

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Thursday, Aug. 21

Senior Menu: BBQ Chicken breast, catalina blend, pineapple tidbits, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Muffins.

School Lunch: Burgers, fries.

Emmanuel Lutheran: WELCA "Do Day", 1:30 p.m.

## Friday, August. 22

Senior Menu: Kielbasa, Mac 'n Cheese, winter blend, banana pudding, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Egg wraps.

School Lunch: French bread pizza, green beans.

Soccer hosts Belle Fourche, Girls at 4 p.m., Boys at 6 p.m.

Football hosts Webster Area, 7 p.m.

## Saturday, Aug. 23

Glacial Golf Tourney at Olive Grove

Soccer at NSU. Girls vs. St. Thomas More at 11 a.m.; Boys vs. St. Thomas More at 1 p.m.



**Groton Daily Independent**  
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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.**

## Gaza City Operation

Israel called up an additional 60,000 reservists yesterday after approving a military offensive to capture and occupy Gaza City, a Hamas stronghold where hundreds of thousands of people are sheltering. The operation could begin within days; army reservists were instructed to report to duty next month.

The announcement comes as Israel considers a ceasefire proposal from Qatar and Egypt that would see a 60-day truce and the release of around half of the 50 remaining hostages in Gaza, 20 of whom are still believed to be alive. Hamas agreed to the deal earlier this week. Israeli officials have said they will reject any proposal that does not include the release of all hostages.

Separately, Israel approved the construction of nearly 3,500 new apartments across 4.6 miles in the West Bank. The decision—considered illegal under international law—is expected to divide the West Bank into a northern and southern region, preventing Palestinian territorial continuity. Israel maintains the land is disputed and that its settlements are lawful.

## Target's CEO Switch

Target CEO Brian Cornell is stepping down in February after 11 years at the helm. The news came yesterday as the retailer reported falling or flat sales for the 11th consecutive quarter, with profits down 19% from a year ago.

Annual sales increased over 40% under Cornell from 2018 to 2021—fueled partly by pandemic-era spending sprees—but have largely flatlined since inflation began surging about four years ago. Roughly half of Target's sales are nonessential spending, while most business for competitors like Walmart and Costco comes from groceries. Tariffs have added pressure, with imports accounting for about half of Target's merchandise, compared to one-third of Walmart's and Costco's. Target also faced backlash over LGBTQ-themed products in 2023 and its retreat from DEI initiatives this year.

Incoming CEO and current COO Michael Fiddelke outlined three priorities: trendier merchandise, better service, and greater technology adoption. Analysts, who favored an external hire, criticized the appointment. Target shares fell roughly 6% yesterday.

## FTC Sues LA Fitness

The Federal Trade Commission yesterday sued the operators of LA Fitness, alleging they make canceling memberships excessively difficult for consumers, costing hundreds of millions of dollars in unwanted recurring fees.

According to the complaint, canceling requires consumers to either visit a gym during limited hours to speak with a specific employee or mail a form that is often hard to access online due to a complex login process. Memberships cost anywhere from \$30 to \$299 per month, depending on the location, and involve annual fees. The FTC seeks a court order to ban such cancellation practices and provide restitution to affected consumers. LA Fitness operators oversee more than 600 locations with over 3.7 million members nationwide. A representative from the fitness company stated the allegations were without merit.

The lawsuit follows similar cases against Uber One, Amazon.com, and Adobe, and comes a month after a federal appeals court blocked the FTC's "click-to-cancel" rule, which would have required businesses to make cancellations easier.

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## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

The 2025 PGA Tour Championship kicks off today for the FedEx Cup title and \$10M top prize.  
... and Tiger Woods to chair committee to look at major structural changes to the PGA Tour.  
ESPN's new app, which will include livestreams of all 12 of the network's channels, launches today at \$29.99/month.  
... and the streaming service will host its first WWE event Sept. 20, ahead of the scheduled 2026 launch.  
Former boxing champ Julio César Chávez Jr. deported over alleged ties to Mexican drug cartels.  
YouTuber-turned-boxer Jake Paul to face WBA world champ Gervonta Davis on Netflix Nov. 14.

## Science & Technology

Google debuts line of Pixel smartphones that use Google's artificial intelligence assistant, Gemini, to let users complete multiple tasks simultaneously.  
Study shows triple-negative breast cancer cells feed on nearby fat cells, prompting researchers to develop a treatment that blocks the aggressive cancer's access to fat; the approach may also work against other cancers.  
Never-before-seen supernova—or exploding star—confirms massive stars have several onion-like layers and an innermost iron core.  
IBM and NASA release an advanced open-source AI model for predicting solar weather.

## Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 -0.2%, Dow +0.0%, Nasdaq -0.7%).  
Federal Reserve meeting minutes from July show most officials agree it's too early to lower interest rates.  
President Donald Trump calls for resignation of Federal Reserve governor Lisa Cook amid accusations of mortgage fraud.  
Pop Mart shares close up 12% after the Labubu maker sees net profit rise nearly 400% in first six months of 2025, hints at mini-Labubu dolls.  
Sony to raise prices of PlayStation 5 game consoles in the US by \$50 starting today, citing challenges of current economic environment.

## Politics & World Affairs

At least 600 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention staffers receive final termination notices.  
Office of the Director of National Intelligence to cut annual budget by over \$700M, trimming workforce by up to 40%.  
Texas House passes GOP redistricting plan; Senate vote expected today.  
Hurricane Erin is forecast to cause large swells, life-threatening rip currents, and damaging winds along the US East Coast into Friday; the storm has already spurred dozens of water rescues and beach closures.  
Third federal judge denies Justice Department request to unseal grand jury transcripts from the investigation into Jeffrey Epstein's sex-trafficking operation, citing contents of DOJ's sealed files far exceed the transcripts in question (More)

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## Some interesting Tidbits about property taxes and schools

Notable District-level Examples

Oglala Lakota County School District (65-1): Receives a large share of its funding from the federal government—approximately 71.4% of its total budget

USAFacts

Groton Area School District (06-6): Heavily reliant on local funding—around 83.4% of its budget comes from local sources

Ballotpedia

USAFacts

SD Department of Education

According to data compiled for the 2021–22 school year, total public school funding per student (combining local, state, and federal sources) varied widely across districts:

Low end: Around \$11,300 per student in the Baltic School District (49-1)

High end: As much as \$39,100 per student in the Elk Mountain School District (West Custer) (16-2)

USAFacts

To meet budget needs beyond those formulas, many districts use opt-out levies (approved by school boards and potentially voters). This adds to school-related property tax burdens:

In 2024–25, about half of SD's public students were in districts with an opt-out. On average, opt-out dollars translated to about \$500 per K–12 student, per opt-out year, in those districts

South Dakota Searchlight

Dakota Institute

SD Department of Education

But there's wide variation: for example, Brookings 05-1 had as little as \$86 per student, while Bowdle 22-1 had nearly \$7,778 per student

Dakota Institute



Webster at Groton  
Football Action  
Friday, Aug. 22, 7 p.m.  
Justin Olson with the play by play



Groton  
Area  
Tigers  
Groton, SD

**GDILIVE**

 YouTube

A production of the  
**Groton Daily Independent**

For more info: [GDILIVE.COM](https://GDILIVE.COM)





## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### State network begins to come back online after second day of failures

**Court system declared judicial emergency, jails found workarounds to deal with spotty coverage**

BY: JOHN HULT

State online and communications systems began to come back online Wednesday after more than 24 hours of failures – and a declaration of judicial emergency by the South Dakota’s court system.

A news release from the state Bureau of Information Technology said the state had restored the primary power supply to the state’s data center, which is the term used by the bureau to describe all the hardware across the state connected through the bureau’s network.

“As a result, core networking and storage systems are now online, and internet access, wireless services, phone systems, and state radio have been fully restored,” the release says.

Some systems had yet to return to full service, but “all state agencies and partners

are actively engaged in addressing the challenges caused by the service disruption.”

The state’s South Dakota’s court system declared a judicial emergency in response to the outage on Wednesday. Since Tuesday, people in and outside the judicial system had been unable to get court records or court dates, file documents like protection orders, trial motions, civil lawsuits or small claims cases. Public access points like [ecourts.sd.gov](https://ecourts.sd.gov) were inaccessible, and court system employees couldn’t access records through their own non-public information portals.

The court system was also unable to take electronic payments of fines, though a press release from the Unified Judicial System said clerks were still taking in-person payments.



**A man approaches the Minnehaha County Treasurer’s Office in Sioux Falls on Aug. 20, 2025, the second day on which a power outage shut down access to state records.** (John Hult/South Dakota Searchlight)

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The judicial emergency suspended "all deadlines, time schedules, due dates and filing requirements imposed by applicable statutes, rules and court orders" until the state Supreme Court rescinds the order.

Alisa Bousa, spokesperson for the Unified Judicial System, said late Wednesday that while systems appear to be back online, the agency's IT team plans to run diagnostics to make sure things are working properly.

The emergency declaration was part of the fallout from the data center outage. Driver's license exam stations and self-service kiosks remained inaccessible for a second day Wednesday, as did vehicle registration and vehicle licensing, birth and death records and the state's voter registration database.

Law enforcement was affected, as well. Faulk County Sheriff Kurt Hall said his dispatch was unable to run license plate and warrant checks for deputies doing traffic stops for most of Tuesday.

"We couldn't run plates yesterday, but we can today," said Hall, whose office polices a county of 2,100 and runs a 32-bed jail.

Minnehaha County Sheriff Mike Milstead, who oversees the deputies patrolling South Dakota's most populous county and one of its largest jails, said state system services were spotty at best during the network outage. Metro Communications, which takes 911 calls and dispatches services for both the county and the Sioux Falls Police Department, was able to communicate with law enforcement, even as some state resources were unavailable.

Milstead's office relied on its local warrants database for information, but adding warrants to the system was cumbersome with the state court system down. Deputies had to hand-deliver warrants for entry into the warrant database, and hand deliver orders to release inmates from custody to the jail.

"This is certainly demonstrating how dependent we are on the state network," Milstead said early Wednesday afternoon, adding that he can't recall an outage that lasted as long.

Attorney General Marty Jackley said early Wednesday that his office's consumer protection division was unable to process complaints.

Jackley's office also oversees the State Automated Victim Notification System, through which victims or the public can sign up for alerts about court dates, incarceration status or release dates for people accused or convicted of crimes. That SAVIN system wasn't sending out alerts during the outage.

Milstead said "we still have processes in place" to notify victims using the information held on local servers without SAVIN.

"That's kind of a check and balance, not in every case, but in most cases," Milstead said. "I would call it more of a workaround, but the jail still does victim notification if we have a victim on file."

The Bureau of Information Technology's spokesperson, Lisa Rahja, said in an email Wednesday that the state engineer's office has investigated the "root cause" of the outage.

The power outage wasn't caused by a cybersecurity breach, she wrote.

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

## Cannabis group applauds compliance checks for hemp-based THC products

**Rapid City, Sioux Falls waiting on lab results to determine criminal charges from sweeps for synthetic intoxicants**

BY: JOHN HULT

South Dakota's medical cannabis industry voiced its support for sting operations targeting sellers of hemp products that create a marijuana-like high.

The comments from Jeremiah Murphy, a lobbyist for the Cannabis Industry Association of South Dakota, came during Tuesday's meeting of the state's Medical Marijuana Oversight Committee.

Murphy's association represents the state's 116 licensed medical cannabis cultivators, manufacturers and dispensaries.

The industry "commends the Pennington County Sheriff's Office" for its sting operation targeting hemp-based THC products at eight Rapid City-area smoke shops and convenience stores, Murphy said.

Law enforcement bought samples of gummies, THC drinks and other products with "hemp-derived" ingredients. Strains of THC is a family of high-inducing molecules found in large concentrations in the cannabis plant.

The hemp plant is a cousin to cannabis that contains tiny quantities of THC. Hemp-derived intoxicants often get their THC from chemically modified or distilled CBD. CBD is a different, nonintoxicating molecule found in cannabis and hemp.

Hemp is legal to cultivate under the 2018 farm bill, and hemp-derived products are legal under federal law. Since mid-2024, however, South Dakota has barred the sale – but not the possession – of products made with chemically synthesized versions of THC.

The Rapid City compliance check followed a July 10 letter from Pennington County State's Attorney Lara Roetzel to businesses suspected of unlawful hemp sales.

Katy Urban, spokeswoman for Roetzel's office, says the agencies are waiting for testing results to determine if any laws were broken.

Sioux Falls Police Department spokesman Aaron Benson said the SFPD has performed one compliance check, and is waiting on results from a lab test to determine how to proceed with one case. Benson declined to say how many businesses were visited, citing the open investigation.

### Committee hears support for compliance

At Tuesday's medical marijuana committee meeting, Murphy repeated an assertion he's used for nearly two years now: The availability of hemp-derived alternatives to medical cannabis puts the state's highly regulated medical marijuana industry at a disadvantage.



**Drinks advertised as THC- and cannabis-infused on the shelves of a Rapid City store in July 2024.** (Seth Tupper/South Dakota Searchlight)



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"Why do I go to a doctor and pay him, and why go pay the state to pay even more money, when I can go to the vape shop, or I can go to the hemp store and they're selling exactly what I need?" Murphy said.

The number of medical marijuana cards issued in the state stands at around 14,000, but changes slightly every day, Whitney Brunner of the Department of Health told the medical marijuana committee Tuesday.

"Any data point presented on patient cards is representative of a snapshot in time," Brunner said.

Cards issuance has picked up slightly since voters rejected a ballot measure to legalize recreational cannabis last fall, but remained at about 14,000 as of this week. A little more than 70% of the cards have been issued to people for the management of chronic pain, Brunner told the committee.

Medical cannabis purveyors supported the law banning the sale of synthetically altered hemp products, but the law hasn't led to a crush of cases against sellers. Around 100 charges had been filed as of last month, between juvenile and adult cases, according to the Unified Judicial System. Several of those charges were attached to individual defendants.

## Hemp industry sees future beyond consumables

John Peterson, president of the South Dakota Industrial Hemp Association, said his organization doesn't have a problem with the rules on consumables.

"They passed the rules, and we want to have only the good players in the game," said Peterson, whose Dakota Hemp is one of two companies in South Dakota building hemp processing facilities.

South Dakota leads the nation in hemp production. Legally, hemp plants need to be tested and have less than .3% THC. In a typical pre-rolled, smokable cannabis joint, Peterson said, "you're looking at a 30% THC level."

"You're going to want your money back if it's not that high," he said.

Peterson said consumable products, with or without intoxicating properties, were among the first to catch on. CBD products, including products like lotions, are often marketed to humans and their pets for their purported health benefits.

Hemp-derived THC products, made "when somebody will take it and process it down to make an unnatural compound," took off just a few years ago.

