter turnout in odd-year elections is hard to predict, and Newsom would be campaigning at a time when his popularity among voters has been sagging.

And opposition has formed quickly.

Former Republican Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has signaled he'd campaign to protect the independent redistricting commission that was one of his signature accomplishments. Schwarzenegger spokesman Danile Ketchell said in a statement that the former governor has always advocated "taking power from the politicians and returning it to the people where it belongs, and he believes gerrymandering is evil no matter who does it."

Still, many Democrats hope Newsom's push will compel Texas Republicans to stand down.

Texas holdouts are still mum on long-term strategy

Despite California's cumbersome path, a potentially extended stalemate in Texas — even if the GOP ultimately gets its way there — could give Newsom and his allies more time to rally support.

Thad Kousser, a political science professor at the University of California, San Diego, said there is uncertainty but that "Democrats have a path to victory if they can make this a referendum on Donald Trump and his collaboration with Texas to stack the deck in his favor."

Further, Pritzker and New York Gov. Kathy Hochul, who also welcomed some Texas lawmakers, have promised to explore ways to redraw congressional districts to counter GOP efforts. That means Texas and California could simply be blueprints for a multistate redistricting bonanza.

For their parts, Texas legislators who left declined to say how long they'll hold out.

"There's folks saying that we walked out. I think everyone behind me would say we're standing up, and as Texans would say, we're standing tall," said state Rep. Ramon Romero, who decamped to Illinois.

Walkouts often only delay passage of a bill, like in 2021, when Democrats left Texas for 38 days to protest proposed voting restrictions. Once they returned, Republicans passed that measure. After that dispute, Texas Republicans adopted \$500 daily fines for lawmakers who don't show.

"I'll pay that price for America," Romero said.

Titan submersible disaster CEO could have been charged criminally if he survived, Coast Guard says

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — The Titan submersible disaster could have been prevented, the U.S. Coast Guard said in a report Tuesday that held OceanGate CEO Stockton Rush responsible for ignoring safety warnings, design flaws and crucial oversight which, had he survived, may have resulted in criminal charges.

Rush and four passengers were killed instantly deep below the North Atlantic in June 2023 when Titan suffered a catastrophic implosion as it descended to the wreck of the Titanic. A multiday search for survivors off Canada grabbed international headlines, and the tragedy led to lawsuits and calls for tighter regulation of the burgeoning private deep sea expedition industry.

The Coast Guard determined that safety procedures at OceanGate, a private company based in Washington state, were "critically flawed" and found "glaring disparities" between safety protocols and actual practices.

Preventing the next Titan disaster

Jason Neubauer of the Marine Board of Investigation said the findings will help avoid future tragedies.

"There is a need for stronger oversight and clear options for operators who are exploring new concepts outside of the existing regulatory framework," he said in a statement.

Salvatore Mercogliano, a professor of maritime history at Campbell University in North Carolina, said OceanGate was able to exploit gray areas in maritime law that made it unclear who was responsible for enforcing regulations.

Now, he said, the Coast Guard and other international maritime agencies will be looking to improve coordination and implement clearer mechanisms for enforcement, especially for private submarines.

"Unfortunately almost all maritime regulation is written in blood, and something had to happen first," Mercogliano said.

OceanGate suspended operations in July 2023. Spokesperson Christian Hammond said the company has been wound down and was fully cooperating with the investigation, and he offered condolences to the families of those who died and everyone affected.

'Red flags' at OceanGate

Investigators pointed to a culture at OceanGate of downplaying, ignoring and even falsifying key safety information to improve its reputation and evade scrutiny from regulators.

The company ignored "red flags" and had a "toxic workplace culture," with firings of senior staff and the looming threat of dismissal used to dissuade employees and contractors from expressing safety concerns.

Rush, a former flight test engineer for fighter jets, founded the company in 2009 after years of experience in aerospace and aviation.

The Marine Board concluded that Rush had an "escalating disregard for established safety protocols," which contributed to the deaths. If Rush were alive, the board would have passed the case to the U.S. Department of Justice and he may have faced criminal charges, it said.

Rush bragged that he would 'buy a congressman' if challenged

The company reclassified submersible passengers as "mission specialists" to bypass regulations on small passenger vessels and claim its subs were oceanic research vessels. Former mission specialists and OceanGate employees said their participation was "purely for a ride in the submersible, not for scientific research," the report said.

Rush and OceanGate received numerous warnings about Titan's fraudulent classifications. In 2017, Rush was told by a Coast Guard Reserve officer hired by OceanGate that his planned Titanic dive would be illegal.

Rush said "he would buy a congressman" if ever confronted by regulators, the officer testified.

Over the years the company resorted to increasingly deceptive strategies, the report said. By 2021 an OceanGate attorney falsely told a Virginia federal court, which was presiding over Titan's authorization to conduct dives, that the vessel was registered in the Bahamas.

To obtain his credentials, Rush submitted a fraudulent sea service letter signed by OceanGate's chief operations officer to the Coast Guard's National Maritime Center, the report said. In it Rush claimed past

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service as a crew member on Titan and misrepresented the size of the vessel, when in fact it had never been registered or admeasured.

Titan's inadequacies

Investigators found that the submersible's design, certification, maintenance and inspection process were all inadequate. The vessel's carbon fiber hull design and construction introduced flaws that "weakened the overall structural integrity" of the hull, according to the report.

Mounting financial pressures in 2023 led to a decision by OceanGate to store the submersible outdoors in the Canadian winter, and the hull was exposed to temperature fluctuations that also compromised the vessel's integrity, the report said.

The victims

The implosion also killed French underwater explorer Paul-Henri Nargeolet, known as "Mr. Titanic"; British adventurer Hamish Harding; and two members of a prominent Pakistani family, Shahzada Dawood and his son Suleman Dawood.

Nargeolet's family filed a \$50 million lawsuit last year alleging that the crew experienced "terror and mental anguish" before the disaster. The lawsuit accused OceanGate of gross negligence.

Titan's final dive

The vessel had been making voyages to the Titanic site since 2021. Its final dive came the morning of June 18, 2023. The submersible lost contact with its support vessel about two hours later and was reported overdue that afternoon. Ships, planes and equipment were rushed to the scene about 435 miles (700 kilometers) south of St. John's, Newfoundland.

The Coast Guard-led team operated under the possibility that there could be survivors for several days. Wreckage was subsequently found on the ocean floor about 330 yards (300 meters) off the bow of the Titanic.

Trump narrows Fed chair candidates to four, excluding Treasury Secretary Bessent

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said Tuesday that he's whittled down his list of potential Federal Reserve chair candidates to four as he considers a successor to Jerome Powell — a choice that could reset the path of the U.S. economy.

Asked on CNBC's "Squawk Box" for a future replacement for Powell, Trump named Kevin Hassett, director of the National Economic Council, and Kevin Warsh, a former member of the Federal Reserve Board of Governors.

"I think Kevin and Kevin, both Kevins, are very good," Trump said.

He said two other people were also under consideration, but Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent is not among them.

"I love Scott, but he wants to stay where he is," Trump said. He did not name his other two top candidates but used the opportunity to disparage Powell, whom he has dubbed "too late" in cutting interest rates.

The news that Trump plans to make a decision on the Fed chair "soon" comes as the Republican president has been highly critical of Powell, whose term ends in May 2026. Trump recently floated having the Fed's board of governors take full control of the U.S. central bank from Powell, whom he has relentlessly pressured to cut short-term interest rates in ways that raise questions about whether the Fed can remain free from White House politicking.

Trump has openly mused about whether to remove Powell before his tenure as chair ends, but he's held off on dismissing the Fed chair after a recent Supreme Court ruling suggested he could only do so for cause rather than out of policy disagreements. The president has put pressure on Powell by claiming he mismanaged the Fed's \$2.5 billion renovation project, but he's also said that he's "highly unlikely" to fire Powell.

One of the Fed's governors, Adriana Kugler, made a surprise announcement last Friday that she would be stepping away from her role. That created an opening for Trump, who called her departure "a pleasant

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surprise," to name a new Fed governor. Trump told CNBC it's "a possibility" that his pick to replace Kugler could also be his choice to replace Powell.

Trump told reporters that he plans to name his pick to join the Fed's board of governors soon, though he is deciding whether he'll nominate someone to permanently join the board and possibly succeed Powell or simply serve out the remaining months of Kugler's term.

"I'll be making that decision before the end of the week," Trump said later Tuesday when asked about his Fed governor pick.

Here's what to know about the two known candidates:

Kevin Hassett

Hassett, director of the White House National Economic Council, has been supportive of the president's agenda — from his advocacy for income tax cuts and tariffs to his support of the recent firing of BLS Commissioner Erika McEntarfer.

Hassett served in the first Trump administration as chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers. He has a doctoral degree in economics from the University of Pennsylvania and worked at the right-leaning American Enterprise Institute before joining the Trump White House in 2017.

As part of Hassett's farewell announcement in 2019, Trump called him a "true friend" who did a "great job." Hassett became a fellow at the Hoover Institution, which is located at Stanford University. He later returned to the administration to help deal with the pandemic.

On CNBC on Monday, Hassett said "all over the U.S. government, there have been people who have been resisting Trump everywhere they can."

Kevin Warsh

A former Fed governor who stepped down in 2011, Warsh is currently a fellow at the Hoover Institution. He has been supportive of cutting interest rates, a key goal of Trump's.

"The president's right to be frustrated with Jay Powell and the Federal Reserve," Warsh said on Fox News' "Sunday Morning Futures" last month.

Warsh has been increasingly critical of Powell's Federal Reserve and in July, on CNBC, called for sweeping changes on how the Fed conducts business as well as a new Treasury-Fed accord "like we did in 1951, after another period where we built up our nation's debt and we were stuck with a central bank that was working at cross purposes with the Treasury."

He said the Fed's "hesitancy to cut rates, I think, is actually quite a mark against them."

"The specter of the miss they made on inflation" after the pandemic, he said, "it has stuck with them. So one of the reasons why the president, I think, is right to be pushing the Fed publicly is we need regime change in the conduct of policy."

"He's very highly thought of," Trump said in June when asked directly about Warsh.

What to know as Israel considers reoccupying Gaza in what would be a major escalation of the war

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is considering ordering the full reoccupation of the Gaza Strip, according to Israeli media, a move that would draw fierce opposition internationally and within Israel.

It would mark a stunning escalation of the nearly 22-month war in the territory that has already been largely destroyed and where experts say famine is unfolding. It would put the lives of countless Palestinians and about 20 living hostages at risk, and deepen Israel's already stark international isolation.