"That has been the industry that has financially led the way, but as the industry is taking off, we see the grain, fiber and textile areas as leading products into the future," Peterson said.

Speaking from a booth at Dakotafest in Mitchell, Peterson listed off a dozen products from a hemp association brochure, including building materials like hempcrete and decking material.

As far as consumables, Peterson said, "we're not going to scream and holler and say, 'you've got to let us have those back.'"

He said he hopes the consumable concerns don't hamstring the rest of the industry.

"As long as they're not going out of their way to discriminate against the hemp industry, I've got no issues with it."

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



## Grants to boost local emergency alert systems in question as public media agency closes

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — The Corporation for Public Broadcasting will no longer administer a grant program that has so far provided millions of dollars to local television and radio stations to upgrade the equipment they use to send out emergency alerts.

The change comes after Republican lawmakers voted last month to defund the corporation, following a request from President Donald Trump to zero out more than \$1.1 billion in previously approved spending for the organization.

Congress originally formed the Next Generation Warning System grant program in fiscal 2022 and provided the Federal Emergency Management Agency about \$40 million during its first year.

FEMA then gave that money to CPB to reimburse stations for infrastructure and other improvements meant to get

emergency alerts sent through the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System to more Americans.

That appears on track to change in the months ahead.

FEMA officials wrote in a notice of funding opportunity for the current fiscal year that the grants will now go directly to state and tribal governments that can then award funding to public broadcasting stations that make improvements to their emergency alert systems.

Democrats and some Republicans have raised concerns that without funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, local stations wouldn't be able to raise enough funding to remain in operation, potentially leading to holes in the country's emergency alert system.



**The Corporation for Public Broadcasting will no longer administer a grant program that provided millions of dollars to local television and radio stations to upgrade the equipment they use to send out emergency alerts to warn of impending natural disasters and more. In this photo, flood waters left debris including vehicles and equipment scattered in Louise Hays Park on July 5, 2025 in Kerrville, Texas.** (Photo by Eric Vryn/Getty Images)

### **'Rescission consequences' for local public media**

CPB, which plans to cease operations later this year, announced this week that it would no longer be able to administer the grant funding Congress approved during fiscal 2023 and 2024. The corporation had yet to determine which applicants would receive the funding lawmakers provided for those two years.

"CPB has been fully invested in the NGWS program and its mission to protect the American public," CPB President and CEO Patricia Harrison wrote in a statement. "This is one more example of rescission consequences impacting local public media stations and the communities they serve—in this case, weakening

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the capacity of local public media stations to support the safety and preparedness of their communities.”

That could potentially leave much of the \$136 million in grant funding approved by Congress in limbo.

CPB wrote in a statement that “FEMA should assume responsibility for disbursing the funds as Congress intended, or most of the FY 2022 funding—and all funds from FY 2023 and FY 2024—will go undistributed.

“As a result, critical emergency alerting equipment will not be purchased, leaving communities, especially those in rural and disaster-prone areas, without the upgrades Congress intended.”

A FEMA official, speaking on background, couldn’t say definitively how the agency would handle funding for those three fiscal years.

The White House and Office of Management and Budget did not immediately respond to requests for comment from States Newsroom on Wednesday about the grant program.

Projects funded so far include:

Mid-South Public Communications Foundation in Cordova, Tennessee, which received \$1.657 million to “replace a transmitter and two emergency generators to ensure the rural agricultural communities in Tennessee, Mississippi, and eastern Arkansas receive timely emergency communications.”

Blue Ridge PBS in Roanoke, Virginia, which received \$1.122 million to “replace critical broadcast infrastructure that will strengthen their signal in the mountainous region to reach more rural communities with targeted emergency alerts.”

Louisiana Public Broadcasting, which received nearly \$2 million to “install transmitters and antennas for KLTL-TV in Lake Charles and KLTM-TV in Monroe and update alerting equipment to enable statewide delivery of alerts and warning messages.”

Congress votes to end public media funds

Kate Riley, president and CEO of America’s Public Television Stations, released a written statement this week calling CPB’s inability to administer the grant program for FEMA “yet another devastating result of the rescission of public media funding.”

She also called on FEMA “to establish a new process for delivering this funding to public broadcasters” and urged “Congress to restore essential direct funding to local stations throughout this country whose communities depend on them for lifesaving public safety services, proven educational resources and essential community connections.”

Trump sent Congress a rescissions request in early June, proposing lawmakers eliminate previously approved funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and several foreign aid accounts.

The House voted mostly along party lines to approve the full \$9.4 billion proposal later that month. GOP senators, except Maine’s Susan Collins and Alaska’s Lisa Murkowski, approved a similar bill in July after removing spending cuts to the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, or PEPFAR. The House voted to clear the revised legislation a few days later, sending the bill to Trump for his signature.

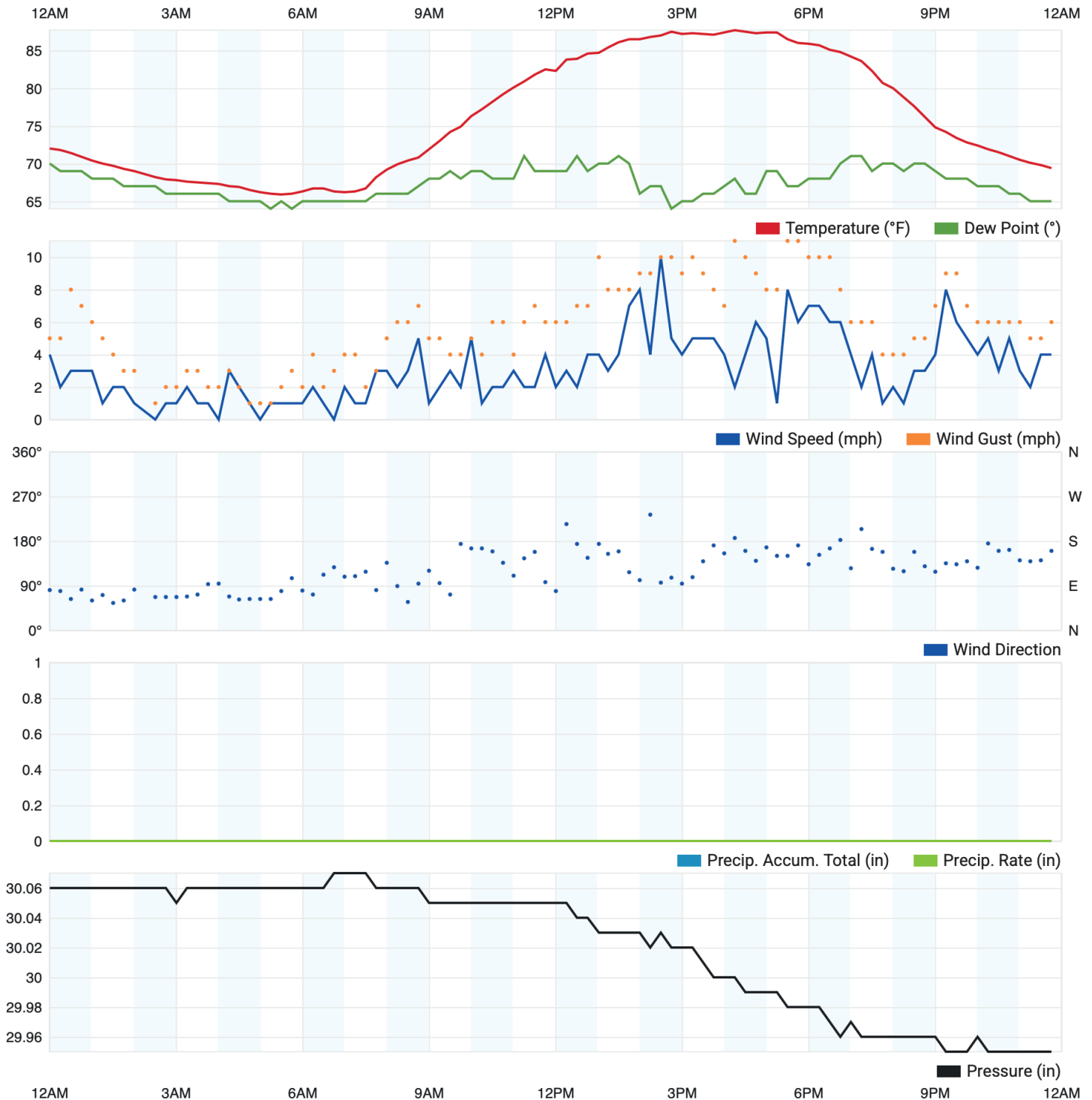
*Jennifer covers the nation’s capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.*

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

August 20, 2025





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Today



High: 90 °F

Sunny then  
Chance  
T-storms

Tonight



Low: 62 °F

Chance  
T-storms

Friday



High: 82 °F

Slight Chance  
T-storms then  
Sunny

Friday Night



Low: 53 °F

Mostly Clear

Saturday



High: 71 °F

Sunny

## THREAT ASSESSMENT

### HIGHEST LOCAL RISK

1

WHAT THIS MEANS:  
Isolated Severe Storms  
Possible

### TIMING

4 PM CDT to Midnight

### PRIMARY THREAT



DAMAGING  
WIND GUSTS OF  
60+ MPH



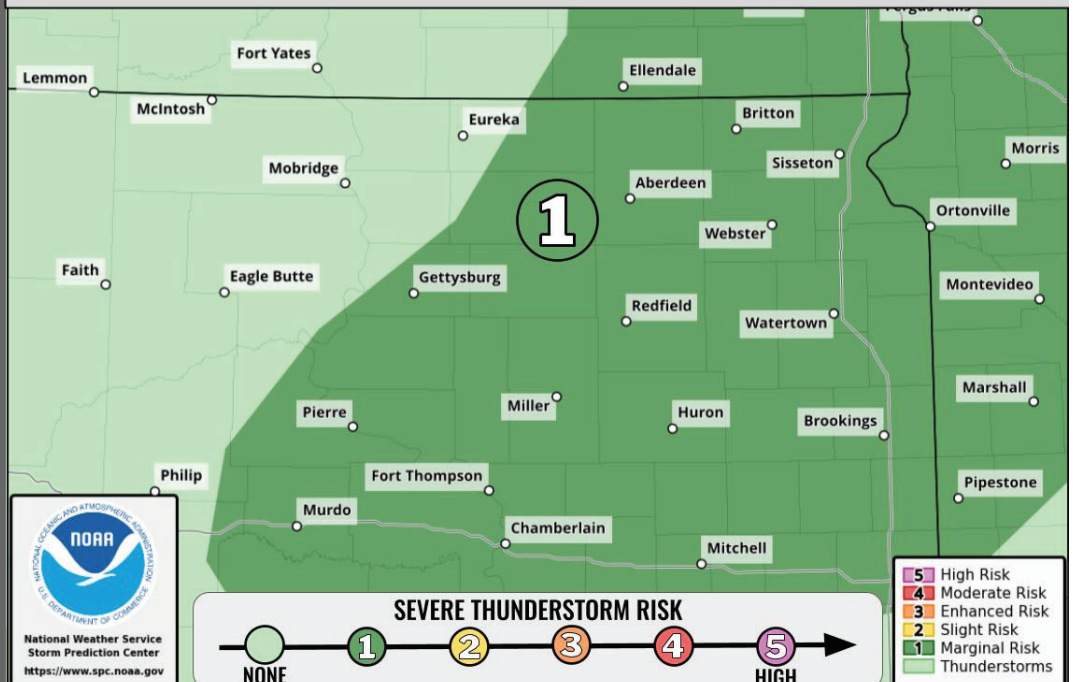
LARGE HAIL  
(QUARTER SIZE)

### SECONDARY THREATS



HEAVY  
RAIN

## Severe Storms Possible This Afternoon and Evening



There is a Marginal Risk (level 1 out of 5) for isolated severe storms this afternoon and evening, mainly 4 PM CDT to midnight, over central and northeastern SD. On and off showers and storms will then continue overnight and into the early morning hours. The primary threats will likely be damaging wind gusts of 60 mph and large hail around an inch in diameter. There is also a threat for heavy rainfall.

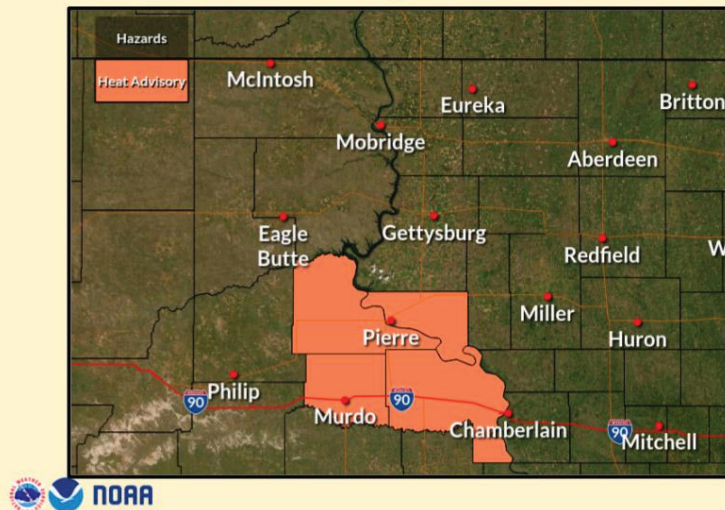


## Heat Advisory for Thursday

NWS Aberdeen, SD

August 21, 2025 3:31 AM

### Heat Advisory - for 1 to 8 PM CDT



## Maximum Heat Index Values Today

|             | Thu |     |      |     |     |     |
|-------------|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|
|             | 6am | 9am | 12pm | 3pm | 6pm | 9pm |
| Aberdeen    | 67  | 83  | 95   | 97  | 96  | 79  |
| Britton     | 68  | 83  | 92   | 95  | 93  | 76  |
| Chamberlain | 71  | 90  | 100  | 101 | 98  | 88  |
| Clark       | 68  | 76  | 89   | 91  | 91  | 75  |
| Eagle Butte | 71  | 84  | 90   | 90  | 89  | 78  |
| Eureka      | 69  | 86  | 90   | 91  | 90  | 78  |
| Gettysburg  | 67  | 87  | 93   | 95  | 90  | 79  |
| McIntosh    | 72  | 82  | 86   | 87  | 87  | 77  |
| Milbank     | 64  | 77  | 91   | 93  | 93  | 74  |
| Miller      | 70  | 86  | 96   | 98  | 96  | 79  |
| Mobridge    | 71  | 86  | 91   | 93  | 90  | 78  |
| Murdo       | 70  | 89  | 97   | 98  | 96  | 86  |
| Pierre      | 72  | 89  | 100  | 101 | 99  | 86  |
| Redfield    | 68  | 85  | 95   | 99  | 97  | 79  |
| Sisseton    | 67  | 84  | 94   | 96  | 92  | 75  |
| Watertown   | 65  | 77  | 92   | 92  | 92  | 76  |
| Webster     | 67  | 78  | 90   | 91  | 90  | 75  |
| Wheaton     | 65  | 77  | 89   | 91  | 90  | 75  |

Temperatures in the mid to upper 90s over central SD will cause heat index values to get up to 103 degrees in some places. This had lead to a heat advisory being issued for some central SD counties from 1 to 8 PM CDT. Make sure to stay safe in the heat by limiting strenuous outdoor activates during the hot-test time of the day and stay hydrated as well as make sure to take breaks in the shade or cool area if you do have to work outside.