It would also face fierce opposition within Israel: Families of the hostages would consider it a virtual death sentence, and much of the security establishment is also reportedly opposed to an open-ended occupation that would bog down and further strain the army after nearly two years of regional wars.

The threat to reoccupy Gaza could be a negotiating tactic aimed at pressuring Hamas after talks mediated by the United States, Egypt and Qatar appeared to have broken down last month. Or it could be aimed at shoring up support from Netanyahu's far-right coalition partners.

His governing allies have long called for escalating the war, taking over Gaza, relocating much of its

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population through what they refer to as voluntary emigration and reestablishing Jewish settlements that were dismantled when Israel withdrew in 2005.

Whether they prevail will likely depend on the one person with leverage over Israel — U.S. President Donald Trump. Asked Tuesday whether he thought Israel should reoccupy Gaza, he said he wasn't aware of the "suggestion" but that "it's going to be pretty much up to Israel."

Ground operations in the most densely populated areas

To take full control of Gaza, Israel would need to launch ground operations in the last areas of the territory that haven't been flattened and where most of Gaza's 2 million Palestinians have sought refuge.

That would mean going into the central city of Deir al-Balah and Muwasi, a so-called humanitarian zone where hundreds of thousands of people live in squalid tent camps along the coast. Such operations would force another wave of mass displacement and further disrupt aid deliveries as the U.N. agencies and humanitarian organizations are already struggling to avert famine.

Israel already controls around 75% of the territory, which has been declared a buffer zone or placed under evacuation orders. With Israel also largely sealing Gaza's borders, it's unclear where civilians would go.

It would also pose a major risk for the remaining 20 or so living hostages, likely held in tunnels or other secret locations. Hamas is believed to have ordered its guards to kill captives if Israeli forces approach.

Hamas-led militants abducted 251 hostages in the Oct. 7, 2023, attack that ignited the war and killed around 1,200 people that day, mostly civilians. They are still holding 50 hostages, less than half of them believed to be alive, and recent videos have shown emaciated captives pleading for their lives.

Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed over 61,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not say how many were civilians or combatants. The ministry, which is part of the Hamas-run government and run by medical professionals, is seen by the United Nations and other experts as the most reliable source on casualties. Israel disputes its toll but has not provided its own.

International outrage and further isolation

Israel's wartime conduct has shocked much of the international community, and prompted even close Western allies to call for an end to the war and to take steps to recognize Palestinian statehood.

The International Court of Justice is considering allegations of genocide, and the International Criminal Court has issued arrest warrants for Netanyahu and his former defense minister, alleging war crimes and crimes against humanity, including the use of starvation as a method of war.

Israel has rejected the allegations and accused those making them of antisemitic "blood libel." It says it has taken every effort to avoid harming civilians and blames Hamas for their deaths because the militants are deeply entrenched in heavily populated areas.

Israel has said it will keep fighting until all the hostages are returned, Hamas is defeated or disarmed, and Gaza's population is given the option of "voluntary emigration," which the Palestinians and much of the international community view as forcible expulsion.

Hamas has said it will only release the remaining hostages in return for a lasting ceasefire and an Israeli withdrawal. It says it is willing to give up power but will not lay down its arms as long as Israel occupies territories the Palestinians want for a future state.

Another open-ended occupation

Israel captured Gaza, the West Bank and east Jerusalem in the 1967 Middle East war. The United Nations, the Palestinians and others continued to view Gaza as occupied territory after the 2005 withdrawal of Israeli troops and settlers, as Israel maintained control of its airspace, coastline, most of its land border and its population registry.

The full reoccupation of Gaza would pose long-term challenges that Israel is well aware of given its long history of occupying Arab lands, including the likelihood of a prolonged insurgency. Israeli support for the war already appears to have declined since Netanyahu ended a ceasefire in March, as soldiers have been killed in hit-and-run attacks.

As an occupying power, Israel would be expected to maintain order and ensure the basic needs of the population are met. In the West Bank, it has largely outsourced that to the Palestinian Authority, which exercises limited autonomy in population centers.

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But in Gaza, Netanyahu has ruled out any future role for the PA, accusing it of not being fully committed to peace, and has not produced any plan for Gaza's postwar governance and reconstruction.

Long-term repercussions

Even if Israel succeeds in suppressing Hamas, the reoccupation of Gaza could pose an even more profound threat to the country.

It would leave Israel in full control of the territory between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, which is home to around 7 million Jews and 7 million Palestinians — most of the latter denied basic rights, including the vote. Even before the war, major human rights groups said the situation amounted to apartheid, something Israel vehemently denies.

Unless large numbers of Palestinians are expelled — no longer merely a fantasy of Israel's far-right — Israel would face an all-too-familiar existential dilemma: Create a Palestinian state in the 1967 territories and preserve Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, or rule over millions of Palestinians indefinitely and hope they never rally behind the idea of equal rights in a binational state.

Israel would no longer be able to point to Hamas' rule in Gaza, or factional divisions among Palestinians, as reasons to avoid such a reckoning. And when Trump leaves office, it may find it has few friends to back it up.

Police arrest suspect in killings of 4 Tennessee family members

The man wanted in the killings of the parents, grandmother and uncle of an infant found abandoned in a front yard in western Tennessee last week has been arrested, police said.

Austin Robert Drummond, 28, was taken into custody amid a search on Tuesday, Jackson police said. His arrest came shortly after police had warned residents of Jackson, which is about 74 miles (119 kilometers) away from the crime scene in Tiptonville, to stay inside their homes, having received a report that he was spotted in a neighborhood.

It came after two tips from members of the community, officials said at a news conference Tuesday. Tennessee Bureau of Investigation Director David Rausch said he couldn't give a motive for the crime yet.

Drummond is expected in court in Tiptonville for an arraignment later this week. He faces four counts of first-degree murder, one count of aggravated kidnapping and weapons offenses, officials have said.

It was not immediately clear whether he had an attorney who could speak on his behalf. An automated message from the public defender's office said to call back later.

Dyer and Lake counties District Attorney Danny Goodman told The Associated Press in a phone interview Tuesday that he has yet to decide if he'll seek the death penalty, but said it was "very likely" he would.

Goodman said Drummond shot the family members, and that Drummond's girlfriend is the sister of the infant's grandmother.

"They were actually all associated with one another," Goodman said. "So it wasn't a random attack."

Tuesday's search left the community, situated on the Mississippi River in western Tennessee and more than 100 miles (161 kilometers) southwest of Nashville, on edge, according to the district attorney.

"The biggest emotion has been fear," Goodman said. "You don't usually hear about in small towns much — you know, a quadruple homicide."

He added: "The two emotions are, one is shock, and the second would be fear."

Hours before the arrest, Jackson Police posted a roughly 20-second video surveillance clip showing someone they said was Drummond, wearing camouflage and carrying a firearm, trying to enter the door of an unspecified building.

Jackson Police Chief Thom Corley said the calls from the public helped officers arrest Drummond, who had been staying in a vacant building near the woods where he was taken into custody.

The investigation into the family's killings in Tiptonville began July 29 after an infant in a car seat was found in a front yard in the Tigrett area, roughly 40 miles (65 kilometers) away. The Dyer County Sheriff's Office said in a statement that a caller reported a minivan or midsize SUV had dropped the infant at a "random individual's front yard."

The sheriff's office later said they were working with investigators in neighboring Lake County, where

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four people had been found dead. Officials determined those people were the child's parents, grandmother and uncle.

Authorities later identified those people as James M. Wilson, 21; Adrianna Williams, 20; Cortney Rose, 38; and Braydon Williams, 15.

Wilson and Adrianna Williams were the infant's parents, while Rose was Adrianna and Braydon Williams' mother.

Investigators determined the four relatives had not been seen since the night before, according to Goodman. A relative had called 911 after finding two vehicles in a remote area, and the four bodies were found in nearby woods, Goodman said.

Tennessee Bureau of Investigation Director David Rausch has said it's believed the killings were a targeted attack by Drummond. The baby, identified by Goodman as a girl, is safe and being cared for by other relatives.

Goodman said authorities believe Drummond drove the baby from Tiptonville to Tigrett, where she was left in a yard.

The TBI has already charged Tanaka Brown, 29, and Giovonte Thomas, 29, with accessory after the fact to first-degree murder. Investigators allege both men "assisted" Drummond, 28, in the killings.

Dearrah Sanders of Jackson was arrested on Monday and charged with being an accessory after the killings.

Drummond's criminal history includes prison time for robbing a convenience store and threatening to go after jurors. He was also charged with attempted murder while behind bars.

An attorney who represented him as a teenager had not returned earlier messages from the AP.

Man accused in Tennessee family's killings captured, but motive and why he spared a baby unknown

A man accused of killing four family members of a baby girl that he left unharmed in a western Tennessee front yard miles from the crime scene last week was captured on Tuesday.

Austin Robert Drummond, 28, was taken into custody after a search that put a community along the Mississippi River on edge and amid several unanswered questions surrounding the July 29 quadruple homicide in Tiptonville.

Here's a closer look at what we know and don't know about the investigation:

How did officials connect the killings with the baby?

The investigation into the family's killings in Tiptonville began after an infant in a car seat was found in a front yard in the Tigrett area, roughly 40 miles (65 kilometers) away. The Dyer County Sheriff's Office said in a statement that a caller reported that a minivan or midsize SUV had dropped the baby at a "random individual's front yard."

The sheriff's office later said they were working with investigators in neighboring Lake County, where four people had been found dead. Officials determined those people were the child's parents, grandmother and uncle.

Why was the baby found so far from the crime scene?

That is not clear.

Detectives believe Drummond drove the baby about 40 miles from Tiptonville, where they say he fatally shot the four adults, to the town of Tigrett, where the baby girl was left in a front yard.

They haven't said publicly why Drummond chose that house.

Dyer and Lake counties District Attorney Danny Goodman declined in an interview with The Associated Press to elaborate on what detectives know about this aspect of the case. He said only that the baby girl is safe now and in the custody of other relatives.

What was the motive?

Investigators have not revealed why they think Drummond carried out the killings.

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Goodman said Drummond knew the four people he's charged with killing and that Drummond's girlfriend is the sister of the child's grandmother, but it's unknown if he has any connection to the baby.

The victims were found fatally shot in a wooded area near Reelfoot Lake, a swamplike body of water near the Mississippi River and not far from the Missouri border.

Did the suspect act alone?

Police say Drummond had help in the killings, but haven't elaborated further.

Tennessee authorities charged Tanaka Brown, 29, and Giovonte Thomas, 29, with accessory after the fact to first-degree murder. Investigators allege both men "assisted" Drummond, 28, in the killings.

Dearrah Sanders of Jackson, Tennessee, was also charged with being an accessory after the killings.

Did Drummond have a criminal background?