## Practice HEAT SAFETY Wherever You Are

Heat related deaths are preventable. Protect yourself and others from the impacts of heat waves.

**Job Sites**  
Stay hydrated and take breaks in the shade as often as possible

**Indoors**  
Check up on the elderly, sick and those without AC

**Vehicles**  
Never leave kids or pets unattended - LOOK before you LOCK

**Outdoors**  
Limit strenuous outdoor activities, find shade, and stay hydrated





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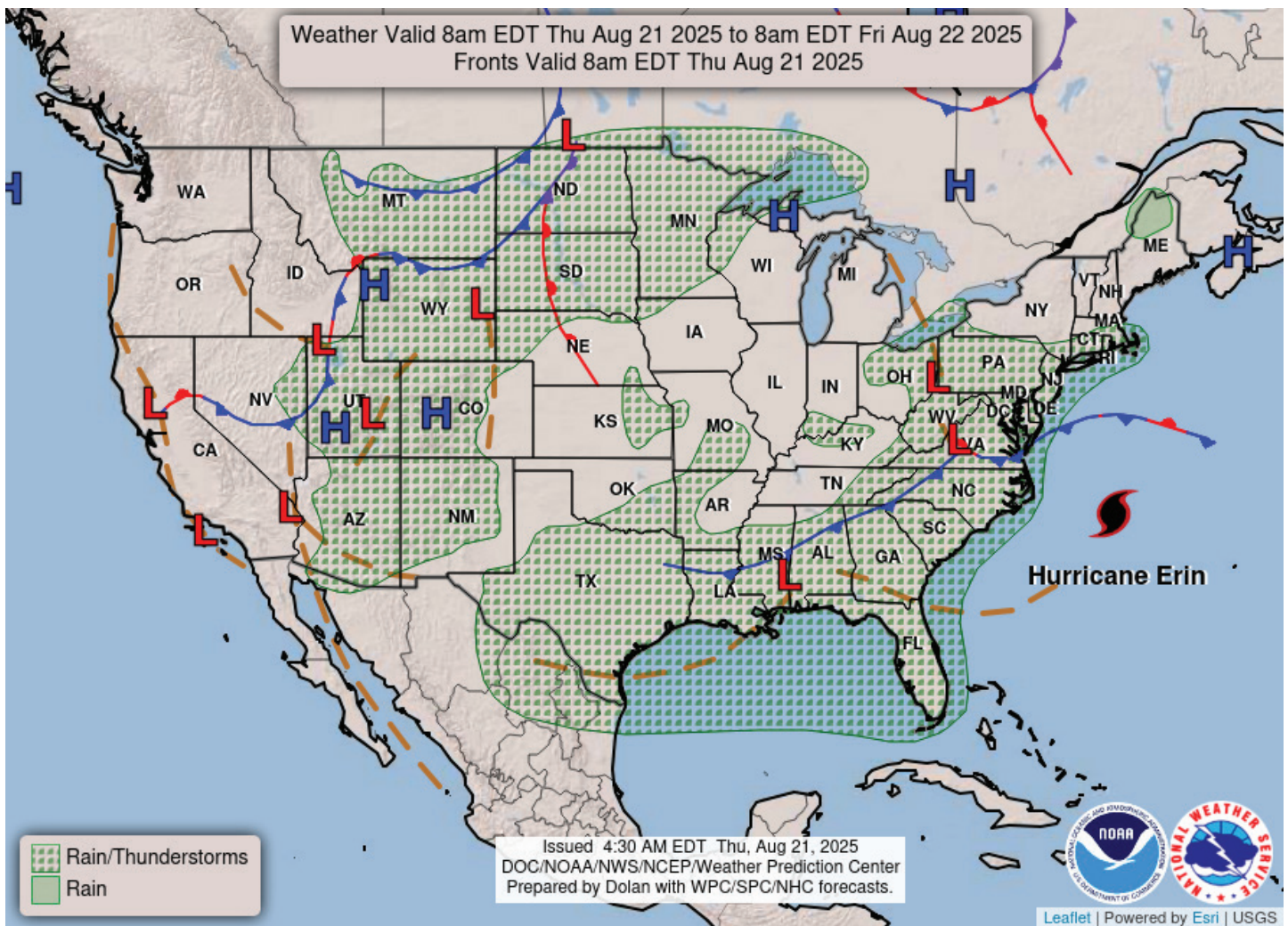
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 88 °F at 4:17 PM**  
**Heat Index: 93 °F at 1:45 PM**  
**Low Temp: 66 °F at 5:21 AM**  
**Wind: 13 mph at 3:06 PM**  
**Precip: : 0.00**

Day length: 13 hours, 51 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 105 in 1947  
Record Low: 37 in 2004  
Average High: 82  
Average Low: 56  
Average Precip in August.: 1.52  
Precip to date in August: 4.40  
Average Precip to date: 15.62  
Precip Year to Date: 20.28  
Sunset Tonight: 8:31:08 pm  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:40:55 am





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## Today in Weather History

August 21, 1989: Baseball size hail caused near 100 percent crop damage to Correll in Big Stone County to 10 miles north of Appleton. Most of Swift County also received 4 to 8 inches of rain.

August 21, 2007: Thunderstorms produced large hail in southeastern South Dakota, mainly near the Missouri River, during the late afternoon and early evening of August 21st. Enormous hail fell in the Dante area in Charles Mix County, including a state record size hailstone certified as 6 and 7/8 inches in diameter, with a circumference of 18 inches and a weight of one pound. The most massive stone was verified at 6 1/8 inches in diameter with a weight of 1.25 lbs. Damage included holes in roofs, broken rafters, broken awnings, numerous broken windows and dented vehicles, damaged siding, divots in the ground up to 12 inches long and 3 inches deep, and damaged crops. The state record hailstone was broken on July 23rd, 2010 with the United States record hailstone in Vivian.

1856: The Charter Oak was an unusually large white oak tree growing from around the 12th or 13th century until it fell during a windstorm on this day in 1856. According to tradition, Connecticut's Royal Charter of 1662 was hidden within the hollow of the tree to thwart its confiscation by the English governor-general. The oak became a symbol of American independence and is commemorated on the Connecticut State Quarter.

1883: An estimated F5 tornado caused extensive damage to Rochester Minnesota on this day. The enormous roar was said to have warned most Rochester residents, as the massive funnel cut through the north side of town. Over 135 homes were destroyed, and another 200 damaged. Many of the 200 plus injuries were severe, and other deaths probably occurred but not listed as part of the 37 total mentioned. This damaging tornado eventually led to the formation of the Mayo Clinic.

1856 - The Charter Oak was an unusually large white oak tree growing from around the 12th or 13th century until it fell during a windstorm on this day in 1856. According to tradition, Connecticut's Royal Charter of 1662 was hidden within the hollow of the tree to thwart its confiscation by the English governor-general. The oak became a symbol of American independence and is commemorated on the Connecticut State Quarter.

1888 - A tornado swarm occurred in Maryland and Delaware. Many waterspouts were seen over Chesapeake Bay. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1893 - Four hurricanes are observed in the Atlantic Ocean at the same time. Over a century would pass, 1998 before four hurricanes would again rage together in the Atlantic.

1918 - A tornado struck Tyler, MN, killing 36 persons and destroying most of the business section of the town resulting in a million dollars damage. (David Ludlum)

1983 - The temperature at Fayetteville, NC, soared to 110 degrees to establish a state record. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Early morning thunderstorms produced severe weather in eastern Iowa and west central Illinois. Thunderstorms produced wind gusts to 82 mph at Moline IL, and tennis ball size hail at Independence IA. Rock Island IL was drenched with 3.70 inches of rain. Total damage for the seven county area of west central Illinois was estimated at twelve million dollars. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms spawned several tornadoes in Iowa, produced wind gusts to 63 mph in the Council Bluffs area, and drenched Sioux Center IA with up to 6.61 inches of rain. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Afternoon and evening thunderstorms produced severe weather from Kansas to Minnesota and North Dakota. Thunderstorms in Minnesota produced baseball size hail from Correll to north of Appleton. Thunderstorms in north central Kansas produced wind gusts higher than 100 mph at Wilson Dam. Thunderstorms around Lincoln NE produced baseball size hail and up to five inches of rain, and Boone NE was deluged with five inches of rain in an hour and a half. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)



## RUNNING WITH GOD

It's not often that we read of a treasurer reading the Word of God. But we do read of one from Ethiopia who was doing exactly that. He'd been on a trip and was on his way home sitting in his chariot. We are told that he was reading it out loud and having a tough time understanding its message. God knew he was confused and said to Phillip, "Go and talk with him in his chariot."

As soon as the Holy Spirit spoke to him, Phillip did not hesitate for one moment. He knew that God had something important for him to do. So, he ran as fast as he could to the chariot and began to talk to him about the Lord. As they rode along, they came to a small body of water.

"Look," exclaimed the treasurer, "here is some water. What is there that could possibly keep me from being baptized?" Phillip answered, "You can - if you believe with all your heart." The official replied, "I do believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God!" So, Phillip baptized him.

Imagine how this story might have ended if his heart was not sensitive to the Holy Spirit, or if doing the Lord's work was not important to him, or, if he had walked and not run to the man. That man may never have come to know the Lord as his Savior. But, none of that matters. When God called - he answered. Immediately!

Perhaps he read Psalm 119:32 for his devotions that morning: "I run in the path of Your commands, for You have broadened my understanding."

Prayer: At all times, Father, - no matter the cost - I want to be open to Your voice and obedient to Your call. I choose to pursue You so You can teach me. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: I run in the path of your commands, for you have broadened my understanding. Psalm 119:32

*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: 08.19.25

10 19 24 49 68 10

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$234,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 56 Mins  
16 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 08.20.25

3 12 27 35 39 6

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$2,300,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 11 Mins  
16 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 08.20.25

1 5 18 25 28 4

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 26 Mins 15  
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 08.20.25

5 13 29 30 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$20,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 26  
Mins 15 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 08.20.25

16 17 23 46 52 3

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 55  
Mins 16 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 08.20.25

31 59 62 65 68 5

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$700,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 55  
Mins 16 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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## **Upcoming Groton Events**

08/09/2025 Groton Legion 30th Anniversary Celebration  
08/07/2025 Groton Firemen Summer Splash in the GHS Parking Lot 7:30-8:30pm  
08/11/2025 Vitalant Blood Drive at the Community Center 3:30-6pm  
08/23/2025 Glacial Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course  
09/05/2025 Homecoming Parade 1pm  
09/06/2025 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm  
09/06-07/25 Groton Airport Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport  
09/07/2025 Couples Sunflower Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 10am  
09/07/2025 9th Annual Doggie Day at the Swimming Pool 3-5pm  
10/10/2025 Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am  
10/11/2025 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm  
10/31/2025 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm  
10/31/2025 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm  
11/15/2025 Legion Post #39 Turkey Party 6:30pm  
11/27/2025 Community Thanksgiving 11:30am-1:30pm Community Center (Thanksgiving)  
11/30/2025 Snow Queen Contest, 4 p.m.  
12/06/2025 Olive Grove Holiday Party and Silent Live Auction Fundraiser

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## News from the **AP** Associated Press

### **The Latest: Texas House approves new congressional maps that favor GOP in 2026 midterms**

By The Associated Press undefined

The Republican-controlled Texas House of Representatives passed Wednesday a redrawn congressional map that creates up to five new winnable GOP seats in Congress, further deepening a national redistricting battle between states.

Republicans want to make it easier for the GOP to hold on to its slim U.S. House majority in the 2026 midterm elections, so that Democrats have little ability to thwart President Donald Trump's agenda. Trump directed Texas and other conservative-controlled states to put forth rare mid-decade redistricting plans as Republicans anticipate a difficult midterm election.

In response, California's Legislature is poised to approve new maps adding more Democratic-friendly seats later this week, in a move former President Barack Obama has applauded.

Texas Democratic lawmakers delayed the vote for 15 days by leaving the state in protest, depriving the House of enough members to do business. With House approval, the maps now need to be approved by the state Senate and signed by Gov. Greg Abbott before they become official.

Here's the Latest:

#### **Texas governor says new maps will 'better reflect the actual votes of Texans'**

Republican Gov. Greg Abbott says he'll sign into the law the redrawn U.S. House districts that give his party five more winnable seats. He had put escalating pressure on Democrats to come home during their two-week walkout that had delayed the vote.

"While Democrats shirked their duty, in futility, and ran away to other states, Republicans stayed the course, stayed at work and stayed true to Texas," he said.

#### **Vance describes Russia's Putin as 'more soft-spoken than you'd necessarily expect'**

"You know that the American media has a particular image of him," Vice President JD Vance told "The Ingraham Angle." "He's soft-spoken in a certain way. He's very deliberate. He's very careful. And I think fundamentally, he's a person who looks out for the interests as he sees it, of Russia. And I think one of the reasons he respects the president of the United States is because he knows the president looks out for the interests of the American people."

Vance, who has never met Putin in person, added that he's spoken with the Russian leader "a number of times."

#### **Federal Reserve official says she won't be 'bullied' by Trump**

Lisa Cook, a member of the Federal Reserve's governing board, responded Wednesday after Trump called on her to resign on social media after a member of his administration accused her of mortgage fraud.

"I have no intention of being bullied to step down from my position because of some questions raised in a tweet," Cook said in a statement issued by the Fed.

Bill Pulte, the head of the agency that regulates mortgage giants Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, alleged on the social platform X that Cook had claimed two primary residences — in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and Atlanta — in 2021 to get better mortgage terms. Mortgage rates are often higher on second homes or those purchased to rent.

Cook also said, "I am gathering the accurate information to answer any legitimate questions and provide the facts."

#### **Vance suggests Trump surprised European leaders and Zelenskyy when he stepped away to call Putin**

Trump told reporters as he sat down with Volodymyr Zelenskyy early in the day on Monday that he intended to call Russian President Vladimir Putin after a day of talks with the Ukrainian president and key



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European leaders. But the vice president on Wednesday suggested in an interview on Fox News' "The Ingraham Angle" that Trump surprised the leaders when he abruptly stepped away from the talks to dial up the Russian president.

"So, we're actually in the East Wing of the White House, and the president says, 'You know, we've had a pretty good meeting. I'm going to call Vladimir Putin, see what he says about it.'" Vance said. "And everybody's like, 'Oh, you're going to call him next week?' And he's like, 'No, what time is it in Moscow? Let's call him right now.'"

Trump said following the Putin call that he had begun arrangements for a face-to-face meeting between the Russian president and Zelenskyy. The Kremlin hasn't publicly confirmed such a possibility.

## **It's all over in the House and lawmakers are free to leave**

The Texas House has given final approval to the new congressional voting maps, and Republicans used their majority to push it through. Within seconds, House Speaker Dustin Burrows removed the "call of the House." The chamber doors were unlocked and House members are now allowed to leave.

## **Texas House approves new congressional map**

Texas Republicans have taken the first step toward approving new congressional maps that would give their party as many as five new seats in the House of Representatives.

The maps need to be approved by the state Senate and signed by Gov. Greg Abbott before they become official.

## **California to vote Thursday on measures to combat Texas gerrymandering effort**

California Legislature is scheduled to vote Thursday morning on the three measures to advance Democrats' partisan plan to neutralize the GOP-led gerrymandering effort in Texas. The legislative package would establish new congressional districts, authorize the redrawn map to replace the existing one and declare a November special election to seek voters' approval.

Each measure would require a two-third vote to pass, but California Democrats hold supermajorities in both chambers and do not need any Republican vote to pass their agenda.

Gov. Gavin Newsom, who's leading the campaign in favor of the new map, must sign the proposals by Friday to give local elections officials enough time to prepare for the special election. Democrats hold 43 out of California's 52 U.S. House seats and want to win five more.

If voters agree, the proposed map would replace one drawn by an independent commission that took effect in 2022. The new map would only take effect if another state moves forward with their own mid-decade redistricting and would remain through the 2030 elections.

## **Floor opens up for debate in last step before final passage**

Republicans have swatted down a series of Democratic amendments to the new congressional map and opened the floor to debate. More than a dozen Democratic representatives have spoken against the legislation, and more are lined up to talk.

## **Trump can end temporary protections for migrants from Central America and Nepal, court says**

A federal appeals court on Wednesday sided with the Trump administration and stayed a lower court's order keeping in place temporary protections for 60,000 migrants from Central America and Nepal.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco granted the emergency stay pending an appeal as immigrants rights advocates allege that the administration acted unlawfully in ending Temporary Protected Status designations for people from Honduras, Nicaragua and Nepal.

Temporary Protected Status is a designation that can be granted by the Homeland Security secretary, preventing migrants from being deported and allowing them to work. The Trump administration has aggressively sought to remove the protection, thus making more people eligible for removal. It's part of a wider effort by the administration to carry out mass deportations of immigrants.

## **Congressional maps aren't the only thing on the agenda at the Texas Capitol**

As the House debated the redistricting bill, families of girls killed at Camp Mystic in flooding last month in Texas were giving tearful testimony in the same building to senators considering summer camp safety

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reforms.

Democrats have criticized House Republicans for putting the redistricting bill ahead of flood relief and response efforts. Twenty-seven girls were killed when the camp was flooded.

## **At least 600 CDC employees are getting final termination notices, union says**

The notices follow a recent court decision that protected some Centers for Disease Control and Protection employees from layoffs but not others.

Many have been on administrative leave since the U.S. Health and Human Services Department sent layoff notices to thousands of employees at federal health agencies in April.

But now, according to a union that represents CDC employees, at least 600 have been fired.

The permanent cuts include about 100 people who worked in violence prevention.

## **Gabbard slashing intelligence office workforce, cutting budget**

The Office of National Intelligence will reduce its workforce by 40% and cut its budget by more than \$700 million annually, the Trump administration announced Wednesday.

Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard said in a statement, "Over the last 20 years, ODNI has become bloated and inefficient, and the intelligence community is rife with abuse of power, unauthorized leaks of classified intelligence, and politicized weaponization of intelligence."

She said the intelligence community "must make serious changes to fulfill its responsibility to the American people and the U.S. Constitution by focusing on our core mission: find the truth and provide objective, unbiased, timely intelligence to the President and policymakers."

## **Texas lawmaker who led a pre-debate protest tried to join a call with other Democrats**

State Rep. Nicole Collier said she was told she had to get off the phone after she joined a Zoom call about redistricting that included prominent Democrats.

Collier joined the call from a bathroom in the House chamber. She said she wasn't allowed to participate from the floor, and other lawmakers could be heard in the background.

She was about to answer a reporter's question when she announced that she had to leave, saying, "They said it's a felony for me to do this."

She didn't specify who told her that.

"Apparently, I can't be on the floor or in the bathroom," she said.

She then said to someone nearby who was not visible, "Well, you told me I was only allowed to be here in the bathroom."

Participating in the call, U.S. Sen. Cory Booker, of New Jersey, accused Republicans of trying to silence a Black woman who is "an American leader."

## **"The fact that she can't even let her voice be heard is frickin' outrageous," Booker said.**

House Speaker Dustin Burrows' office said Collier wasn't breaking the chamber's rules or breaking the law. His office doesn't know why Collier made her statements or exactly what happened.

## **Guard commander calls mission not 'out of the ordinary'**

The commander of the National Guard members deployed in Washington says their mission isn't "out of the ordinary" though troops are out in larger numbers than usual.

They are providing "an extra set of eyes and ears, more than anything else, for our law enforcement partners and helping them maintain control the situation," said Col. Larry Doane, head of Joint Task Force District of Columbia, the military unit overseeing the Guard.

He spoke to The Associated Press outside Union Station, where D.C. Guard members have been stationed since Trump ordered a federal intervention into policing in the nation's capital last week. They have been joined by newly arrived troops from South Carolina.

"This is our community, too," Doane said. "We're from here. This is our town, too. And safe and beautiful is what we've been asked to do, and those are two words I can get behind."

## **Trump point person on Smithsonian says goal of review is to eliminate ideology**

Lindsey Halligan, one of Trump's special assistants, said a review of Smithsonian museums that he ordered will basically be an audit of the institution.

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Halligan told Fox News Channel that the goal is to learn how museum placards were written in what she says is an "ideological fashion." They also want to know how exhibits are voted on and how they're put together for the millions of people who visit annually, she said.

## **Halligan also said there is an "overemphasis on slavery" at the Smithsonian.**

A lawyer, Halligan said it's awful that the United States was involved in slavery but "I think there should be more of an overemphasis on how far we've come since slavery."

"There's a lot of history to our country, both positive and negative, but we need to keep moving forward," she said. "We can't just keep focusing on the negative. All it does is divide us. We really need to unite the country."

## **Prosecutors have a new policy on gun charges in DC, source says**

Federal prosecutors in the nation's capital have stopped seeking criminal charges for people possessing rifles or shotguns in Washington, D.C., according to a person familiar with the new policy.

U.S. Attorney Jeanine Pirro informed her office of the policy change in a memo sent within the past month, according to the person who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss an internal matter.

Pirro said in a statement that the change is based on guidance from the Justice Department and the Office of Solicitor General and conforms with two landmark U.S. Supreme Court decisions on gun rights.

The new policy also covers large-capacity magazines, but it doesn't apply to handguns. Pirro's office will continue to pursue felony charges for cases in which somebody is accused of using a shotgun or rifle in a crime of violence or has a criminal record that makes it illegal to have a firearm.

Local authorities in Washington can prosecute people for illegally possessing unregistered rifles and shotguns.

— By Michael Kunzelman

## **Barack Obama says it's OK for California to hit back on redistricting**

Obama made his comment at a fundraiser Tuesday night for the main Democratic redistricting group.

The former president said that he has long backed a nonpartisan approach to redistricting. But he agrees with California Gov. Gavin Newsom that Democrats there should try to replace their nonpartisan-drawn map with one drawn to maximize Democratic seats in response to the GOP's Texas move. Voters would need to approve the new California map.

"I think that approach is a smart, measured approach," Obama said.

Far more Democratic-controlled states' maps are drawn by independent commissions than Republican ones, putting the party at a disadvantage in the new redistricting fight.

## **Data shows rise in arrests during DC police surge**

The average number of people arrested each day in Washington during the first 10 days of Trump's federal takeover increased by about 20% as hundreds of federal officers joined police on the streets of the nation's capital.

Law enforcement data shows the average number of daily jail bookings increased from 64 to 78 during the 10-day period since the president moved to exert control over the police department and call out the National Guard, as compared with the previous 10 days.

Those totals include arrests by both local police and federal officers, but not immigration arrests, according to a law enforcement official who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss data that has not been publicly released.

Law enforcement have made more than 550 arrests since the beginning of the surge, officials have said. About 40% of those have been immigration arrests, according to data sent to law enforcement that was viewed by The Associated Press.

— By Lindsay Whitehurst

## **US Rep. Greg Casar is also at the Texas Capitol rally**

Casar may challenge Doggett in a new Austin district. Like Green, he is calling the new maps a violation of the Voting Rights Act.

**Casar was leading chants of "We're not going back."**

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Metropolitan Police Chief Pam Smith urges calm, measured collaboration with federal law enforcement. Smith said D.C. police had not yet received any subpoenas as part of the Justice Department's inquiry into the accuracy of the District of Columbia's crime statistics.

The broader operation was garnering mixed opinions from local police and residents.

Smith said that she's spoken with the Trump administration about community relations following protests and residents in multiple neighborhoods heckling federal agents who were conducting raids and other law enforcement activities. She added that the MPD had "come a long way in establishing positive relationships with our community" and wanted to maintain that dynamic amid the surge in federal agents.

"We do a lot of community engagement with our federal partners. This isn't new, so we want to try to see how we can enhance that and build upon that. What we don't want is for community members to interfere and get involved in things that is a police related manner," said Smith.

## **US Reps. Al Green of Houston and Lloyd Doggett of Austin join Texas Capitol protest**

Green said the new map is "something that Jim Crow would love."

Doggett said even if Democrats lose the vote today, they will fight to win the new districts.

"We need a check in this president," Doggett said. "We are going to keep fighting Trump in these five districts. We're together in this."

## **Vance, other Trump administration officials, have lunch with National Guard troops at Shake Shack**

Asked at Union Station whether the White House would extend the federalization of Washington's police force after 30 days, Vance replied, "If the president of the United States thinks that he has to extend this order to ensure that people have access to public safety, that's exactly what he'll do."

Amid questions about whether the Trump's actions have really made Washington safer, Vance suggested that crime statistics "all over the country" have been "massively underreported."

After speaking to reporters, the vice president, as well as Hegseth and Miller, remained at the station's Shake Shack for lunch with National Guard members.

## **Judge denies Justice Department request to unseal Epstein grand jury transcripts**

The ruling Wednesday by federal Judge Richard Berman in Manhattan came after the judge presiding over the case against British socialite Ghislaine Maxwell also turned down the government's request.

Maxwell is serving a 20-year prison sentence after her conviction on sex trafficking charges for helping the late financier Jeffrey Epstein sexually abuse girls and young women.

Epstein died in jail awaiting trial. A Justice Department spokesperson declined to comment.

## **Most DC residents are opposed to Trump's federal intervention in the District**

According to a new poll from The Washington Post-Schar School, about two-thirds also believe that Trump ordering the National Guard and FBI to patrol D.C. will not make the city safer.

The poll shows many D.C. residents don't agree with Trump's assessment of the District as a crime-ridden area. Fewer describe crime as a highly serious problem than did a few months ago.

Most residents report noticing more federal law enforcement officers in D.C. over the prior week. Among those who noticed more law enforcement, about 6 in 10 said it made them feel less safe.

## **Heated exchange over map's impact on Black voters**

Debate had been relatively calm and technical until Democratic State Rep. Barbara Gervin-Hawkins, who is Black, confronted bill author and Republican State Rep. Todd Hunter over the provision's elimination of two House seats held by Black Democrats.

"We weren't asked any questions or engaged," Gervin-Hawkins said, referring to the Texas Legislative Black Caucus and accusing Hunter of ignoring minority interests.

"For 17 to 18 days you left," Hunter shot back. "And now you're coming on the microphone and asking why I didn't come find you?"

## **ICC denounces US sanctions**

The International Criminal Court has denounced the imposition of new U.S. sanctions against four of its judges and prosecutors. In a statement, The Hague-based ICC called the sanctions "a flagrant attack



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against the independence of an impartial judicial institution” and “an affront against the Court’s states parties, the rules-based international order and, above all, millions of innocent victims across the world.”

The sanctions freeze any assets held by the two ICC judges and two ICC prosecutors in U.S. jurisdictions. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said he imposed the sanctions because the tribunal’s investigations into alleged war crimes by U.S. and Israeli soldiers and officials. Neither Israel nor the U.S. is a member of the ICC, which is charged prosecuting international war crimes.

Stephane Dujarric, the spokesperson for the U.N. secretary-general, said the U.S. should withdraw the sanctions.

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu welcomed the step.

## **Protesters are staying loud**

Opponents of the redistricting bill are staging protests inside the Capitol rotunda every two hours during the floor debate.

About 200 have gathered again to chant and cheer while lawmakers debate one floor above. Many protesters are holding signs that read “Put Texans Here” and “Fight the Trump Takeover.”

## **Debate centers around race**

Much of the floor debate over the new Texas map revolves around whether it increases or decreases the number of majority-minority districts in the state.

That’s because the Voting Rights Act requires that maps give minority groups enough districts where they have an opportunity to elect candidates of their choice. That would be the only grounds under which a court could block the map. Democrats and their allies have already filed court papers urging the presumed map be rejected for that reason.

Republicans are arguing that the map actually increases the number of majority-minority House seats in Texas. Democrats are countering that the map does so only by playing numbers games and overall hurts minority representation.

## **Republicans in little mood for talking**

Democrats can’t stop the vote on the redistricting bill but are doing what they can to slow things down. Republicans are in no mood.

Democrats are trying to prolong the debate by filing amendments and asking a lot of questions.

Republicans have twice used the majority to enforce time limits and keep the bill moving toward a vote.

## **Texas Democrats say it’s about democracy**

Texas Democrats objecting to the new maps say the idea of lawmakers redrawing districts to help their party win elections flies in the face of the nation’s values.

“In a democracy, people choose their representatives,” said state Rep. Chris Turner. “This bill flips that on its head and lets politicians in Washington, D.C., choose their voters.”

What about that aid for flood victims?

Texas Republican House Speaker Dustin Burrows has brushed off the protests by Democratic lawmakers, saying ahead of Wednesday’s session that he’s focused on important issues including responding to last month’s deadly floods.

Republicans had accused Democrats of delaying aid to flood victims by leaving the state. But redistricting is the only item scheduled for Wednesday’s session.

## **Trump is making more decorating changes at the White House**

It looks like Trump is adding portraits along the West Wing colonnade, or the walkway that borders one side of the Rose Garden.