Yes, an extensive one. According to court records, Drummond spent years in prison for robbing a convenience store as a 16-year-old and threatening to go after jurors.

He was tried as an adult for the July 2013 robbery in Jackson, Tennessee. During the robbery, he pointed a pistol at the gas station store worker and ordered the cash register to be opened, taking the \$44 inside, court records show.

At a 2020 parole hearing, Drummond said he was on Xanax the night of the robbery and doesn't remember robbing the gas station. He said the firearm was a BB gun.

After the jury convicted him of one count of aggravated robbery in August 2014, he made threats to go after jurors, Drummond said during the hearing. He pleaded guilty in February 2015 to 13 counts of retaliation for past action and was given a combined 13-year sentence. His sentence ended in September 2024, according to Tennessee Department of Correction records.

As of the 2020 parole hearing, Drummond had more than two dozen disciplinary issues in prison, including possession of a deadly weapon, assault, refusing a drug test and gang activity.

Drummond was charged for several activities inside the prison, including attempted murder, after he completed the sentence that originally put him behind bars, Goodman said at a news conference. Drummond was out on bond on the other charges at the time of the killings, Goodman said.

What happens next?

Drummond is expected in court in Tiptonville for an arraignment later this week. He faces four counts of first-degree murder, one count of aggravated kidnapping and weapons offenses, officials have said.

Goodman said he's yet to decide whether to seek the death penalty, but said "it is very likely" he'll pursue it.

An attorney who represented Drummond in his case as a teenager did not return an earlier message requesting a comment. A telephone listing for Drummond could not be found, and an automated message from the local public defender's office said to call back later.

US government proposes easing some restrictions on drones traveling long distances

A new federal rule proposed Tuesday would make it easier for companies to use drones over longer distances out of the operator's sight without having to go through a cumbersome waiver process.

The federal government had already approved 657 waivers to allow companies such as Amazon and major utilities to do this in certain circumstances, but the waiver process made it difficult. The rule would establish a clear process for drone operators to seek approval for using drones this way.

The industry has long pressed for the rule because being able to operate drones out of sight opens up a multitude of possibilities for their use. Being able to do this enables more use of drones for deliveries, inspecting infrastructure like bridges and power lines and other uses in agriculture like spraying fertilizer over thousands of acres on large farms.

"This draft rule is a critical step toward enabling drone operations that will enhance safety, transform commercial services, and strengthen public safety with drones as a force multiplier," Michael Robbins, president & CEO of the Association for Uncrewed Vehicle Systems International trade group, said in a statement.

Rules spell out when drones can be flown out of sight

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The rule spells out the circumstances drones can be used. These out of sight flights will only be allowed under 400 feet, and there are precautions to ensure they don't disrupt aviation and cause problems around airports, Federal Aviation Administration Administrator Bryan Bedford said. The drones will be required to have collision-avoidance technology to keep them away from planes and other drones. And the rule will only allow drones up to 1,320 pounds — including their payloads.

"The issue hasn't been that America just can't innovate, America can't create, America can't build amazing drone technology. It's that we've had a bureaucracy in place that makes it incredibly incredibly difficult for innovators to actually innovate," Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy said.

The rules are designed to address the way modern drones are being used today.

"While the technology has rapidly advanced over the last decade, our regulatory framework in the United States has failed to keep pace," said Lisa Ellman, CEO of the Commercial Drone Alliance group. "Drone operators must navigate a labyrinth of ill-suited regulations designed for crewed aircraft."

A rule in the works for years

President Donald Trump issued executive orders in June directing the Transportation Department to quickly get this rule out. The orders also included restrictions meant to help protect against terrorism, espionage and public safety threats.

Drones are already used in a variety of ways, including bolstering search and rescue operations, applying fertilizer, inspecting power lines and railroad bridges, and even delivering packages.

Amazon is one of the companies that received a waiver allowing it to use drones this way for some of its deliveries in College Station, Texas, as it develops the technology. This rule should make it easier for Amazon and other companies to get approval to use drones this way in more communities.

Flytrex, a Tel Aviv-based drone delivery company that has operations in Texas and North Carolina, said it was excited to see the proposed rule take shape. Flytrex co-founder and CEO Yariv Bash called the proposed rule "a foundational milestone that paves the way for drone delivery to scale across more communities in the U.S."

"This rule is a critical step toward unlocking the full potential of drone delivery and ensuring its long-term business viability nationwide," Bash said.

Addressing concerns about safety

The war in Ukraine has highlighted how drones could be used in a military or terrorist attack — a concern as the World Cup and Olympics approach in the U.S. There also have been espionage cases where drones have been used to surveil sensitive sites. And White House officials said drones are being used to smuggle drugs over the border, and there are concerns about the potential for a disastrous collision between a drone and an airliner around an airport.

The rule won't allow drone flights over large open-air gatherings like concerts or sporting events or crowded parks.

The FAA consulted with the Department of Homeland Security as it developed this rule to make sure security concerns are addressed. The government will accept comments on the new rule over the next 60 days before finalizing the rule likely sometime later this year. Drone operators will have to go through background checks and be certified to operate drones out of their sight.

Duffy and Bedford said they hope having regulations in place can help prevent problems like earlier this year when a small drone collided with a "Super Scooper" plane that was fighting wildfires raging through Southern California. The drone punched a hole in the plane's left wing, causing enough damage that officials grounded the aircraft for several days to make repairs.

Authorities tracked down the 56-year-old drone operator, who pleaded guilty to a federal charge of recklessly flying his aircraft. The man admitted he launched his DJI quadcopter to observe fire damage over the Pacific Palisades neighborhood, despite the FAA having restricted drone flying in the area, according to court records. The operator lost sight of the drone after it flew about 1.5 miles from where he had launched it. And that's when it struck the "Super Scooper."

This rule applies directly to commercial and recreational drone operators who must apply to be able to

fly drones out of sight. People who buy drones on their own and don't get approval would still be prohibited from doing this.

Massive central California wildfire threatens more than 800 structures and leaves 3 injured

SANTA MARIA, Calif. (AP) — More than 800 structures are threatened by a massive wildfire in central California that left at least three people injured as it burned through Los Padres National Forest.

The Gifford Fire scorched more than 129 square miles (334 square kilometers) of coastal Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo counties, with 7% containment, according to a U.S. Forest Service update on Tuesday morning.

More than 1,900 personnel are battling the blaze that grew out of at least four smaller fires that erupted Friday along State Route 166 between Santa Maria and Bakersfield. The causes of the fires are under investigation.

The blaze is burning through steep terrain and creating a huge smoke column, said Capt. Scott Safechuck, a spokesperson with the Santa Barbara County Fire Department.

"A lot of it's in really inaccessible areas where even bulldozers can't even get into," Safechuck said, adding that aircraft is being added to the firefight.

The smoke will affect parts of Southwest California, the National Weather Service's Los Angeles office said, noting that wildfire smoke is a health risk. Smoke was expected to move toward the south and east.

The blaze threatened about 872 structures and forced the closure of the highway in both directions east of Santa Maria, a city of about 110,000 people in Santa Barbara County. About 65 miles (105 kilometers) northwest of Santa Barbara and 150 miles (240 kilometers) northwest of Los Angeles, the hilly agricultural region is dotted by sprawling California live oaks and Sycamore trees and is known for its strawberry fields and wine industry.

Firefighters made great progress on the west, north and east flanks of the fire and significant efforts were made to ensure structure protection on the south end, officials said in an update Monday evening. Two new base camps were being established on the north and east sides of the fire, allowing more efficient access to the fire perimeter. Officials said they expected more helicopters to be able to deliver significant water drops Tuesday with a drone doing reconnaissance.

A warming and drying trend was expected to continue from Wednesday through the weekend, with temperatures up to 90 to 100 degrees Thursday and Friday, with increasing fire behavior, officials said.

A motorist was hospitalized with burn injuries after getting out of his vehicle and being overrun by flames, U.S. Forest Service spokesperson Flemming Bertelson said. Two contract employees assisting firefighters were also hurt when their all-terrain vehicle overturned.

Ranchers evacuated cattle Monday as aircraft made water drops on the encroaching flames.

Trump takes an unexpected walk on the White House roof to survey new projects

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's day began typically enough, with a television interview and a call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Then it took an unexpected and unusual turn when he appeared on the roof of the White House's West Wing.

Late Tuesday morning, Trump emerged from a door connected to the State Dining Room and stepped onto the roof above the press briefing room and west colonnade that walls the Rose Garden. He spent nearly 20 minutes surveying the rooftop and the grounds below, including a newly paved makeover of the Rose Garden.

Reporters, tipped off by the out-of-the-ordinary positioning of snipers above the Oval Office, shouted questions from below. One called out: "Sir, why are you on the roof?"

"Taking a little walk," Trump shouted back. "It's good for your health."

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Trump walked with a small group that included James McCrery, architect of the newly announced \$200 million ballroom project. They moved slowly, with Trump frequently gesturing and pointing at the roof and grounds. Several times, he wandered toward the corner nearest the press corps, waving and cupping his hands to shout responses to shouted questions.

At one point, he said he was looking at "another way to spend my money for this country." Later, near the end of his appearance on the roof, Trump was asked what he was going to build. He quipped, "Nuclear missiles."

The unexpected walk on the rooftop comes as Trump looks to leave a lasting footprint on what's often referred to as "The People's House."

He has substantially redecorated the Oval Office through the addition of golden flourishes and cherubs, presidential portraits and other items and installed massive flagpoles on the north and south lawns to fly the American flag. And last week, his administration announced that construction on a massive ballroom will begin in September and be ready before Trump's term ends in early 2029.

While Trump appeared on the West Wing, the White House has said the ballroom will be where the "small, heavily changed, and reconstructed East Wing currently sits."

While rare, there have been times through the years where presidents ventured out onto — and even slept on — the White House roof.

To promote renewable energy, President Jimmy Carter installed 32 solar panels on the West Wing roof in the 1970s. The panels were removed during the Reagan administration.

In 1910, President William Howard Taft had a sleeping porch built on the roof to escape Washington's hot summer nights.

House committee issues subpoenas for Epstein files and depositions with the Clintons

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House Oversight Committee subpoenaed the Justice Department on Tuesday for files in the Jeffrey Epstein sex trafficking investigation and is seeking depositions with the Clintons and former law enforcement officials, part of a congressional probe that lawmakers believe may show links to President Donald Trump and former top officials.

The Republican-controlled committee issued subpoenas for depositions with former President Bill Clinton, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and eight former top law enforcement officials.