U.S. Attorney Jeanine Pirro, who is also one of Trump’s close personal friends, shared photos of herself with the president on the colonnade.

In one photo, separate sheets of brown paper are taped to the wall. In the second, Trump and Pirro stand back and watch as military aides hold up framed portraits.

A White House spokesperson says Trump is playing with different ideas and designs.

## **Trump’s sanctions have halted ICC’s war crimes work**

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The Trump administration already managed to halt the International Criminal Court's work by sanctioning its chief prosecutor, Karim Khan. He lost access to his email and bank accounts, and the court's American staffers were told they risk arrest if they return home. Those are just some of hurdles court staff face under pressure from Trump, according to interviews with current and former ICC officials, international lawyers and human rights advocates.

Trump sanctioned the court after a panel of ICC judges in November issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his former defense minister, Yoav Gallant, finding reason to believe the pair may have committed war crimes by restricting humanitarian aid and intentionally targeting civilians in Israel's campaign against Hamas in Gaza — charges Israeli officials deny.

## **US sanctions more ICC officials for probing allegations of American and Israeli war crimes**

The Trump administration is ramping up pressure on the International Criminal Court. The sanctions announced by the State Department on Wednesday target two judges and two prosecutors who it said had been instrumental in efforts to prosecute Americans and Israelis at the The Hague-based international war crimes tribunal.

They are judges Kimberly Proust of Canada and Nicolas Guillou of France, and prosecutors Nazhat Shameem Khan of Fiji and Mame Mandiaye Niang of Senegal.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the administration will "take whatever actions we deem necessary to protect our troops, our sovereignty, and our allies from the ICC's illegitimate and baseless actions."

## **Hurricane Erin stirs up strong winds and floods part of a NC highway as it slowly moves out to sea**

By ALLEN G. BREED and JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

RODANTHE, N.C. (AP) — Hurricane Erin battered North Carolina's Outer Banks with strong winds and waves that flooded part of the main highway and surged under beachfront homes as the monster storm slowly began to move away from the East Coast on Thursday.

Forecasters predicted the storm would peak Thursday and said it could regain strength and once again become a major hurricane, Category 3 or greater, but it was not forecast to make landfall along the East Coast before turning farther out to sea.

Tropical storm conditions were in effect over parts of the Outer Banks and the coast of Virginia, the National Hurricane Center in Miami said. In Bermuda, residents and tourists were told to stay out of the water with rough seas expected through Friday.

As Erin's outer bands brushed the Outer Banks, water poured onto the main route connecting the barrier islands and a handful of stilted homes precariously perched above the beach. By Wednesday evening, officials had closed Highway 12 on Hatteras Island as the surge increased and waves rose. The road remained closed Thursday. Ocracoke Island's connection to its ferry terminal was cut off.

Authorities predicted that the largest swells during high tide would cut off villages and homes on the Outer Banks and whip up life-threatening rip currents from Florida to New England.

Beaches were closed to swimming Wednesday and Thursday in New York City, and some others in New Jersey, Maryland and Delaware were temporarily off-limits. Widespread, moderate coastal flooding was forecast for low-lying areas of Long Island and parts of New York City.

Off Massachusetts, Nantucket Island could see waves of more than 10 feet (3 meters) this week. But the biggest threat remained along the Outer Banks where longtime residents didn't seem too concerned.

"I remember taking canoes out of my front yard to get to school, so I don't think it's gonna be that bad," said Jacob Throne, who lives on Hatteras Island and works for surf shops.

Despite beach closures elsewhere, some swimmers continued to ignore the warnings. Rescuers saved more than a dozen people caught in rip currents Tuesday at Wrightsville Beach in North Carolina, a day after more than 80 people were rescued.

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Bob Oravec, a National Weather Service forecaster, said that even if someone thinks they know how to handle a rip current, it's not safe.

"You can be aware all you want," he said. "It can still be dangerous."

A combination of fierce winds and huge waves estimated at about 20 feet (6.1 meters) could cause coastal flooding in many beachfront communities, North Carolina officials warned.

"Dangerous conditions can be felt far from the eye, especially with a system as large as Erin," said Will Ray, the state's emergency management director.

Dozens of beach homes already worn down from chronic erosion and protective dunes could be at risk, said David Hallac, superintendent of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore.

Most residents decided to stay despite evacuations ordered on Hatteras and Ocracoke Islands.

"We probably wouldn't stay if it was coming directly at us," said Rob Temple, who operates sailboat cruises on Ocracoke.

His biggest concern was whether the main route would wash out and if tourists and delivery trucks may be cut off from the thin stretch of low-lying islands, which are increasingly vulnerable to storm surges.

Erin has become an unusually large and deceptively worrisome system, with tropical storm-force winds spreading across 500 miles (800 kilometers) — roughly the distances from New York City to Pittsburgh.

It remained a Category 2 hurricane early Thursday with maximum sustained winds around 105 mph (165 kph), the hurricane center said. Erin was about 205 miles (330 kilometers) east-southeast of Cape Hatteras and moving north-northeast at 17 mph (28 kph).

The hurricane center was also watching two tropical disturbances far out in the Atlantic that could develop into named storms in the coming days. With thousands of miles of warm ocean water, hurricanes known as Cape Verde storms are some of the most dangerous that threaten North America.

Climate scientists say Atlantic hurricanes are now much more likely to rapidly intensify into powerful and catastrophic storms, fueled by warmer oceans.

## Major Russian drone and missile attack on Ukraine kills 1, injures 15

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia launched one of its biggest aerial attacks of the year on Ukraine, firing 574 drones and 40 ballistic and cruise missiles overnight, the Ukrainian Air Force said Thursday, while a recent diplomatic push to stop the three-year war is trying to gain momentum.

The attack mostly targeted western regions of the country, the air force said, where much of the military aid provided by Ukraine's Western allies is believed to be delivered and stored. The strikes killed at least one person and injured 15 others, according to officials.

It was Russia's third largest aerial attack this year in terms of the number of drones fired and the eighth-largest in terms of missiles, according to official figures. Most such Russian attacks have hit civilian areas.

The strikes occurred during a renewed U.S.-led effort to reach a peace settlement following Russia's February 2022 invasion of its neighbor. U.S. President Donald Trump discussed the war with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Alaska last week, and at the start of this week hosted Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and European leaders at the White House.

Ukraine and European leaders have accused Putin of stalling in ongoing peace efforts, including Ukraine's proposal of a ceasefire and Zelenskyy's offer to sit down with the Russian leader. The Kremlin has reacted coolly to those possibilities.

Zelenskyy condemned the overnight attack, saying it was carried out "as if nothing were changing at all."

Moscow has shown no signs of pursuing meaningful negotiations to end the war, Zelenskyy said. He urged the international community to respond with stronger pressure on Moscow, including tougher sanctions and tariffs.

Ukraine, meanwhile, has kept up its attacks with domestically produced long-range drones on infrastructure inside Russia that supports Moscow's war effort. Among other targets, it has hit oil refineries, and

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Russian wholesale gasoline prices have reached record highs in recent days.

Ukraine's Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha said Russia struck a "major American electronics manufacturer" in western Ukraine. He provided no further details but Zelenskyy said the company produces domestic appliances.

Western parts of Ukraine are far from the battlefield's front line in the east and south of the country, where a grinding war of attrition has killed tens of thousands of soldiers on both sides.

In comments Wednesday that were embargoed until Thursday, Zelenskyy said Ukraine will hold intensive meetings to understand what kind of security guarantees its allies are willing to provide.

The details are being hammered out by national security advisers and military officials. The plans will become clearer within 10 days, Zelenskyy said. He then expects to be ready to hold direct talks with Putin for the first time since the full-scale invasion.

The talks could also be conducted in a trilateral format alongside Trump, Zelenskyy said.

A venue for the meeting is being discussed, and Switzerland, Austria and Turkey are possibilities, Zelenskyy added.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Wednesday that working on security arrangements in Ukraine without Moscow's involvement was not feasible, according to state news agency RIA Novosti.

Zelenskyy said that in his meeting with Trump in the Oval Office on Monday he sought to convince the American president that the battlefield situation was not as bad for Ukraine as Putin portrayed.

Zelenskyy pointed to errors in the U.S. map of the front line that he said showed Russia holding more territory than it actually does.

## **Uganda agrees deal with US to take deported migrants if they don't have criminal records**

KAMPALA, Uganda (AP) — Uganda has agreed a deal with the United States to take deported migrants on condition that the deportees should not have criminal records and not be unaccompanied minors, officials said Thursday.

The Ugandan foreign affairs ministry in a statement said the "two parties are working out the detailed modalities on how the agreement shall be implemented."

Uganda also expressed a preference that those brought into the country should be of African nationalities.

It was not clear if the agreement had been signed but the ministry statement said it had been "concluded."

International Relations Minister Henry Okello Oryem told The Associated Press that while Uganda is known globally for its benevolent refugee policy, there are limits.

And he questioned why the country would take people rejected by their own countries.

"We are talking about cartels: people who are unwanted in their own countries. How can we integrate them into local communities in Uganda?" he asked.

He said the government was in discussions about "visas, tariffs, sanctions, and related issues, not accepting illegal aliens from the U.S. That would be unfair to Ugandans."

In July, the U.S. deported five men with criminal backgrounds to the southern African kingdom of Eswatini and sent eight more to South Sudan.

## **China is expanding into digital currencies, hoping to promote use of its 'people's money'**

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer

BANGKOK (AP) — China has been expanding use of digital currencies as it promotes wider use of its yuan, or renminbi, to reflect its status as the world's second-largest economy and challenge the overwhelming sway of the U.S. dollar in international trade and finance.

However, restrictions on access to Chinese financial markets and limits on convertibility of the yuan, or



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"people's money," are big obstacles blocking its global use.

Still, Hong Kong already has stablecoin regulations and some Chinese experts are pushing for regulations to prepare for a possible stablecoin pegged to the yuan.

Officials at the People's Bank of China and State Council Information Office in Beijing did not immediately respond to requests for comment on a Reuters report that the State Council, or Cabinet, is preparing to issue a plan for internationalizing the yuan that might include a yuan stablecoin.

In the U.S., President Donald Trump has made cryptofriendly policies a priority for his administration. He signed a law, the GENIUS Act, last month regulating stablecoins.

How stablecoins work

Stablecoins are digital currencies whose value is linked to a specific currency such as the U.S. dollar. They can be used as a substitute in situations where currency transactions might be difficult or costly. They are different from cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin in that their only purpose is to be a means of payment, not an investment meant to be traded to gain value.

Dollar stablecoins are typically bought and sold for \$1 each. They are based on a reserve equal to their value, but are issued by private institutions, not central banks like the U.S. Federal Reserve.

Stablecoins are not Digital Central Bank Currencies, which are digital versions of currencies issued by central banks. They are based on blockchain-based distributed ledgers. They are "stable" in the sense that their value is anchored to the currency they are based on.

Critics of stablecoins say that since they are essentially a proxy for ordinary currencies that can bypass banking systems and safeguards set up to manage traditional financial transactions they may be most useful for illegal purposes.

China inches toward using digital currencies

China launched its own digital yuan, the e-CNY issued by its central bank, on a trial basis in 2019, and McDonalds was an early participant in that project. Chinese regulators have banned mining, trading and other dealings in private, decentralized digital currencies like Bitcoin, while encouraging use of the digital yuan.

The nearly universal use of electronic payments has facilitated use of the e-CNY in the Chinese mainland, with some cities using it to pay wages of civil servants. State media reported that as of July 2024, there were 7.3 trillion yuan worth of transactions using the currency in areas where it is being used on a trial basis.

China has also been promoting use of e-CNY in Africa, as it expands business dealings on the continent.

But e-CNY are not stablecoins. Experts say regulations are needed to safely manage use of stablecoins and to ensure they could be used smoothly with bank accounts and payment systems.

Hong Kong's role in digital currencies

Hong Kong, a former British colony that has its own financial markets, currency and partly autonomous legal system, enacted a stablecoin law that took effect on Aug. 1.

Aimed at attracting wealthy investors who want to use digital currencies and other financial products, it requires that a stablecoin linked to the Hong Kong dollar must be equal to the Hong Kong dollar reserves for that digital currency.

As a global duty-free port and financial hub, Hong Kong has often served as a base for trying out paths toward liberalizing Chinese financial markets. But new regulations specifically governing yuan stablecoin would be needed if such a digital currency were issued for use in Hong Kong, Liu Xiaochun, deputy director of the Shanghai Institute of New Finance, recently wrote in a report on the Chinese financial website Yicai.com.

China's limits on cross-border dealings

China's currency is not freely convertible in world financial markets and its stringent controls on foreign exchange are the biggest hindrance toward making the yuan a global currency, experts say.

According to the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication, or SWIFT, as of June, the yuan was the sixth most active currency for global payments by value, with a share of 2.88%. Its use peaked in July 2024 at about 4.7%.

It's used more often in trade financing, where it accounts for nearly 6% of such dealings, according to

that report.

The lion's share of yuan transactions take place in Hong Kong.

The U.S. dollar's share as a global payment currency was over 47% as of June, followed by the euro, the British pound, the Canadian dollar and the Japanese yen, the report said.

## **A Ukrainian startup develops long-range drones and missiles to take the battle to Russia**

By SAMYA KULLAB and EFREM LUKATSKY Associated Press

When a Ukrainian-made drone attacked an ammunition depot in Russia last September, it showcased Kyiv's determination to strike deep behind enemy lines and the prowess of its defense industry.

The moment was especially gratifying for the woman in charge of manufacturing the drones that flew more than 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) to carry out this mission. For months after, Russia no longer had the means to keep up devastating glide bomb attacks like the one that had just targeted her native city of Kharkiv.

"Fighting in the air is our only real asymmetric advantage on the battlefield at the moment. We don't have as much manpower or money as they have," said Iryna Terekh, head of production at Fire Point.

Terekh spoke as she surveyed dozens of "deep-strike drones" that had recently come off the assembly line and would soon be used by Ukrainian forces to attack arms depots, oil refineries and other targets vital to the Kremlin's war machine and economy.

Spurred by its existential fight against Russia — and limited military assistance from Western allies — Ukraine has fast become a global center for defense innovation. The goal is to match, if not outmuscle, Russia's capabilities — and Fire Point is one of the companies leading the way.

The Associated Press was granted an exclusive look inside one of Fire Point's dozens of covert factories. In a sprawling warehouse where rock music blared, executives showed off their signature FP-1 exploding drones that can travel up to 1,600 kilometers (994 miles). They also touted publicly for the first time a cruise missile they are developing that is capable of traveling 3,000 kilometers (1,864 miles), and which Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy hopes will be mass-produced by the end of the year.

Even as U.S. President Donald Trump presses for an end to the 3 1/2-year war — and dangles the prospect of U.S. support for NATO-like security guarantees — Ukrainian defense officials say their country is determined to become more self-sufficient in deterring Russia.

"We believe our best guarantee is not relying on somebody's will to protect us, but rather our ability to protect ourselves," said Arsen Zhumadilov, the head of the country's arms procurement agency.

Ukraine's government is now purchasing about \$10 billion of weapons annually from domestic manufacturers. The industry has the capacity to sell triple that amount, officials say, and they believe sales to European allies could help it reach such potential in a matter of years.

Drone innovation grew out of necessity

Like most defense companies in Ukraine, Fire Point grew out of necessity after Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022. Despite pleas from Ukrainian military officials, Western countries were unwilling to allow Kyiv to use their allies' longer-range weapons to strike targets deep inside Russian territory.

That's when a group of close friends, experts from various fields, set out to mass-produce inexpensive drones that could match the potency of Iranian-made Shahed drones that Russia was firing into Ukraine with devastating consequences.

The company's founders spoke with AP on the condition of anonymity out of concern for their safety and the security of their factories.

By pooling together knowledge from construction, game design and architecture, the company's founders — who had no background in defense — came up with novel designs for drones that could fly further and strike with greater precision than most products already on the market. Their long-range drones had another benefit: they did not need to take off from an air field.

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When Terekh — an architect — was hired in the summer of 2023, she was given a goal of producing 30 drones per month. Now the company makes roughly 100 per day, at a cost of \$55,000 apiece.

The FP-1 looks more like a hastily made science project than something that would roll off the production lines of the world's biggest defense contractors. "We removed unneeded, flashy glittery stuff," she said.

But the FP-1 has been extremely effective on the battlefield.

With a payload of explosives weighing 60 kilograms (132 pounds), it is responsible for 60% of strikes deep inside Russian territory, including hits on oil refineries and weapons depots, according to Terekh. These strikes have helped to slow Russia's advance along the 1,000 kilometer-long (620 mile-long) front line in eastern Ukraine, where army units have reported a sharp decline in artillery fire.

"I think the best drones, or among the best, are Ukrainian drones," said Claude Chenuil, a former French military official who now works for a trade group that focuses on defense. "When the war in Ukraine ends, they will flood the market."

Ukraine is becoming the 'Silicon Valley' of defense

Fire Point's story is not entirely unique. Soon after Russia's 2022 invasion, hundreds of defense companies sprouted almost overnight. The Ukrainian government incentivized innovation by relaxing regulations and making it easier for startups to work directly with military brigades.

Patriotic entrepreneurs in metallurgy, construction and information technology built facilities for researching and making weapons and munitions, with an emphasis on drones. The ongoing war allowed them to test out ideas almost immediately on the battlefield, and to quickly adapt to Russia's changing tactics.

"Ukraine is in this very unique moment now where it is becoming, de facto, the Silicon Valley of defense," said Ukrainian defense entrepreneur Yaroslav Azhnyuk. "The biggest strategic asset that we have is that we have been at war with Russia for 11 years."

A case in point: Fire Point had initially sourced navigational equipment for its drones from a major Western firm, but before long Russia was able to disrupt their effectiveness using electronic warfare; so Fire Point developed its own software to outwit the enemy.

Because defense companies are high-value targets for Russia, many operate underground or hidden within civilian centers to evade detection. Although they are guarded by air defenses, the strategy has the disadvantage of putting civilians at risk. Many Ukrainians have died in imprecise Russian attacks that were likely targeting weapons facilities. Entrepreneurs said the alternative is to operate openly and face attacks that would set back the war effort.

Supplies of drones don't last long

On the day AP reporters visited the Fire Point factory, there were dozens of drones awaiting delivery. They would all be gone within 72 hours, shipped to the battlefield in inconspicuous cargo trucks.

The Fire Point team receives regular feedback from army units, and the company has reinvested most profits toward innovating quickly to keep pace with other drone makers. Increasingly, those profits are being directed to develop a new, more potent weapon.

The company completed testing this year for its first cruise missile, the FP-5. Capable of traveling 3,000 kilometers (1,864 miles) and landing within 14 meters (45 feet) of its target, the FP-5 is one of the largest such missile in the world, delivering a payload of 1,150 kilograms (2,535 pounds), independent experts said. Because initial versions of the missile came out pink after a factory error, they called it the Flamingo — and the name has stuck.

Fire Point is producing roughly one Flamingo per day, and by October they hope to build capacity to make seven per day, Terekh said.

Even as Zelenskyy and other Ukrainian officials pursue ways to end the war, Terekh said she is skeptical that Russia will accept terms for a real peace. "We are preparing for a bigger, much scarier war."

## Prosecutors say Sean 'Diddy' Combs' request for acquittal or new trial should be swiftly rejected

By LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press



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NEW YORK (AP) — Federal prosecutors are urging a federal judge to quickly reject Sean “Diddy” Combs’ request that he throw out a jury verdict or order a new trial after a jury convicted the music maven of two prostitution-related charges.

Prosecutors said in papers filed shortly before midnight Wednesday that Combs masterminded elaborate sexual events for two ex-girlfriends between 2008 and last year that involved hiring male sex workers who sometimes were required to cross multiple state lines to participate.

A jury in July exonerated the Bad Boy Records founder of racketeering conspiracy and sex trafficking charges that carried the potential penalty of a mandatory 15 years in prison up to life behind bars. But it convicted him of two lesser Mann Act charges that prohibit interstate commerce related to prostitution.

The Mann Act charges each carry a potential penalty of 10 years behind bars. Combs has been denied bail despite his lawyers’ arguments that their client should face little to no additional jail time for the convictions. Prosecutors said he must serve multiple years behind bars.

Combs has been in a federal jail in Brooklyn since his September arrest at a Manhattan hotel. Sentencing is scheduled for Oct. 3.

Prosecutors wrote that Combs’ attorneys were mistaken when they contended in a submission to the judge late last month that the Mann Act was unduly vague and violates his due process and First Amendment rights.

“Evidence of the defendant’s guilt on the Mann Act counts was overwhelming,” prosecutors wrote.

They noted that the multiday, drug-fueled sexual marathons that Combs demanded of his girlfriends involved hiring male sex workers and facilitating their travel across multiple states for what became known as “freak-offs” or “hotel nights.”

Prosecutors said he then used video recordings he made of the sexual events to threaten and coerce the girlfriends to continue participating in the sometimes weekly or monthly sexual meetings.

“At trial, there was ample evidence to support the jury’s convictions,” prosecutors said.

They said Combs “masterminded every aspect” of the sexual meetups, paying escorts to travel across the country to participate and directing the sexual activity that took place between the men and his girlfriends “for his own sexual gratification” while sometimes joining in.

Cassandra “Cassie” Ventura, an R&B artist who dated Combs from 2008 through 2018, testified during the trial that Combs sometimes demanded the sexual meetups with male escorts every week, often leaving her too exhausted to work on her music career. She said she participated in hundreds of “freak-offs.”

A woman who testified under the pseudonym “Jane” said she participated in “hotel nights” when she dated Combs from 2021 to last September and that the events sometimes lasted multiple days and required her to have sex with male sex workers, even when she was not well.

Both women testified that Combs had threatened to release videos he made of the encounters as a way of controlling their behavior.

“During these relationships, he asserted substantial control over Ventura and Jane’s lives. Specifically, he controlled and threatened Ventura’s career, controlled her appearance, and paid for most of her living expenses, taking away physical items when she did not do what he wanted,” prosecutors wrote.

“The defendant similarly paid Jane’s \$10,000 rent and threatened her that he would stop paying her rent if she did not comply with his demands,” they said.

In their submission requesting acquittal or a new trial, Combs’ lawyers argued that none of the elements normally used for Mann Act convictions, including profiting from sex work or coercion, existed.

“It is undisputed that he had no commercial motive and that all involved were adults,” the lawyers said. “The men chose to travel and engage in the activity voluntarily. The verdict confirms the women were not vulnerable or exploited or trafficked or sexually assaulted.”

The lawyers said that Combs, “at most, paid to engage in voyeurism as part of a ‘swingers’ lifestyle” and argued that “does not constitute ‘prostitution’ under a properly limited definition of the statutory term.”

**‘South Park’ targets federal takeover of DC police in latest episode**

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NEW YORK (AP) — “South Park” continued its cartoon assault on the Trump administration Wednesday, with an episode that addressed the federal takeover of Washington, D.C.’s police department.

The latest installment on Comedy Central depicted the recurring character “Towelie” — a walking, talking towel — riding in a bus past landmarks like the Supreme Court building and the Capitol as armed troops marched in the streets. A tank rolled by in front of the White House.

The half-hour episode, which primarily satirized artificial intelligence, also roasted world leaders and tech CEOs for kowtowing to President Donald Trump. Eventually Towelie ended up with the president in the Oval Office.

“South Park” creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone recently signed a reported \$1.5 billion, five-year deal with Paramount for new episodes and streaming rights to their series, which began its 27th season this summer.

Their second episode of the season depicted Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem shooting puppies, a reference to a story from the former South Dakota governor’s biography where she said she killed the family dog because of its behavioral issues. Noem was also depicted being trailed by a team of beauticians having to reattach her face.

“It’s so easy to make fun of women for how they look,” Noem told Glenn Beck in response to the episode.

The season premiere mocked Trump’s body in a raunchy manner and depicted him sharing a bed with Satan. That scenario reappeared in Wednesday’s episode.

The White House has dismissed “South Park” as a fourth-rate, no-longer-relevant show. But it has been attracting attention; Comedy Central said the Noem episode had the highest audience share in the show’s history, a reference to the percentage of people with televisions on watching the cartoon.

## **Rhode Island Judge Frank Caprio, whose empathy in court earned him fame online, dies at 88**

By STEVE LeBLANC Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — Frank Caprio, a retired municipal judge in Rhode Island who found online fame as a caring jurist and host of “Caught in Providence,” has died. He was 88.

His official social media accounts said Wednesday that he “passed away peacefully” after “a long and courageous battle with pancreatic cancer.”

Caprio billed his courtroom as a place “where people and cases are met with kindness and compassion.” He was known for dismissing tickets or showing kindness even when he handed out justice.

Last week, Caprio posted a short video on Facebook about how he had “a setback,” was back in the hospital and was asking that people “remember me in your prayers.”

Caprio’s show was filmed in his courtroom and featured his folksy humor and compassion. Clips from the show have had more than 1 billion views on social media.

During his time on the bench, Caprio developed a persona at odds with many TV judges — more sympathetic and less confrontational and judgmental.

In his bite-sized segments on YouTube, Caprio is often seen empathizing with those in his courtroom. Many of the infractions are also relatively minor, from failing to use a turn signal to a citation for a loud party.

Caprio also used his fame to address issues like unequal access to the judicial system.

“The phrase, ‘With liberty and justice for all’ represents the idea that justice should be accessible to everyone. However it is not,” Caprio said in one video. “Almost 90% of low-income Americans are forced to battle civil issues like health care, unjust evictions, veterans benefits and, yes, even traffic violations, alone.”

Caprio’s upbeat take on the job of a judge drew him millions of views. His most popular videos have been those where he calls children to the bench to help pass judgment on their parents. One shows him listening sympathetically to a woman whose son was killed and then dismissing her tickets and fines of \$400.

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In another clip, after dismissing a red-light violation for a bartender who was making \$3.84 per hour, Caprio urged those watching the video not to duck out on their bills.

"If anyone's watching I want them to know you better not eat and run because you're going to get caught and the poor people who are working hard all day for three bucks an hour are going to have to pay your bill," he said.

His fame reached as far as China, where clips of his show have been uploaded to social media in recent years. Some fans there posted about his death, recalling and praising the humanity he showed in his rulings.

His family described Caprio "as a devoted husband, father, grandfather, great grandfather and friend."

"Beloved for his compassion, humility, and unwavering belief in the goodness of people, Judge Caprio touched the lives of millions through his work in the courtroom and beyond," the family wrote online. "His warmth, humor, and kindness left an indelible mark on all who knew him."

State and local politicians mourned his passing and celebrated his life.

"Judge Caprio not only served the public well, but he connected with them in a meaningful way, and people could not help but respond to his warmth and compassion," Rhode Island Gov. Dan McKee said in a statement. "He was more than a jurist — he was a symbol of empathy on the bench, showing us what is possible when justice is tempered with humanity."

Robert Leonard, who co-owned a restaurant with Caprio, said he was "going to be sorely missed" and was "all around wonderful."

"There is nothing he wouldn't do for you if he could do it," Leonard said.

Caprio retired from Providence Municipal Court in 2023 after nearly four decades on the bench.

According to his biography, Caprio came from humble beginnings, the second of three boys growing up in the Federal Hill neighborhood of Providence, Rhode Island.

"I hope that people will take away that the institutions of government can function very well by exercising kindness, fairness, and compassion in their deliberations. We live in a very contentious society," he said in 2017. "I would hope that people will see that we can dispense justice without being oppressive."

## Gymnast who sparked abuse inquiry into coach at elite US academy says she 'needed to speak out'

By RYAN J. FOLEY Associated Press

IOWA CITY, Iowa (AP) — Recalling the damage her now-arrested coach inflicted on her and many of her gymnast friends, Finley Weldon said she feels a sense of pride.

Free from the grip that Sean Gardner had during her years of training at an Iowa academy known for producing Olympians, Weldon told The Associated Press in an exclusive interview that she is among the few who survived his abuse and are still in the sport.

The 18-year-old is heading into her freshman year at Iowa State University, where she'll be a member of the Cyclones gymnastics team. She spoke with the AP on Wednesday, less than a week after Gardner was arrested on a child sexual exploitation charge.

"I didn't want him to take away anything from me, especially something that I love," she said. "None of the girls that I started with or went through the things that I did with Sean are still doing gymnastics today. So that's something I'm very proud of."

She's also happy she's made a difference, in the same way gymnasts she admires — like Aly Raisman, an Olympian whose visceral accounts of abuse by Larry Nassar shined a spotlight on the trauma gymnasts went through and how authorities failed to curb it.

The AP generally does not identify victims of sexual abuse, but Weldon said she wanted "my name out there because I was the one who did come forward."

"I felt like I needed to speak out to stop it from happening to other little girls, so they didn't have to go through what I went through," Weldon said.

"I knew it would just be a continuous cycle if nobody did."

Gymnasts reported abuse to watchdog in 2022



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The FBI said Tuesday it believes Gardner “targeted children” while coaching at Chow’s Gymnastics and Dance Institute in West Des Moines, and gyms in Mississippi and Louisiana where he worked dating back to 2004.

Gardner, 38, didn’t return AP messages left on his cellphone before his arrest, and has not entered a plea to the charge. A public defender who represented him after his arrest hasn’t returned messages.