The committee's actions showed how even with lawmakers away from Washington on a monthlong break, interest in the Epstein files is still running high. Trump has denied prior knowledge of Epstein's crimes and claimed he cut off their relationship long ago, and he has repeatedly tried to move past the Justice Department's decision not to release a full accounting of the investigation. But lawmakers from both major political parties, as well as many in the Republican president's political base, have refused to let it go.

Rep. James Comer, the Republican chairman of the oversight committee, noted in letters to Attorney General Pam Bondi and the former officials that the cases of Epstein and his former girlfriend Ghislaine Maxwell "have received immense public interest and scrutiny."

"While the Department undertakes efforts to uncover and publicly disclose additional information related to Mr. Epstein and Ms. Maxwell's cases, it is imperative that Congress conduct oversight of the federal government's enforcement of sex trafficking laws generally and specifically its handling of the investigation and prosecution of Mr. Epstein and Ms. Maxwell," Comer said.

Epstein's circle

Since Epstein's 2019 death in a New York jail cell as he awaited trial for sex trafficking charges, conservative conspiracists have stoked theories about what information investigators gathered on Epstein — and who else knew about his sexual abuse of teenage girls. Republican lawmakers on the House Oversight Committee nodded to that line of questioning last month by initiating the subpoenas for the Clintons, both Democrats, as well as demanding all communications between President Joe Biden's Democratic administration and the Justice Department regarding Epstein.

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Bill Clinton was among a number of luminaries acquainted with Epstein, a wealthy financier, before the criminal investigation against him in Florida became public two decades ago. Clinton has never been accused of wrongdoing by any of the women who say Epstein abused them.

One of Epstein's victims, Virginia Giuffre, once gave a newspaper interview in which she described riding in a helicopter with Clinton and flirting with Trump, but she later said in a deposition that those things hadn't actually happened and were mistakes by the reporter. Clinton has previously said through a spokesperson that while he traveled on Epstein's jet he never visited his homes and had no knowledge of his crimes.

The committee is also demanding interviews under oath from former attorneys general spanning the last four presidential administrations: Merrick Garland, William Barr, Jeff Sessions, Loretta Lynch, Eric Holder and Alberto Gonzales. Lawmakers also subpoenaed former FBI Directors James Comey and Robert Mueller.

However, it was Democrats who sparked the move to subpoena the Justice Department for its files on Epstein. They were joined by some Republicans last month to successfully initiate the subpoena through a subcommittee of the House Oversight Committee.

"Today was an important step forward in our fight for transparency regarding the Epstein files and our dedication to seeking justice for the victims," said Democratic Reps. Robert Garcia, the top Democrat on the committee, and Summer Lee, who initiated the subpoena, in a joint statement. "Now, we must continue putting pressure on the Department of Justice until we actually receive every document."

Will the subpoenas be enforced?

The subpoenas give the Justice Department until Aug. 19 to hand over the requested records, though such requests are typically open to negotiation and can be resisted by the Trump administration.

The committee is also asking the former officials to appear for the depositions throughout August, September and October, concluding with Hillary Clinton on Oct. 9 and Bill Clinton on Oct. 14.

Multiple former presidents have voluntarily testified before Congress, but none has been compelled to do so. That history was invoked by Trump in 2022, between his first and second terms, when he faced a subpoena by the House committee investigating the deadly Jan. 6, 2021, riot by a mob of his supporters at the U.S. Capitol.

Lawyers for Trump resisted the subpoena, citing decades of legal precedent they said shielded an ex-president from being ordered to appear before Congress. The committee ultimately withdrew its subpoena.

The committee had previously issued a subpoena for an interview with Maxwell, who had been serving a prison sentence in Florida for luring teenage girls to be sexually abused by Epstein but was recently transferred to a Texas facility.

However, Comer has indicated he is willing to delay that deposition until after the Supreme Court decides whether to hear an appeal to her conviction. She argues she was wrongfully prosecuted.

As the Justice Department has tried to appease demands for more disclosure, it has turned attention to Maxwell. Officials interviewed her for 1 1/2 days last month.

But Democrats stressed the importance of gaining direct access to the investigative files, rather than relying on Maxwell's words.

"We need these files now in order to corroborate any claims she makes," Garcia and Lee said, adding, "This fight is not over."

Prosecutors say there's not much new in grand jury transcripts

Another way the Trump administration is trying to address the public clamor for more transparency is by asking federal judges to unseal grand jury transcripts in the cases against Epstein and Maxwell. But prosecutors indicated Monday the public already knows a lot of what's in the documents.

Much of the information "was made publicly available at trial or has otherwise been publicly reported through the public statements of victims and witnesses," prosecutors wrote in court papers Monday.

The prosecutors also made clear they're seeking to unseal only the transcripts of grand jury witnesses' testimony, not the exhibits that accompanied it.

Raw milk sickens 21 people in Florida including 6 children

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Six children are among 21 people who have E. coli or campylobacter infections after consuming raw milk from a farm in Florida, public health officials said.

Seven people have been hospitalized, and at least two of them are suffering severe complications, the Florida Department of Health said Monday. It did not specify if any of the six infected children under 10 are among those being treated in hospitals, nor how many people were infected by E. coli, campylobacter or both bacteria.

"Sanitation practices in this farm are of particular concern due to the number of cases," reads the state advisory, which did not identify the farm linked to the cluster of infections in northeast and central Florida.

Raw milk appears to be gaining in popularity, despite years of warnings about the health risks of drinking unpasteurized products. The Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention say raw milk is one of the "riskiest" foods people can consume.

Raw milk is far more likely than pasteurized milk to cause illnesses and hospitalizations because of dangerous bacteria such as campylobacter, listeria, salmonella and E. coli, research shows. The infections can cause gastrointestinal illness, and in some cases may lead to serious complications, including a life-threatening form of kidney failure. Young children, the elderly, immunocompromised people and pregnant women are at greater risk of complications.

"We invented pasteurization for a reason," said Keith Schneider, a food safety professor at the University of Florida. "It's maddening that this is happening."

States have widely varying regulations regarding raw milk, with some allowing retail purchases in stores and others allowing sale only at farms. Some states allow "cowshares," in which customers buy milk produced by designated animals, and some allow consumption only by farm owners, employees or "non-paying guests."

In Florida, the sale and distribution of raw milk for human consumption is illegal, but retailers get around the ban by labeling their products as for pet or animal food only. Schneider called it a "wink, wink, nudge, nudge," form of regulation.

"Everybody knows that they're selling it for human consumption," Schneider said, adding that people getting sick — or even seriously ill — from drinking raw milk is "not a question of if, but when."

The world nearly beat polio. But fake records, an imperfect vaccine and missteps aided its comeback

KARACHI, Pakistan (AP) — For the past decade, Sughra Ayaz has traveled door to door in southeastern Pakistan, pleading with parents to allow children to be vaccinated against polio as part of a global campaign to wipe out the paralytic disease. She hears their demands and fears. Some are practical — families need basics like food and water more than vaccines. Others are simply unfounded — the oral doses are meant to sterilize their kids.

Amid rampant misinformation and immense pressure for the campaign to succeed, Ayaz said, some managers have instructed workers to falsely mark children as immunized. And the vaccines, which must be kept cold, aren't always stored correctly, she added.

"In many places, our work is not done with honesty," Ayaz said.

The World Health Organization and partners embarked on their polio campaign in 1988 with the bold goal of eradication — a feat seen only once for human diseases, with smallpox in 1980. They came close several times, including in 2021, when just five cases of the natural virus were reported in Pakistan and Afghanistan. But since then, cases rebounded, hitting 99 last year, and officials have missed at least six self-imposed eradication deadlines.

Afghanistan and Pakistan remain the only countries where transmission of polio — which is highly infectious, affects mainly children under 5, and can cause irreversible paralysis within hours — has never been interrupted. The worldwide campaign has focused most of its attention and funding there for the past decade.

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But in its quest to eliminate the disease, the Global Polio Eradication Initiative has been derailed by mismanagement and what insiders describe as blind allegiance to an outdated strategy and a problematic oral vaccine, according to workers, polio experts and internal materials obtained by The Associated Press.

Officials have falsified vaccination records, selected unqualified people to dole out drops, failed to send out teams during mass campaigns, and dismissed concerns about the oral vaccine sparking outbreaks, according to documents shared with AP by staffers from GPEI – one of the largest and most expensive public health campaigns in history, with over \$20 billion spent and nearly every country in the world involved.

In Afghanistan and Pakistan – which share a border, harbor widespread mistrust of vaccines, and have weakened healthcare systems and infrastructure – local staffers like Ayaz have for years flagged problems to senior managers. But those issues, along with concerns by staffers and outside health officials, have long gone unaddressed, insiders say.

Officials tout the successes – 3 billion children vaccinated, an estimated 20 million people who would have been paralyzed spared – while acknowledging challenges in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Remote villages are hard to reach, some cultural and religious authorities instruct against vaccination, and hundreds of polio workers and security staff have been killed because of their alignment with a Western-led initiative.

Dr. Jamal Ahmed, WHO's polio director, defended progress in those two countries, citing workers' tailored response in resistant pockets.

"There's so many children being protected today because of the work that was done over the past 40 years," he said. "Let's not overdramatize the challenges, because that leads to children getting paralyzed."

Ahmed said he believes authorities will end the spread of polio in the next 12 to 18 months. Its latest goal for eradication is 2029. The campaign says about 45 million children in Pakistan and 11 million in Afghanistan must be vaccinated this year. Children typically need four doses of two drops each to be considered fully immunized.

Dr. Zulfiqar Bhutta, who has served on advisory groups for WHO, the Gates Foundation and others, said campaign officials should listen to the criticism of its tactics.

"Continuing blindly with the same strategies that we have relied on since eradication began is unlikely to lead to a different result," he said.

Documents show yearslong problems on polio vaccination teams

Internal WHO reports reviewing vaccination drives in Afghanistan and Pakistan over the past decade – given to AP by current and former staffers – show that as early as 2017, local workers were alerting significant problems to senior managers.

The documents flagged multiple cases of falsified vaccination records, health workers being replaced by untrained relatives and workers improperly administering vaccines.

On numerous occasions, WHO officials noted, "vaccinators did not know about vaccine management," citing failure to keep doses properly cold. They also found sloppy or falsified reporting, with workers noting "more used vaccine vials than were actually supplied."

According to an August 2017 report from Kandahar, Afghanistan, local government authorities and others interfered in choosing vaccinators, "resulting in the selection of underage and illiterate volunteers."

Vaccination teams worked "in a hurried manner," reports said, with "no plan for monitoring or supervision." A team in Nawzad, Afghanistan, covered just half of the intended area in 2017, with 250 households missed entirely. Village elders said no one visited for at least two years.

Vaccine workers and health officials in Afghanistan and Pakistan confirmed the issues in the documents and told AP it's hard for campaign leadership to grasp the difficulties in the field. Door-to-door efforts are stymied by cultural barriers, unfounded stories about vaccines, and the region's poverty and transience.

"Most of the time when we go to vaccinate and knock on the door, the head of the house or the man is not at home," said one worker, speaking on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to talk to the press. "Many people find it offensive that a stranger knocks on the door and talks to a woman."

Some workers find families have moved. Occasionally, they say, the encounter abuse.

"We have shared these problems with our senior officials," the worker told AP. "They know about it."

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In an email response to AP's questions about officials' knowledge of the issues, WHO polio director Ahmed noted "operational challenges" in Afghanistan and Pakistan and said the program has "robust monitoring and evaluation processes."

Worker Ayaz described "fake finger marking" — placing the ink used to show a child is vaccinated on their pinky even when no vaccine has been given.

"There is so much pressure," Ayaz said.

Critics point to continued use of the oral polio vaccine

Before the first polio vaccine was developed in 1955, the disease — spread mostly from person to person, through contaminated water and via fecal particles — was among the world's most feared, paralyzing hundreds of thousands of children annually. People avoided crowded places during epidemics, and hospital wards filled with children encased in iron lungs after the virus immobilized their breathing muscles.

Polio is mainly spread when people are exposed to water infected with the virus. In countries with poor sanitation, children often become infected when they come into contact with contaminated waste.

WHO says that as long as a single child remains infected, kids everywhere are at risk.

Eradication demands near-perfection — zero polio cases and immunizing more than 95% of children.

But public health leaders and former WHO staffers say campaign efforts are far from perfect, and many question the oral vaccine.

The oral vaccine — proven to be safe and effective — has been given to more than 3 billion children. But there are some extremely rare side effects: Scientists estimate that for every 2.7 million first doses given, one child will be paralyzed by the live polio virus in the vaccine.

In even rarer instances, the live virus can mutate into a form capable of starting new outbreaks among unimmunized people where vaccination rates are low.

Worldwide, several hundred vaccine-derived cases have been reported annually since at least 2021, with at least 98 this year.

Most public health experts agree the oral vaccine should be pulled as soon as possible. But they acknowledge there simply isn't enough injectable vaccine — which uses no live virus and doesn't come with the risks of the oral vaccine — to wipe out polio alone. The injectable vaccine also is more expensive and requires more training to administer.

More than two dozen current and former senior polio officials told AP the agencies involved haven't been willing to even consider revising their strategy to account for some of the campaign's problems.

Dr. Tom Frieden, a former director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention who sits on an independent board reviewing polio eradication, said it would be impossible to eliminate polio without the oral vaccine. But he's urged authorities to find ways to adapt, such as adopting new methods to identify polio cases more quickly. Since 2011, he and colleagues have issued regular reports about overall program failures.

"There's no management," he said, citing a lack of accountability.

Last year, former WHO scientist Dr. T. Jacob John twice emailed WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus calling for a "major course correction." John shared the emails with AP and said he's received no response.

"WHO is persisting with polio control and creating polio with one hand and attempting to control it by the other," John wrote.

In his response to AP, WHO polio director Ahmed said the oral vaccine is a "core pillar" of eradication strategy and that "almost every country that is polio-free today used (it) to achieve that milestone."

"We need to step back and really care for the people," he said. "The only way we can do that in large parts of the world is with oral polio vaccine."

Ahmed also pointed to the success WHO and partners had eliminating polio from India, once considered a nearly impossible task. In the four years before polio was wiped out there, health workers delivered about 1 billion doses of the oral vaccine to more than 170 million children.

Today, nearly all of the world's polio cases -- mostly in Africa and the Middle East -- are mutated viruses from the oral vaccine, except for Afghanistan and Pakistan.

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Scott Barrett, a Columbia University professor, called for an inquiry into how things went so wrong — particularly with a failed effort in 2016, when authorities removed a strain from the oral vaccine. They miscalculated, leading to outbreaks in more than 40 countries that paralyzed more than 3,000 children, according to an expert report commissioned by WHO. Last year, a mutated virus traced to that effort paralyzed a baby in Gaza.

"Unless you have a public inquiry where all the evidence comes out and WHO makes serious changes, it will be very hard to trust them," he said.

Mistrust of the polio eradication effort persists

With an annual budget of about \$1 billion, the polio initiative is among the most expensive in all of public health. This year, the U.S. withdrew from WHO, and President Donald Trump has cut foreign aid. WHO officials have privately admitted that sustaining funding would be difficult without success.

Some say the money would be better spent on other health needs.

"We have spent more than \$1 billion (in external polio funding) in the last five years in Pakistan alone, and it didn't buy us any progress," said Roland Sutter, who formerly led polio research at WHO. "If this was a private company, we would demand results."

Villagers, too, have protested the cost, staging hundreds of boycotts of immunization campaigns since 2023. Instead of polio vaccines, they ask for medicine, food and electricity.

In Karachi, locals told AP they didn't understand the government's fixation on polio and complained of other issues — dirty water, heroin addiction. Workers are accompanied by armed guards; Pakistani authorities say more than 200 workers and police assigned to protect them have been killed since the 1990s, mostly by militants.

The campaign also is up against a wave of misinformation, including that the vaccine is made from pig urine or will make children reach puberty early. Some blame an anti-vaccine sentiment growing in the U.S. and other countries that have largely funded eradication efforts and say it's reaching even remote areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In suburban southwest Pakistan, Saleem Khan, 58, said two grandchildren under 5 were vaccinated over his family's objections.

"It results in disability," said Khan, without citing evidence for his belief. "They are vaccinated because officials reported our refusal to authorities and the police."

Svea Closser, professor of international health at Johns Hopkins University, said Pakistan and Afghanistan were less resistant to immunization decades ago. Now, people are angry about the focus on polio and lack of help for diseases like measles or tuberculosis, she said, spurring conspiracy theories.

"Polio eradication has created a monster," Closser said. It doesn't help, she added, that in this region, public trust in vaccine campaigns was undermined when the CIA organized a fake hepatitis drive in 2011 in an attempt to get DNA and confirm the presence of Osama bin Laden or his family.

Workers see that continued mistrust every day.

In a mountainous region of southeastern Afghanistan where most people survive by growing wheat and raising cows and chickens, a mother of five said she'd prefer that her children be vaccinated against polio, but her husband and other male relatives have instructed their families to reject it. They believe the false rumors that it will compromise their children's fertility.

"If I allow it," the woman said, declining to be named over fears of family retribution, "I will be beaten and thrown out."

What to know about the Titan sub and its tragic final dive to the Titanic

The Titan submersible was crushed by intense water pressure beneath the North Atlantic Ocean in the summer of 2023. A catastrophic implosion instantly killed the four passengers and pilot, Stockton Rush, who was also the CEO of the company that owned the vessel.

Two years later, the U.S. Coast Guard released a lengthy report saying the disaster could have been

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prevented, but deeply flawed safety procedures and efforts to avoid oversight had effectively doomed the vessel and all aboard.

Things to know about Titan:

What was the Titan?

Titan had been making voyages to the Titanic shipwreck since 2021. Owned by OceanGate, a company based in Washington state, the final dive came on June 18, 2023. The submersible was reported overdue that afternoon, and ships, planes and equipment were rushed to the scene about 435 miles (700 kilometers) south of St. John's, Newfoundland.

The Titanic rests on the ocean floor about 12,500 feet (3,800 meters) below the surface. Experts had cautioned that the submersible's hull could implode under intense pressure at extreme depths.

The craft's design

OceanGate touted Titan's roomier cylinder-shaped cabin made of a carbon-fiber, although experts say it was a departure from the sphere-shaped cabins made of titanium used by most submersibles.

A sphere is a "perfect shape" because water pressure is exerted equally on all areas, said Chris Roman, a professor at the University of Rhode Island's Graduate School of Oceanography.

Titan had made more than two dozen deep-sea dives, which put repeated stress on the hull, said Jasper Graham-Jones, an associate professor of mechanical and marine engineering at the University of Plymouth in the United Kingdom.

Investigators also found that Titan was stored outdoors over the Canadian winter, where its hull was exposed to temperature fluctuations that compromised the integrity of the vessel.

The water pressure at the Titanic is roughly 400 atmospheres or 6,000 pounds per square inch. Arun Bansil, a Northeastern University physics professor, likened the pressure to the force of a "whale biting on somebody."

"The passengers probably would have had no idea what happened," Bansil said in 2023.

What investigators said

OceanGate had a culture of downplaying, ignoring and even falsifying key safety information to improve its reputation and dodge scrutiny from regulators, Coast Guard investigators found.

OceanGate ignored "red flags" and had a "toxic workplace culture," while its mission was hindered by lack of domestic and international framework for submersible operations, the report says.

Numerous OceanGate employees have come forward since the implosion to support those claims.

"By strategically creating and exploiting regulatory confusion and oversight challenges, OceanGate was ultimately able to operate TITAN completely outside of the established deep-sea protocols," the report found.

In addition to Rush, the implosion killed French explorer Paul-Henri Nargeolet, British adventurer Hamish Harding and two members of a prominent Pakistani family, Shahzada Dawood and his son Suleman Dawood.

What to know about Legionnaires' disease, which has sickened dozens in New York City

An outbreak of Legionnaires' disease in New York City has killed two people and sickened 58 since late July.

City health officials link the Central Harlem outbreak to cooling towers, structures containing water and a fan that are used to cool buildings. They said 11 of these towers initially tested positive for a type of bacteria that causes Legionnaires' disease, but the problem has been remedied.

They urged people in the area with flu-like symptoms to contact a health care provider as soon as possible, especially if they are 50 or older, smoke or have chronic lung conditions.

Here's what to know.

What is Legionnaires' disease?

It's a type of pneumonia caused by Legionella bacteria, which grow in warm water and spread in building water systems. They can be found in places such as showerheads, hot tubs and cooling towers.

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People often get the disease by inhaling aerosols from contaminated water. Hospital patients can also contract it through contaminated water or ice, and babies can be exposed during water births, health officials said. People don't get it from each other.

Symptoms usually develop two days to two weeks after exposure and include cough, fever, headaches, muscle aches and shortness of breath, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

How does Legionnaires' disease hurt you and how can you treat it?

It's important to be diagnosed quickly and treated with the appropriate antibiotics, health officials said.

If untreated, the disease usually worsens during the first week, the World Health Organization said. Complications can include respiratory failure, shock and kidney or multi-organ failure.

How can Legionnaires' disease be prevented?