Another former gymnast at Chow’s, the academy known for producing Olympic gold medalists Shawn Johnson and Gabby Douglas, first reported sexual abuse allegations against Gardner to the U.S. Center for SafeSport in March 2022, alleging he fondled her during training sessions, according to an FBI affidavit.

That girl provided the names of six other of Gardner’s potential victims, according to the affidavit. Weldon said she spoke with a SafeSport investigator about her abuse at the time.

SafeSport, a watchdog created after the Nassar scandal to investigate misconduct complaints, informed the West Des Moines Police Department about the allegations. It suspended Gardner from coaching or having contact with any gymnasts in July 2022.

The police department said its investigation was closed in 2022 when the initial accuser decided she did not want to pursue charges.

Weldon said police never reached out to her in 2022 but she’s unsure whether she would have wanted to press charges then. She said she came forward in April 2024 at age 16 after she matured and began to realize the severity of her abuse.

She praised police for doing “an amazing job” keeping her informed about the progress of the case.

“It’s definitely taken awhile, but I mean, even I didn’t realize how many steps there would be to charge him with anything,” she said.

Police defend investigative efforts

Iowa investigators say they searched Gardner’s home in May and seized electronic devices that contained images of nude girls from a hidden camera Gardner placed in the bathroom of a Purvis, Mississippi, gym where he previously worked.

West Des Moines Police Sgt. Daniel Wade said Wednesday the department sought the FBI’s assistance in mid-July when the case’s “scope started to broaden.” Asked why the department didn’t involve FBI sooner, he said, “We call the FBI when the time is right.”

Gardner is charged in federal court in Mississippi with producing visual depictions of minors engaging in sexually explicit conduct related to the alleged hidden camera. Federal and state investigations remain active, and additional charges are possible.

Wade defended the department’s investigative efforts over the last three years. He said investigators “went as far with it as we could” in 2022, without a victim seeking charges and have been conducting a thorough investigation since receiving the new complaint in 2024.

Wade declined comment on whether investigators reached out to Weldon and other potential victims identified in 2022, saying only that police opened “lines of communication with different people” that later paid off.

Weldon said she met with investigators Tuesday and they asked her to identify herself in an image Gardner allegedly secretly took of her in a vulnerable stretching position.

Protecting the ‘male figure in my life’

Weldon said her goal since she was a girl was to reach the elite level in the USA Gymnastics Junior Olympic program for those who aim to compete internationally.

She said she started training at Chow’s after her family moved to Iowa in 2015. She began taking private lessons with Gardner two or three times per week shortly after he joined Chow’s in September 2018, when she 11 years old.

Weldon said she was struggling as her parents went through a divorce and her father was largely absent from her life. She said Gardner sought to fill that role by telling her she could tell him “anything” and that he would always be there for her.

In hindsight, she said he was manipulating her in order to gain her trust.

Finley’s mother, Julie Weldon, said she heard concerns about Gardner from other parents at Chow’s

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early on and asked her daughter whether her coach had ever done anything inappropriate. Finley said she falsely told her mother no because she was protecting the "male figure in my life."

Inappropriate behavior progressed

She said Gardner began touching her inappropriately in 2019 during lessons, beginning with long hugs and pats on the back. She said his behavior progressed, and he began touching her butt during the hugs and requiring her to stretch for extended periods in positions that exposed her vagina and anus out of her leotard.

She said around 2020 he began touching her vagina while spotting her during exercises. She recalled once telling him not to put his hands there and he claimed it was an accident because her "leotard was slippery."

Weldon recalled reaching her breaking point with Gardner after a 2021 training in which he yelled and threw shoes at her, telling her she'd never reach elite status. She said she walked out and told her mom she wanted to quit.

She said many of her classmates quit or didn't return because of Gardner's conduct after the gym shut down during the pandemic. But while he made her hate gymnastics at times, she continued training when her family moved to Texas and then to Utah. She said she eventually proved Gardner wrong by earning elite status and a spot on a Division 1 team.

After news of Gardner's arrest, Weldon saw his jail booking photo in the AP story. She said she was struck by how much heavier and unkempt he appeared.

"He's definitely like gone through a spiral," she said. "I think he probably just had so much guilt built up in him that he kind of turned into that."

## Israel to mobilize 60,000 reservists ahead of an expanded Gaza City operation

By MELANIE LIDMAN, SAM METZ and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel's military said Wednesday it will call up 60,000 reservists ahead of an expanded military operation in Gaza City. Many residents have chosen to stay despite the danger, fearing nowhere is safe in a territory facing shortages of food, water and other necessities.

Calling up extra military reservists is part a plan Defense Minister Israel Katz approved to begin a new phase of operations in some of Gaza's most densely populated areas, the military said. The plan, which is expected to receive the chief of staff's final approval in the coming days, also includes extending the service of 20,000 additional reservists who are already on active duty.

In a country of fewer than 10 million people, the call-up of reservists is the largest in months and carries economic and political weight. It comes days after hundreds of thousands of Israelis rallied for a cease-fire, as negotiators scramble to get Israel and Hamas to agree to end their 22 months of fighting, and as rights groups warn that an expanded assault could deepen the crisis in the Gaza Strip, where most of the roughly 2 million inhabitants have been displaced, many areas have been reduced to rubble, and the population faces the threat of famine.

Gaza City operation could begin within days

An Israeli military official, speaking on the condition of anonymity in line with military regulations, said troops will operate in parts of Gaza City where they haven't been deployed yet and where Israel believes Hamas is still active. Israeli troops in the the city's Zeitoun neighborhood and in Jabaliya, a refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip, are already preparing the groundwork for the expanded operation, which could begin within days.

Though the timeline wasn't clear, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said Wednesday that Netanyahu "has directed that the timetables ... be shortened" for launching the offensive.

Gaza City is Hamas' military and governing stronghold, and one of the last places of refuge in the northern Strip, where hundreds of thousands are sheltering. Israeli troops will be targeting Hamas' vast underground tunnel network there, the official added.

Although Israel has targeted and killed much of Hamas' senior leadership, parts of Hamas are actively

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regrouping and carrying out attacks, including launching rockets towards Israel, the official said.

Netanyahu has said the war's objectives are to secure the release of remaining hostages and ensure that Hamas and other militants can never again threaten Israel.

The planned offensive, announced earlier this month, comes amid heightened international condemnation of Israel's restrictions on food and medicine reaching Gaza and fears that many Palestinians will be forced to flee.

"It's pretty obvious that it will just create another mass displacement of people who have been displaced repeatedly since this phase of the conflict started," United Nations spokesman Stephane Dujarric told reporters.

Associated Press journalists saw small groups heading south from the city this week, but it's unclear how many others will voluntarily flee. Some said they would wait to see how events unfold, with many insisting that nowhere is safe from airstrikes.

"What we're seeing in Gaza is nothing short of apocalyptic reality for children, for their families, and for this generation," Ahmed Alhendawi, regional director of Save the Children, said in an interview. "The plight and the struggle of this generation of Gaza is beyond being described in words."

Some reservists question the war's goals

The call-up comes amid a growing campaign by exhausted reservists who accuse the Israeli government of perpetuating the war for political reasons and failing to bring home the 50 remaining hostages, 20 of whom are believed to be alive.

The hostages' families and former army and intelligence chiefs have also expressed opposition to the expanded operation in Gaza City. Most of the families want an immediate ceasefire and worry that an expanded assault could imperil the surviving hostages.

Guy Poran, a retired air force pilot who has organized veterans campaigning to end the war, said many reservists are spent after repeated tours lasting hundreds of days and resent those who haven't been called up.

"Even those that are not ideologically against the current war or the government's new plans don't want to go because of fatigue or their families or their businesses," he said.

Hamas-led militants started the war when they attacked Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing roughly 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting 251. Most of the hostages have been released in ceasefires or other deals. Hamas says it will only free the rest in exchange for a lasting ceasefire and an Israeli withdrawal.

Israel has yet to respond to a ceasefire proposal

Arab mediators and Hamas said this week that the militant group's leaders had agreed to the terms of a proposed 60-day ceasefire, though similar announcements have been made in the past that didn't lead to a lasting truce.

Egypt and Qatar have said they are waiting for Israel's response.

Egypt's foreign minister, Badr Abdelatty, spoke by phone Wednesday with U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff to discuss the proposed ceasefire in the hopes of winning Israel's acceptance, the Egyptian foreign ministry said. During the call, Abdelatty urged Israel to "put an end to this unjust war" by negotiating a comprehensive deal and "to lay the foundations for a just settlement of the Palestinian cause," according to the Egyptian government.

An Israeli official who spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to speak to the media said Israel is in constant contact with the mediators in an effort to secure the hostages' release.

Netanyahu has repeatedly said he will oppose a deal that doesn't include the "complete defeat of Hamas."

Also Wednesday, Israel gave final approval to a controversial settlement project east of Jerusalem in the occupied West Bank. The development in what's called E1 would effectively cut the territory in two. Palestinians and rights groups say it could destroy hopes for a future Palestinian state.

Gaza's death toll rises

At least 27 Palestinians were killed and more than 100 were wounded Wednesday at the Zikim crossing in northwestern Gaza as a crowd rushed toward a U.N. convoy transporting humanitarian aid, according to health officials.

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"The majority of casualties were killed by gunshots fired by the Israeli troops," said Fares Awad, head of the Health Ministry's ambulance and emergency service in northern Gaza. "The rush toward the trucks and the stampede killed and injured others."

The dead included people seeking aid and Palestinians guarding the convoy, Awad told the AP. The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

More than 62,122 people have been killed during Israel's offensive, Gaza's Health Ministry said Monday. The ministry is part of the Hamas-run government and staffed by medical professionals. The ministry does not say how many of the dead were civilians or combatants, but it said women and children make up around half of them.

In addition, 154 adults have died from malnutrition-related causes since late June, when the ministry began counting such deaths, and 112 children have died from malnutrition-related causes since the war began.

## Hundreds of historic tall ships sail into Amsterdam for a maritime festival

By MOLLY QUELL Associated Press

AMSTERDAM (AP) — Crowds packed vantage points along a major canal and took to the water themselves Wednesday to watch a flotilla of hundreds of historic ships sail into Amsterdam at the start of a five-day festival celebrating the Dutch capital's maritime history.

Ships from all over the world, many with their masts and rigging decorated with flags, sailed from the North Sea coastal town of IJmuiden on an hourslong journey up the North Sea Canal and into Amsterdam's IJ waterway for SAIL 2025, the first edition in a decade.

A puff of orange smoke erupted into the sky and ships' horns sounded as the replica three-masted clipper Stad Amsterdam passed through a lock to mark the official start of the event. Each ship is greeted with two cannon shots and its country's national anthem as it enters the harbor.

Hugo Peek was one of the thousands of people who sailed in smaller boats together with the tall ships. Along with his grandfather and several other family members, he traveled on a smaller boat that accompanied the tall ship Europa.

"There was almost no water. It's almost all boats," the 21-year-old student said.

Mahek Singahl was waiting in Amsterdam's central train station, looking onto the harbor with her two small children and several large suitcases. Her family was headed back to Ivory Coast after a holiday in Iceland and had stopped in Amsterdam for a few days. They had no idea what the crowds were for.

"My husband went to look at the boats and left me here," she said, laughing. "He loves this stuff."

The event, which draws hundreds of thousands of visitors, is held every five years. The 2020 edition was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Wednesday's parade culminates in an evening fireworks display. The ships will remain in Amsterdam, many open for visitors, through the weekend.

The first event was first held in 1975 to celebrate Amsterdam's 700th anniversary and this year's edition coincides with the city's 750th birthday.

## Hurricane Erin picking up steam as it edges along the East Coast

By ALLEN G. BREED and JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

RODANTHE, N.C. (AP) — Hurricane Erin began strengthening again Wednesday as it crept closer to the mid-Atlantic coast, its outer bands brushing North Carolina's Outer Banks as beaches closed across much of the U.S. East Coast.

Forecasters expect the storm to peak going into Thursday and say it could intensify again as a major hurricane.

While Erin is unlikely to make landfall along the East Coast before turning farther out to sea, its outer edge is packing tropical force winds while approaching North Carolina's Outer Banks.



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Water began pouring onto the main route connecting the barrier islands and around a handful of stilted homes precariously perched above the beach. By Wednesday evening, officials had closed Highway 12 on Hatteras Island as surge increased and waves were growing higher, while Ocracoke Island's connection to its ferry terminal was cut off.

Authorities expect the largest swells during high tide will cut off villages and vacation homes on the Outer Banks and whip up life-threatening rip currents from Florida to New England.

New York City closed its beaches to swimming on Wednesday and Thursday. Some beaches in New Jersey, Maryland and Delaware also will be temporarily off-limits. The storm is expected to bring widespread, moderate coastal flooding to low-lying areas of Long Island and parts of New York City.

Off Massachusetts, Nantucket Island could see waves of more than 10 feet (3 meters) later this week. But the biggest threat remained along the Outer Banks where longtime residents didn't seem too concerned.

"I remember taking canoes out of my front yard to get to school, so I don't think it's gonna be that bad," said Jacob Throne, who lives on Hatteras Island and works for surf shops.

Surfers flocked to the oceanfront in Virginia Beach, where Erin was supplying robust waves for the East Coast Surfing Championships and the kind of swells that many locals hadn't seen in awhile.

"We're notorious for not having waves," said Henry Thompson, who competed in the open long board event. "Usually we get a surf competition and it gets canceled due to no waves or they just run it in really bad waves."

The championships will pause Thursday when Erin blows directly off the Virginia coast. But Thompson said he's expecting more hurricanes and good surfing in the coming months.

Despite beach closures elsewhere, some swimmers were continuing to ignore the warnings. Rescuers saved more than a dozen people caught in rip currents Tuesday at Wrightsville Beach in North Carolina — a day after more than 80 people were rescued.

Bob Oravec, a National Weather Service forecaster, said even if someone thinks they know how to handle a rip current, it's still not safe.

"You can be aware all you want," he said. "It can still be dangerous."

A combination of fierce winds and huge waves — estimated to be about 20 feet (6.1 meters) — could cause coastal flooding in many beachfront communities, North Carolina officials warned on Wednesday.

"Dangerous conditions can be felt far from the eye, especially with a system as large as Erin," said Will Ray, the state's emergency management director.

Dozens of beach homes already worn down from chronic beach erosion and protective dunes could be at risk, said David Hallac, superintendent of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore.

The National Hurricane Center is also watching two tropical disturbances to the east of Erin that could develop into named cyclones. With thousands of miles of warm ocean water, hurricanes known as Cape Verde storms are some of the most dangerous that threaten North America.

In the Outer Banks, most residents decided to stay despite evacuations ordered on Hatteras and Ocracoke Islands.

"We probably wouldn't stay if it was coming directly at us," said Rob Temple, who operates sailboat cruises on Ocracoke.