People responsible for the safety of buildings and water systems can reduce the threat by taking steps to minimize the growth of the bacteria, the WHO said. For example, they should regularly clean and disinfect cooling towers, maintain an adequate level of chlorine in spa pools and flush unused taps in buildings weekly.

There are also steps people can take to reduce the risk of Legionnaires' disease at home. New York state health officials suggest draining garden hoses; following manufacturers' instructions for cleaning and replacing water filters; checking chlorine levels in pools and hot tubs regularly and flushing hot water heaters twice a year.

Gaza aid truck drivers face increasing danger from desperate crowds and armed gangs

Truck drivers trying to deliver aid inside Gaza say their work has become increasingly dangerous in recent months as people have grown desperately hungry and violent gangs have filled a power vacuum left by the territory's Hamas rulers.

Crowds of hungry people routinely rip aid off the backs of moving trucks, the local drivers said. Some trucks are hijacked by armed men working for gangs who sell the aid in Gaza's markets for exorbitant prices. Israeli troops often shoot into the chaos, they said.

Drivers have been killed in the mayhem.

Since March, when Israel ended a ceasefire in its war with Hamas and halted all imports, the situation has grown increasingly dire in the territory of some 2 million Palestinians. International experts are now warning of a "worst-case scenario of famine" in Gaza.

Under heavy international pressure, Israel last week announced measures to let more aid into Gaza. Though aid groups say it's still not enough, getting even that amount from the border crossings to the people who need it is difficult and extremely dangerous, the drivers said.

Driving aid trucks can be deadly

Thousands of people packed around the road Monday as two trucks entered southern Gaza, AP video showed. Young men overwhelmed the trucks, standing on the cabs' roofs, dangling from the sides and clambering over each other onto the truck beds to grab boxes even as the trucks slowly kept driving.

"Some of my drivers are scared to go transfer aid because they're concerned about how they'll untangle themselves from large crowds of people," said Abu Khaled Selim, vice president of the Special Transport Association, a nonprofit group that works with private transportation companies across the Gaza Strip and advocates for truck drivers' rights.

Selim said his nephew, Ashraf Selim, a father of eight, was killed July 29 by a stray bullet when Israeli forces opened fire on crowds climbing onto the aid truck he was driving.

Shifa Hospital officials said they received his body with an apparent gunshot to the head. The Israeli military said it was unaware of the incident and that "as a rule" it does not carry out deliberate attacks on aid trucks.

Earlier in the war, aid deliveries were safer because, with more food getting into Gaza, the population was less desperate. Hamas-run police had been seen securing convoys and went after suspected looters

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and merchants who resold aid at exorbitant prices,

Now, "with the situation unsecured, everything is permissible," said Selim, who appealed for protection so the aid trucks could reach warehouses.

The U.N. does not accept protection from Israeli forces, saying it would violate its rules of neutrality, and said that given the urgent need for aid it would accept that hungry people were going to grab food off the back of the trucks as long as they weren't violent.

Flooding Gaza with renewed aid would ease the desperation and make things safer for the drivers, said Juliette Touma, communications director at UNRWA, the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees.

The danger for drivers is growing

Ali al-Derbashi, 22, was an aid truck driver for more than a year and a half, but he quit after his last trip three weeks ago because of the increasing danger, he said. Some people taking aid off the trucks are now carrying cleavers, knives and axes, he said.

He was once ambushed and forcibly redirected to an area designated by Israel as a conflict zone in its war against Hamas. There everything was stolen, including his truck's fuel and batteries, and his tires were shot out, he said. He was beaten and his phone was stolen.

"We put our lives in danger for this. We leave our families for two or three days every time. And we don't even have water or food ourselves," he said. In addition to the danger, the drivers faced humiliation from Israeli forces, he said, who put them through "prolonged searches, unclear instructions, and hours of waiting."

The war began Oct. 7, 2023, when Hamas-led militants killed around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted 251 others. Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed more than 61,000 Palestinians, according to the latest figures by Gaza's Health Ministry, which doesn't distinguish between militants and civilians and operates under the Hamas government.

The threats come from everywhere

Nahed Sheheibr, head of the Special Transport Association, said the danger for the drivers comes from everywhere. He accused Israel of detaining drivers and using them as human shields. The Israeli military did not comment on the accusation. In recent days, men linked to a violent Gaza clan fired at drivers, injuring one, and looted a convoy of 14 trucks, he said. They later looted a convoy of 10 trucks.

Hossni al-Sharafi, who runs a trucking company and was an aid driver himself, said he is only allowed to use drivers who have no political affiliation and have been approved by Israel to transport aid from crossings.

Al-Sharafi said he was detained by Israeli forces for more than 10 days last year while transporting aid from the southern Kerem Shalom crossing and interrogated about where the truck was headed and how the aid was being distributed. Israeli officials did not comment on the accusations.

Some drivers spoke of being shot at repeatedly by armed gangs. Others said their trucks were routinely picked clean — even of the wooden pallets — by waves of desperate people, many of whom were fighting each other for the food, while Israeli troops were shooting. Hungry families who miss out on the aid throw stones at the trucks in anger.

Anas Rabea said the moment he pulled out of the Zikkim crossing last week his aid truck was overwhelmed by a crowd.

"Our instructions are to stop, because we don't want to run anyone over," he said. "It's crazy. You have people climbing all over the cargo, over the windows. It's like you're blind, you can't see out."

After the crowd had stripped everything, he drove another few hundred meters and was stopped by an armed gang that threatened to shoot him. They searched the truck and took a bag of flour he had saved for himself, he said.

"Every time we go out, we get robbed," he said. "It's getting worse day by day."

NFL longevity demands wisdom as much as determination and talent. These seasoned guys can explain

EAGAN, Minn. (AP) — Harrison Smith, just like anyone approaching middle age, has learned to accept the realities of getting older. The joints, for one, don't quite move as effortlessly as they once did.

So that's where the 14th-year free safety for the Minnesota Vikings has aimed his recent training regimens, customizing resistance exercises to simulate the stress that NFL games can place on critical areas of the body.

Reaching at full extension to make a tackle at full speed puts the arm muscles and tendons in a vulnerable position. The more fluidly the elbow can bend, the better.

"All the strength work in the world isn't really going to translate to real strength on the field if your joints don't have the range they once did, especially range under load," Smith said. "I've come up with different ways to work out that aren't necessarily just the traditional banging weights around. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with that, but if you don't have your range ready, it's kind of almost counterproductive."

In a sport where less than half the players in the league last season had at least five years of experience, as salary cap constraints perpetually conspire with constant injury risk and overall physical decline, the fountain of youth can seem like a unicorn. Smith's approach provides some valuable clues for finding the most vital source: wisdom.

"When you meet Harrison Smith, right away you understand why he might be the type of person to defy odds, and he's done nothing short of convincing us that over these few years," Vikings general manager Kwesi Adofo-Mensah said.

The sturdy 30

From a famous quarterback like Aaron Rodgers dropping back in the pocket to a steady six-time Pro Bowl pick like Smith patrolling the secondary, the young man's league still has some space for gray hair. But sticking around takes more than just determination and talent.

"I feel great, actually. I don't feel like a 37-year-old. Not sure what they're supposed to feel like, but I feel a little younger," San Francisco 49ers left tackle Trent Williams said at the beginning of training camp. "As we get older, things start to change. I think you've got to pay a little bit more attention to what you put in your body, how you treat your body. Moreso than just being a football player, it's just a natural maturation of a human being. When you get older you can't do the same things you did when you were 22."

According to an Associated Press review of the 90-man rosters across the league last week, there are 30 players currently with an NFL club who were born in the 1980s. That's barely 1%. Not only has Generation X been long gone from the game, once Tom Brady retired in 2023, but Millennials are already in the minority.

Rodgers, of course, is the oldest active player at 41, followed by New York Jets kicker Nick Folk (40) and Cleveland Browns quarterback Joe Flacco (40). The sturdy 30 includes six long snappers, two punters and two kickers, plus nine quarterbacks — the positions that usually produce the longest-lasting players.

"You have to evolve every single year," Kansas City Chiefs tight Travis Kelce said.

The 36-year-old Smith is the lone defensive back. Kelce is the only offensive skill-position player who's not a quarterback. Williams and Arizona Cardinals left tackle Kelvin Beachum, now a backup, are the offensive linemen. Demario Davis of the New Orleans Saints and Nick Bellore of the Washington Commanders, who plays almost exclusively on special teams, are the linebackers. Then there's a well-decorated group of five defensive linemen: Calais Campbell (Arizona Cardinals), Cameron Heyward (Pittsburgh Steelers), John Jenkins (Baltimore Ravens), Cameron Jordan (New Orleans Saints) and Von Miller (Washington Commanders).

"I still feel great. I feel like I can go out there and dominate," said Campbell, who returned this year to his original team, the Cardinals. "I wish I had a magic formula. I think I've just been blessed. God's given me a lot of blessings to play this game I love."

Grinding it out

The list has been trimmed, naturally, from last season. Nine players — tight end Marcedes Lewis, kickers Matt Prater, Justin Tucker and Greg Zuerlein, long snappers Jake McQuaide and Matt Overton, safety

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Kareem Jackson, defensive end Jerry Hughes and defensive tackle Linval Joseph — who logged time on the field in 2024 have not signed with a team this year.

Their peers still grinding through summer practices fully realize they'll be permanently on the sideline sooner than later.

"I start a lot earlier doing my training. Just listen to my body when I need to take a rest," Heyward said. "But it's more just trying to get stronger as soon as possible after the season. Less time to recover, but recovering through the process."

Mastering the art of recovery, forever a moving target, is a primary focus. Moving around on Mondays after games can be a chore, but figuring out how to maximize those summer strength and conditioning sessions for a mid-30s player is also a challenge.

Smith, a soft-spoken leader who'd much rather have a deep locker-room conversation about life in professional football than give the defense a rah-rah pregame speech, fields more questions from young players about recovery than any other topic.

"Sometimes you just grind it out and you don't feel good, and that's how it is," said Smith, who also mixes in pickup basketball with his offseason work in his hometown of Knoxville, Tennessee.

Pride and perspective are part of the NFL roadmap for longevity, too. Heyward's oldest son, 9-year-old Callen, has spent a few nights with him in his dorm room.

"There's a hunger there that I know I'm in a rare group that gets to see year 15, but it's something I constantly think about," Heyward said. "There's things I want to check off before I hang them up, and I haven't reached those goals yet."

Russia says it no longer will abide by its self-imposed moratorium on intermediate-range missiles

MOSCOW (AP) — Russia has declared that it no longer considers itself bound by a self-imposed moratorium on the deployment of nuclear-capable intermediate range missiles, a warning that potentially sets the stage for a new arms race as tensions between Moscow and Washington rise again over Ukraine.

In a statement Monday, the Russian Foreign Ministry linked the decision to efforts by the U.S. and its allies to develop intermediate range weapons and preparations for their deployment in Europe and other parts of the world. It specifically cited U.S. plans to deploy Typhoon and Dark Eagle missiles in Germany starting next year.

The ministry noted that such actions by the U.S. and its allies create "destabilizing missile potentials" near Russia, creating a "direct threat to the security of our country" and carry "significant harmful consequences for regional and global stability, including a dangerous escalation of tensions between nuclear powers."

It didn't say what specific moves the Kremlin might take, but President Vladimir Putin has previously announced that Moscow was planning to deploy its new Oreshnik missiles on the territory of its neighbor and ally Belarus later this year.

Asked where and when Russia could potentially deploy intermediate-range weapons, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that it's not something to be announced in advance.

"Russia no longer has any limitations, Russia no longer considers itself to be constrained by anything," Peskov told reporters. "Therefore Russia believes it has the right to take respective steps if necessary."

"Decisions on specific parameters of response measures will be made by the leadership of the Russian Federation based on an interdepartmental analysis of the scale of deployment of American and other Western land-based intermediate-range missiles, as well as the development of the overall situation in the area of international security and strategic stability," the Foreign Ministry said.

Russia's move follows Trump's nuclear messaging

The Russian statement follows President Donald Trump's announcement Friday that he's ordering the repositioning of two U.S. nuclear submarines "based on the highly provocative statements" of Dmitry Medvedev, who was president in 2008-12 to allow Putin, bound by term limits, to later return to the office. Trump's statement came as his deadline for the Kremlin to reach a peace deal in Ukraine approaches

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later this week.

Trump said he was alarmed by Medvedev's attitude. Medvedev, who serves as deputy chairman of Russia's Security Council chaired by Putin, has apparently sought to curry favor with his mentor by making provocative statements and frequently lobbing nuclear threats. Last week, he responded to Trump's deadline for Russia to accept a peace deal in Ukraine or face sanctions by warning him against "playing the ultimatum game with Russia" and declaring that "each new ultimatum is a threat and a step toward war."

Medvedev also commented on the Foreign Ministry's statement, describing Moscow's withdrawal from the moratorium as "the result of NATO countries' anti-Russian policy."

"This is a new reality all our opponents will have to reckon with," he wrote on X. "Expect further steps."

INF treaty abandoned in 2019

Intermediate-range missiles can fly between 500 to 5,500 kilometers (310 to 3,400 miles). Such land-based weapons were banned under the 1987 Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.

Trump withdrew from the pact in his first term, citing Russian violations, which Moscow denied. It, in turn, alleged the U.S. had committed violations. The treaty was terminated in 2019, but the Kremlin declared its self-imposed moratorium on their deployment until the U.S. makes such a move.

The collapse of the INF Treaty has stoked fears of a replay of a Cold War-era European missile crisis, when the U.S. and the Soviet Union both deployed intermediate-range missiles on the continent in the 1980s. Such weapons are seen as particularly destabilizing because they take less time to reach targets, compared with intercontinental ballistic missiles, leaving no time for decision-makers and raising the likelihood of a global nuclear conflict over a false launch warning.

Russia's missile forces chief has declared that the new Oreshnik intermediate range missile, which Russia first used against Ukraine in November, has a range to reach all of Europe. Oreshnik can carry conventional or nuclear warheads.

Putin has praised the Oreshnik's capabilities, saying its multiple warheads that plunge to a target at speeds up to Mach 10 are immune to being intercepted and are so powerful that the use of several of them in one conventional strike could be as devastating as a nuclear attack.

Putin has warned the West that Moscow could use it against Ukraine's NATO allies who allowed Kyiv to use their longer-range missiles to strike inside Russia.

Takeaways from AP's report on problems in the worldwide campaign to eradicate polio

KARACHI, Pakistan (AP) — For nearly four decades, the World Health Organization and partners have been trying to rid the world of polio, a paralytic disease that has existed since prehistoric times. While cases have dropped more than 99%, polio remains entrenched in parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In its quest to eliminate the virus, WHO and its partners in the Global Polio Eradication Initiative have been derailed by mismanagement and what insiders describe as blind allegiance to an outdated strategy and a problematic oral vaccine, according to workers, polio experts and internal materials obtained by the Associated Press.

Officials tout the successes — 3 billion children vaccinated, an estimated 20 million people who would have been paralyzed spared — while acknowledging challenges in Pakistan and Afghanistan. WHO polio director Dr. Jamal Ahmed defended progress in those two countries, citing workers' tailored response in resistant pockets.

Here are some takeaways from AP's report on what's happened in one of the most expensive efforts in all of public health.

Documents show major problems on polio vaccination teams

Internal WHO reports reviewing polio immunization in Afghanistan and Pakistan over the past decade — given to AP by current and former staffers — show that as early as 2017, local workers were alerting problems to senior managers. The documents flagged multiple cases of falsified vaccination records, health

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workers being replaced by untrained relatives and workers improperly administering vaccines.

On numerous occasions, WHO officials noted, "vaccinators did not know about vaccine management," citing failure to keep doses properly cold. They also found sloppy or falsified reporting, with workers noting "more used vaccine vials than were actually supplied."

According to an August 2017 report from Kandahar, Afghanistan, vaccination teams worked "in a hurried manner," reports said, with "no plan for monitoring." A team in Nawzad, Afghanistan, covered just half of the intended area in 2017, with 250 households missed entirely. Village elders said no one visited for at least two years.

Polio workers say problems have gone unaddressed

Health officials in Afghanistan and Pakistan told AP their efforts to vaccinate children are often stymied by cultural barriers, misinformation about the vaccines, and poverty.

Sughra Ayaz has traveled door to door in southeastern Pakistan for the past decade, pleading for children to be immunized. Some families demand basics such as food and water instead of vaccines. Others, without citing proof for their beliefs, repeat false rumors and say they think the oral vaccine doses are meant to sterilize their kids.

Ayaz said that given the immense pressure for the campaign to succeed, some managers have instructed workers to falsely mark children as immunized

"In many places, our work is not done with honesty," she said.

Some scientists blame the oral vaccine

Polio eradication demands perfection — zero polio cases and immunizing more than 95% of children.

But some scientists and former WHO staffers say the campaign's efforts are far from perfect, blaming in particular the oral vaccine. It's safe and effective, but in very rare instances, the live virus in the oral vaccine can paralyze a child. In even rarer cases, the virus can mutate into a form capable of starting outbreaks among unimmunized people where vaccination rates are low.

Except for Afghanistan and Pakistan, most polio cases worldwide are linked to the vaccine; several hundred cases have been reported annually since 2021, with at least 98 this year.

Most public health experts agree the oral vaccine should be pulled as soon as possible. But they acknowledge there isn't enough injectable vaccine — which uses no live virus and doesn't come with the risks of the oral vaccine — to eliminate polio alone.

The injectable vaccine is more expensive and requires more training to administer.

More than two dozen current and former senior polio officials told AP the agencies involved haven't been willing to even consider revising their strategy to account for campaign problems.

Last year, former WHO scientist Dr. T. Jacob John twice emailed WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus calling for a "major course correction." John wrote that "WHO is persisting with polio control and creating polio with one hand and attempting to control it by the other."

Ahmed told AP the oral vaccine is a "core pillar" of eradication strategy and that "almost every country that is polio-free today used (it) to achieve that milestone."

Critics say there's no accountability

Dr. Tom Frieden, who sits on an independent board reviewing polio eradication, said he and colleagues have urged WHO and partners to adapt to obstacles in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Since 2011, the board has issued regular reports about program failures, but had little impact.

"There's no management," he said.

With an annual budget of about \$1 billion, polio eradication is among the most expensive initiatives in public health. WHO officials have privately admitted that sustaining funding will be difficult without signs of progress.

Roland Sutter, who previously headed polio research at WHO, said donors had spent more than \$1 billion in Pakistan trying to get rid of polio in the last five years — and made little progress.

"If this was a private company, we would demand results," he said.

Ahmed pointed to the program's many successes.

"Let's not overdramatize the challenges, because that leads to children getting paralyzed," he said.

Mistrust of the vaccine persists

Vaccine workers and health officials say it's hard for campaign leadership to grasp the difficulties in the field. Door-to-door efforts are stymied by cultural barriers, unfounded stories about vaccines, and the region's poverty and transience.

The campaign is up against a wave of misinformation, including that the vaccine is made from pig urine or will make children reach puberty early. Some blame an anti-vaccine sentiment growing in the U.S. and other countries that have largely funded eradication efforts.

In a mountainous region of southeastern Afghanistan where most people survive by growing wheat and raising cows and chickens, many are wary of the Western-led initiative.

A mother of five said she'd prefer that her children be vaccinated against polio, but her husband and other male relatives have instructed their families to reject it, fearing it will compromise their children's fertility.

"If I allow it," the woman said, declining to be named over fears of family retribution, "I will be beaten and thrown out."

Going online in Russia can be frustrating, complicated and even dangerous

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — YouTube videos that won't load. A visit to a popular independent media website that produces only a blank page. Cellphone internet connections that are down for hours or days.

Going online in Russia can be frustrating, complicated and even dangerous.

It's not a network glitch but a deliberate, multipronged and long-term effort by authorities to bring the internet under the Kremlin's full control. Authorities adopted restrictive laws and banned websites and platforms that won't comply. Technology has been perfected to monitor and manipulate online traffic.

While it's still possible to circumvent restrictions by using virtual private network apps, those are routinely blocked, too.

Authorities further restricted internet access this summer with widespread shutdowns of cellphone internet connections and adopting a law punishing users for searching for content they deem illicit.

They also are threatening to go after the popular WhatsApp platform while rolling out a new "national" messaging app that's widely expected to be heavily monitored.

President Vladimir Putin urged the government to "stifle" foreign internet services and ordered officials to assemble a list of platforms from "unfriendly" states that should be restricted.

Experts and rights advocates told The Associated Press that the scale and effectiveness of the restrictions are alarming. Authorities seem more adept at it now, compared with previous, largely futile efforts to restrict online activities, and they're edging closer to isolating the internet in Russia.

Human Rights Watch researcher Anastasiia Kruope describes Moscow's approach to reining in the internet as "death by a thousand cuts."

"Bit by bit, you're trying to come to a point where everything is controlled."

Censorship after 2011-12 protests

Kremlin efforts to control what Russians do, read or say online dates to 2011-12, when the internet was used to challenge authority. Independent media outlets bloomed, and anti-government demonstrations that were coordinated online erupted after disputed parliamentary elections and Putin's decision to run again for president.

Russia began adopting regulations tightening internet controls. Some blocked websites; others required providers to store call records and messages, sharing it with security services if needed, and install equipment allowing authorities to control and cut off traffic.

Companies like Google or Facebook were pressured to store user data on Russian servers, to no avail, and plans were announced for a "sovereign internet" that could be cut off from the rest of the world.

Russia's popular Facebook-like social media platform VK, founded by Pavel Durov long before he launched the Telegram messaging app, came under the control of Kremlin-friendly companies. Russia tried to block Telegram between 2018-20 but failed.

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Prosecutions for social media posts and comments became common, showing that authorities were closely watching the online space.

Still, experts had dismissed Kremlin efforts to rein in the internet as futile, arguing Russia was far from building something akin to China's "Great Firewall," which Beijing uses to block foreign websites.

Ukraine invasion triggers crackdown

After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the government blocked major social media like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, as well as Signal and a few other messaging apps. VPNs also were targeted, making it harder to reach restricted websites.

YouTube access was disrupted last summer in what experts called deliberate throttling by authorities. The Kremlin blamed YouTube owner Google for not maintaining its hardware in Russia. The platform has been wildly popular in Russia, both for entertainment and for voices critical of the Kremlin, like the late opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

Cloudflare, an internet infrastructure provider, said in June that websites using its services were being throttled in Russia. Independent news site Mediazona reported that several other popular Western hosting providers also are being inhibited.

Cyber lawyer Sarkis Darbinyan, founder of Russian internet freedom group Roskomsvoboda, said authorities have been trying to push businesses to migrate to Russian hosting providers that can be controlled.

He estimates about half of all Russian websites are powered by foreign hosting and infrastructure providers, many offering better quality and price than domestic equivalents. A "huge number" of global websites and platforms use those providers, he said, so cutting them off means those websites "automatically become inaccessible" in Russia too.

Another concerning trend is the consolidation of Russia's internet providers and companies that manage IP addresses, according to a July 30 Human Rights Watch report.

Last year, authorities raised the cost of obtaining an internet provider license from 7,500 rubles (about \$90) to 1 million rubles (over \$12,300), and state data shows that more than half of all IP addresses in Russia are managed by seven large companies, with Rostelecom, Russia's state telephone and internet giant, accounting for 25%.

The Kremlin is striving "to control the internet space in Russia, and to censor things, to manipulate the traffic," said HRW's Kruope.

Criminalizing 'extremist' searches

A new Russian law criminalized online searches for broadly defined "extremist" materials. That could include LGBTQ+ content, opposition groups, some songs by performers critical of the Kremlin — and Navalny's memoir, which was designated as extremist last week.

Right advocates say it's a step toward punishing consumers — not just providers — like in Belarus, where people are routinely fined or jailed for reading or following certain independent media outlets.

Stanislav Seleznev, cyber security expert and lawyer with the Net Freedom rights group, doesn't expect ubiquitous prosecutions, since tracking individual online searches in a country of 146 million remains a tall order. But even a limited number of cases could scare many from restricted content, he said.

Another major step could be blocking WhatsApp, which monitoring service Mediascope said had over 97 million monthly users in April.

WhatsApp "should prepare to leave the Russian market," said lawmaker Anton Gorelkin, and a new "national" messenger, MAX, developed by social media company VK, would take its place. Telegram probably won't be restricted, he said.

MAX, promoted as a one-stop shop for messaging, online government services, making payments and more, was rolled out for beta tests but has yet to attract a wide following. Over 2 million people registered by July, the Tass news agency reported.

Its terms and conditions say it will share user data with authorities upon request, and a new law stipulates its preinstallation in all smartphones sold in Russia. State institutions, officials and businesses are actively encouraged to move communications and blogs to MAX.

Anastasiya Zhyrmon of the Access Now digital rights group said both Telegram and WhatsApp were

disrupted in Russia in July in what could be a test of how potential blockages would affect internet infrastructure.

It wouldn't be uncommon. In recent years, authorities regularly tested cutting off the internet from the rest of the world, sometimes resulting in outages in some regions.

Darbinyan believes the only way to make people use MAX is to "shut down, stifle" every Western alternative. "But again, habits ... do not change in a year or two. And these habits acquired over decades, when the internet was fast and free," he said.

Government media and internet regulator Roskomnadzor uses more sophisticated methods, analyzing all web traffic and identifying what it can block or choke off, Darbinyan said.

It's been helped by "years of perfecting the technology, years of taking over and understanding the architecture of the internet and the players," as well as Western sanctions and companies leaving the Russian market since 2022, said Kruope of Human Rights Watch.

Russia is "not there yet" in isolating its internet from the rest of the world, Darbinyan said, but Kremlin efforts are "bringing it closer."

Young adults are less likely to follow politics or say voting is important: AP-NORC poll

WASHINGTON (AP) — Mairekk Griffiths, a 26-year-old cook in a Denver suburb, doesn't think he'll ever pay a lot of attention to U.S. politics unless radical change happens.

"If another party was likely to win, I'd be interested in that," said Griffiths, who voted for Democrat Kamala Harris in last year's presidential race but, like many his age, does not see voting as that valuable.

"I can't say either way that voting matters," Griffiths said. "It's just picking the least bad option. That's what I remember my whole life — both sides are bad, but this side is less bad."

Young people such as Griffiths are less engaged with U.S. politics than older Americans and less likely to say voting is important, according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Young people — even those who follow politics closely — are less likely to say issues such as the economy, government spending and health care are "extremely important" to them than comparable older adults.

The findings point to a broad sense of disillusionment among younger people about the country's political system — even if, like Griffiths, they still end up casting a ballot. Alberto Medina, who leads the Center for Information and Research on Civic Engagement at Tufts University, which studies youth and politics, noted that turnout among young people hit record levels in the 2020 election and was high last year.

"There's a sense that democracy isn't working for young people. There's a lack of belief that democracy is even able to improve their lives," Medina said. "At the same time, we have been living in an era of high youth voting."

Disengagement from political parties and politics

In another sign of their general estrangement from politics, the poll shows young adults are more likely to reject political party labels. About one-third of adults under age 30 identify as political independents who don't lean toward either major political party, compared with 17% of Americans age 60 or older.

The poll also finds young people are far less likely to follow politics closely than older adults are.

Only about 2 in 10 of adults under age 30 say they follow U.S. politics "extremely" or "very" closely, compared with about one-third of Americans overall. That's even higher among adults age 60 or older — 45% of this group says they follow U.S. politics at least very closely.

Disengagement is higher among teenagers, with an AP-NORC poll from May finding 44% of teens ages 13 to 17 report following U.S. politics "not very closely" or "not closely at all."

Meanwhile, about two-thirds of adults under age 30 say it's "extremely" or "very" important to vote, compared with almost 9 in 10 over age 45 who say it's at least "very" important to vote.

Some of these habits could shift as people grow older. Younger people traditionally are less likely to vote than older people, and voter participation tends to go up with age. It's possible that engagement with

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politics could follow a similar pattern.

Brittany Diaz, 28, follows politics closely for an unusual reason: Her oldest son, who is 7, is obsessed with the news and watches it every night. Diaz, a Republican who lives in an Albuquerque, New Mexico, suburb, acknowledges that she's unusual among her age group because she decided to start paying attention to politics when she had her first child at 20.

"Now that I have kids, I'm like, 'I need to care,'" she said.

In closely following politics, Diaz is different from many other women under 30.

Women in her age group are less likely than young men to say they follow U.S. politics, the poll finds. About one-quarter of men under 30 say they follow politics "extremely" or "very" closely, compared with 16% of women in the same age group. And about 4 in 10 young women say they follow U.S. politics "not very closely" or "not closely at all" compared with about a quarter of young men.

Lower investment in key issues

On a few issues, such as the economy and health care, the divide between the youngest and oldest Americans isn't large. About 8 in 10 Americans under age 30 say the economy is "extremely" or "very" important to them personally, compared with about 9 in 10 Americans age 60 or older.

But older adults are much likelier to say topics that have taken center stage during the first six months of President Donald Trump's second term — including immigration and government spending — are "extremely" or "very" important to them personally compared with Americans under 30.

That's even true for topics such as the situation in the Middle East, which has become a rallying cry for young activists since the Israel-Hamas war broke out. Only about 4 in 10 adults under 30 say this is highly important to them personally, compared with about 6 in 10 Americans age 60 or older.

For some, that lack of interest could be related to a sense that the political system doesn't respond to their needs.

At 18, Blake Marlar is just starting to pay attention to politics. As Trump's tax cut and spending bill moved through the Republican-controlled Congress, the aspiring geology major at the University of Nebraska emailed his state's two senators, both Republicans, objecting to its Medicaid cuts and increases in immigration enforcement funding.

"They didn't seem to take me seriously," Marlar said. "While I recognize they have to represent the whole state and the whole state doesn't agree with me, it could have been a different experience."

But he's resolved not to give up on politics: "In the future," he said, "I'll do my part and vote."

Today in History: August 6, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima

Today is Wednesday, Aug. 6, the 218th day of 2025. There are 147 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On August 6, 1945, during World War II, the U.S. B-29 Superfortress Enola Gay dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan, resulting in an estimated 140,000 deaths.

Also on this date:

In 1806, Emperor Francis II abdicated, marking the end of the Holy Roman Empire after nearly a thousand years.

In 1825, Upper Peru became the autonomous republic of Bolivia.

In 1890, at Auburn Prison in Auburn, New York, William Kemmler became the first person to be executed via the electric chair.

In 1926, Gertrude Ederle became the first woman to swim across the English Channel.

In 1942, Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands became the first reigning queen to address a joint session of Congress, telling lawmakers that despite Nazi occupation, her people's motto remained, "No surrender."

In 1962, Jamaica gained independence from the United Kingdom after 300 years of British rule.

In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act, prohibiting racial discrimination in voting.

In 1991, the World Wide Web made its public debut as a means of accessing webpages over the Internet.

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In 2011, insurgents shot down a U.S. military helicopter during fighting in eastern Afghanistan, killing 30 Americans, most of them belonging to the same elite Navy commando unit that had killed Osama bin Laden; seven Afghan commandos also died.

Today's Birthdays: Actor-director Peter Bonerz is 87. Actor Dorian Harewood is 75. Actor Leland Orser is 65. Actor Michelle Yeoh is 63. Basketball Hall of Famer David Robinson is 60. Movie writer-director M. Night Shyamalan (SHAH'-mah-lahn) is 55. Singer Geri Halliwell Horner is 53. Actor Vera Farmiga is 52. Actor Soleil (soh-LAY') Moon Frye is 49. Actor Leslie Odom Jr. is 44. Soccer coach and former player Robin van Persie is 42.