His biggest concern was whether the main route will be washed out, and if tourists and delivery trucks will be cut off from the thin stretch of low-lying islands that are increasingly vulnerable to storm surges.

Erin has become an unusually large and deceptively worrisome storm, with its tropical storm winds spreading across 500 miles (800 kilometers) — roughly the distances from New York City to Pittsburgh.

It remained a strong Category 2 hurricane on Wednesday with maximum sustained winds around 110 mph (180 kph), the National Hurricane Center said. Erin was about 215 miles (346 kilometers) southeast of North Carolina's Cape Hatteras.

Tropical storm warnings were issued for North Carolina and Virginia, while in Bermuda residents and tourists were told to stay out of the water, as rough seas are expected through Friday.

Climate scientists say Atlantic hurricanes are now much more likely to rapidly intensify into powerful and

catastrophic storms fueled by warmer oceans.

## Israel approves settlement project that could divide the West Bank

By MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Israel gave final approval Wednesday for a controversial settlement project in the occupied West Bank that would effectively cut the territory in two, and that Palestinians and rights groups say could destroy hopes for a future Palestinian state.

Settlement development in E1, an open tract of land east of Jerusalem, has been under consideration for more than two decades, but was frozen due to U.S. pressure during previous administrations. The international community overwhelmingly considers Israeli settlement construction in the West Bank to be illegal and an obstacle to peace.

Far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, a former settler leader, cast the approval as a rebuke to Western countries that announced their plans to recognize a Palestinian state in recent weeks.

"The Palestinian state is being erased from the table not with slogans but with actions," he said on Wednesday. "Every settlement, every neighborhood, every housing unit is another nail in the coffin of this dangerous idea."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejects the idea of a Palestinian state alongside Israel and has vowed to maintain open-ended control over the occupied West Bank, annexed east Jerusalem, and the war-ravaged Gaza Strip — territories Israel seized in the 1967 war that the Palestinians want for their state.

Israel's expansion of settlements is part of an increasingly dire reality for Palestinians in the occupied West Bank as the world's attention focuses on the war in Gaza. There have been marked increases in attacks by settlers on Palestinians, evictions from Palestinian towns, Israeli military operations, and checkpoints that choke freedom of movement, as well as several Palestinian attacks on Israelis.

More than 700,000 Israelis settlers now live in the West Bank and east Jerusalem.

The location of E1 is significant because it is one of the last geographical links between the major West Bank cities of Ramallah, in the north, and Bethlehem, in the south.

The two cities are 22 kilometers (14 miles) apart, but Palestinians traveling between them must take a wide detour and pass through multiple Israeli checkpoints, spending hours on the journey. The hope was that, in an eventual Palestinian state, the region would serve as a direct link between the cities.

"The settlement in E1 has no purpose other than to sabotage a political solution," said Peace Now, an organization that tracks settlement expansion in the West Bank. "While the consensus among our friends in the world is to strive for peace and a two-state solution, a government that long ago lost the people's trust is undermining the national interest, and we are all paying the price."

Asked about E1 in an interview with The Associated Press, U.S. Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee said talk of a two-state solution was not a "high priority" for the Trump administration and that there were too many unanswered questions about what a Palestinian state would look like. The State Department did not immediately respond to requests for further comment.

If the process moves quickly, infrastructure work in E1 could begin in the next few months and construction of homes could start in around a year. The plan includes around 3,500 apartments that would abut the existing settlement of Maale Adumim. Smotrich also hailed the approval, during the same meeting, of 350 homes for the settlement of Ashael near Hebron.

Israel could, in theory, remove the settlement at some future date, as it did with its ones in Gaza in 2005, but that possibility appears extremely remote at present given strong support for the settlements among Israel's government and even some opposition parties.

Israel's government is dominated by religious and ultranationalist politicians, like Smotrich, with close ties to the settlement movement. The finance minister has been granted Cabinet-level authority over settlement policies and vowed to double the settler population in the West Bank.

## Brazilian police say ex-President Bolsonaro had planned to flee to Argentina seeking asylum

By MAURICIO SAVARESE and GABRIELA SÁ PESSOA Associated Press

BRASILIA, Brazil (AP) — Brazil's federal police said messages found on the telephone of former President Jair Bolsonaro showed he once wanted to flee to Argentina and request political asylum, according to documents seen Wednesday by The Associated Press.

Bolsonaro is currently awaiting a Supreme Court ruling about an alleged coup attempt and learned Wednesday he might face another case as police formally accused him and one of his sons, Eduardo Bolsonaro, of obstruction of justice in connection with his trial.

The 170-page report said Bolsonaro had drafted a request for political asylum from Argentine President Javier Milei's government dated Feb. 10, 2024. He saved the document two days after authorities searched his home and office as part of the alleged coup plot investigation.

Close to that date, Bolsonaro admittedly spent two nights at the Hungarian Embassy in Brasília, fueling speculation he may have been attempting to avoid arrest.

The Argentina plot is part of the wider police accusation of obstruction of justice, in which Bolsonaro has allegedly ignored precautionary measures established for his house arrest and spread content to his allies "to directly hit Brazilian democratic institutions, notably the Supreme Court and even Brazil's Congress," according to the report.

The AP reviewed the police evidence, which included messaging app exchanges and voice messages, after police forwarded the documents to Brazil's Supreme Court. Bolsonaro would face another trial if the attorney-general decides to charge him.

Justice Alexandre de Moraes, who oversees the case, gave Bolsonaro's lawyers 48 hours to explain why the former president sought political asylum in Argentina and failed to comply with other precautionary measures of his house arrest, such as avoiding contact with people outside his family circle.

### Asylum in Argentina

In a 33-page letter addressed to Milei, Bolsonaro claimed he was being politically persecuted in Brazil. Both are staunch supporters of U.S. President Donald Trump, who has recently repeated some of the former president's claims in his decision to impose 50% tariffs on Brazilian exports.

"I, Jair Messias Bolsonaro, request political asylum from Your Excellency in the Republic of Argentina, under an urgent regime, as I find myself in a situation of political persecution in Brazil and fear for my life," the former Brazilian leader wrote.

Bolsonaro had his passport seized by Brazil's Supreme Court in on Feb. 8, 2024. He has repeatedly sought to get it back, including prior to Trump's inauguration earlier this year. De Moraes rejected all requests as the former president is seen as a flight risk.

Manuel Adorni, spokesperson for Milei, said the Argentine government hasn't received anything yet. Bolsonaro did not comment about the investigation.

The former Brazilian president attended Milei's inauguration in December 2023, while the serving President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva did not attend. Lula and Milei have had a frosty relationship since the right-wing Argentine took office.

Silas Malafaia, a very popular evangelical pastor who is a staunch ally of Bolsonaro's, had his passport and cell phone seized by investigators but was not formally accused of obstruction of justice.

### Praising Trump

Brazil's federal police gathered several messages between Bolsonaro and his son in which they show interest in praising Trump to affect legal proceedings back home.

"You won't have time to reverse the situation if the guy here turns his back on you. Everything here is very touchy, every little thing affects you," Eduardo Bolsonaro told his father in one of the exchanges.

"In today's situation, you don't even need to worry about jail; you won't be arrested. But I'm afraid things will change here (in the United States). Even inside the White House, there are people telling (Trump): 'OK, Brazil is gone. Let's move on,'" Eduardo Bolsonaro said.

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Earlier, Eduardo Bolsonaro said in a statement that he "never aimed at interfering in any ongoing proceedings in Brazil." He added the conversations with his father that are part of the investigation are "absolutely normal" and its publication has a political bias.

Some exchanges also show frictions sauced with expletives between father and son. Eduardo, who moved to the U.S. earlier this year despite holding a seat in Brazil's congress, calls Bolsonaro "ungrateful" for his efforts to influence the Trump administration in their favor.

Eduardo Bolsonaro also asks his father to "ACT RESPONSIBLY" so he doesn't have to remain much longer in the U.S.

Avoiding prison

Eduardo Bolsonaro also said he had secured U.S. government support "with great difficulty," claiming that he and an ally, Paulo Figueiredo, were the only ones with access to the White House. He also told his father that Trump's pressure was the only chance Bolsonaro had to avoid prison.

"The most powerful man in the world is on your side. We did our part," Eduardo texted on July 10.

Brazil's federal police also investigated conversations between Bolsonaro and Martin de Luca, a lawyer for video platform Rumble and the Trump Media Group in a case challenging Justice Alexandre de Moraes, who oversees the investigations against the former president. De Luca sent the former president information about Rumble's lawsuit against de Moraes in the U.S.

On July 14, De Luca wrote to Bolsonaro, saying he was receiving interview requests from U.S. media for the former president. That same day, Bolsonaro sent De Luca a voice message seeking his advice.

"I drafted a note, I think I sent it to you, with four short paragraphs. It is good, praising Trump, saying that freedom is much more important than economic issues," Bolsonaro said. "I was really happy with Trump, very grateful to him. Please guide me with a short statement from your side, so I can post it on my channels and send it back to you."

A verdict and sentence in the coup trial will come from a Supreme Court panel of five justices. They are scheduled to announce their rulings between Sept. 2 and 12. The new findings will not be part of that decision.

Prosecutors say Bolsonaro and several of his allies headed a criminal organization that plotted to overturn the election, including plans to kill Lula and de Moraes.

## **Texas House approves redrawn maps sought by Trump ahead of 2026 elections**

By JIM VERTUNO and NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — The Texas House on Wednesday approved redrawn congressional maps that would give Republicans a bigger edge in 2026, muscling through a partisan gerrymander that launched weeks of protests by Democrats and a widening national battle over redistricting.

The approval came at the urging of President Donald Trump, who pushed for the extraordinary mid-decade revision of congressional maps to give his party a better chance at holding onto the U.S. House of Representatives in the 2026 midterm elections. The maps, which would give Republicans five more winnable seats, need to be approved by the GOP-controlled state Senate and signed by Republican Gov. Greg Abbott before they become official.

But the Texas House vote had presented the best chance for Democrats to derail the redraw.

Democratic legislators delayed the vote by two weeks by fleeing Texas earlier this month in protest, and they were assigned round-the-clock police monitoring upon their return to ensure they attended Wednesday's session.

The approval of the Texas maps on an 88-52 party-line vote is likely to prompt California's Democratic-controlled state Legislature this week to approve of a new House map creating five new Democratic-leaning districts. But the California map would require voter approval in November.

Democrats have also vowed to challenge the new Texas map in court and complained that Republicans made the political power move before passing legislation responding to deadly floods that swept the state



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last month.

Texas maps openly made to help GOP

Texas Republicans openly said they were acting in their party's interest. State Rep. Todd Hunter, who wrote the legislation formally creating the new map, noted that the U.S. Supreme Court has allowed politicians to redraw districts for nakedly partisan purposes.

"The underlying goal of this plan is straight forward: improve Republican political performance," Hunter, a Republican, said on the floor. After nearly eight hours of debate, Hunter took the floor again to sum up the entire dispute as nothing more than a partisan fight. "What's the difference, to the whole world listening? Republicans like it, and Democrats do not."

Democrats said the disagreement was about more than partisanship.

"In a democracy, people choose their representatives," State Rep. Chris Turner said. "This bill flips that on its head and lets politicians in Washington, D.C., choose their voters."

State Rep. John H. Bucy blamed the president. "This is Donald Trump's map," Bucy said. "It clearly and deliberately manufactures five more Republican seats in Congress because Trump himself knows that the voters are rejecting his agenda."

Redistricting becomes tool nationwide in battle for US House

The Republican power play has already triggered a national tit-for-tat battle as Democratic state lawmakers prepared to gather in California on Thursday to revise that state's map to create five new Democratic seats.

"This is a new Democratic Party, this is a new day, this is new energy out there all across this country," California's Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom said on a call with reporters on Wednesday. "And we're going to fight fire with fire."

A new California map would need to be approved by voters in a special election in November because that state normally operates with a nonpartisan commission drawing the map to avoid the very sort of political brawl that is playing out. Newsom himself backed the 2008 ballot measure to create that process, as did former President Barack Obama. But in a sign of Democrats' stiffening resolve, Obama Tuesday night backed Newsom's bid to redraw the California map, saying it was a necessary step to stave off the GOP's Texas move.

"I think that approach is a smart, measured approach," Obama said during a fundraiser for the Democratic Party's main redistricting arm.

The incumbent president's party usually loses seats in the midterm election, and the GOP currently controls the House of Representatives by a mere three votes. Trump is going beyond Texas in his push to remake the map. He's pushed Republican leaders in conservative states like Indiana and Missouri to also try to create new Republican seats. Ohio Republicans were already revising their map before Texas moved. Democrats, meanwhile, are mulling reopening Maryland's and New York's maps as well.

However, more Democratic-run states have commission systems like California's or other redistricting limits than Republican ones do, leaving the GOP with a freer hand to swiftly redraw maps. New York, for example, can't draw new maps until 2028, and even then, only with voter approval.

Texas Democrats decry the new maps

In Texas, there was little that outnumbered Democrats could do other than fume and threaten a lawsuit to block the map. Because the Supreme Court has blessed purely partisan gerrymandering, the only way opponents can stop the new Texas map would be by arguing it violates the Voting Rights Act requirement to keep minority communities together so they can select representatives of their choice.

Democrats noted that, in every decade since the 1970s, courts have found that Texas' legislature did violate the Voting Rights Act in redistricting, and that civil rights groups had an active lawsuit making similar allegations against the 2021 map that Republicans drew up.

Republicans contend the new map creates more new majority-minority seats than the previous one. Democrats and some civil rights groups have countered that the GOP does that through mainly a numbers game that leads to halving the number of the state's House seats that will be represented by a Black representative.

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State Rep. Ron Reynolds noted the country just marked the 60th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act's passage and warned GOP members about how they'd be remembered if they voted for what he called "this racial gerrymander."

"Just like the people who were on the wrong side of history in 1965, history will be looking at the people who made the decisions in the body this day," Reynolds, a Democrat, said.

Republicans hit back at criticism

Republicans spent far less time talking on Wednesday, content to let their numbers do the talking in the lopsided vote. As the day dragged on, a handful hit back against Democratic complaints.

"You call my voters racist, you call my party racist and yet we're expected to follow the rules," said State Rep. Katrina Pierson, a former Trump spokesperson. "There are Black and Hispanic and Asian Republicans in this chamber who were elected just like you."

House Republicans' frustration at the Democrats' flight and ability to delay the vote was palpable. The GOP used a parliamentary maneuver to take a second and final vote on the map so it wouldn't have to reconvene for one more vote after Senate approval.

House Speaker Dustin Burrows announced as debate started that doors to the chamber were locked and any member leaving was required to have a permission slip. The doors were only unlocked after final passage more than eight hours later. One Democrat who refused the 24-hour police monitoring, State Rep. Nicole Collier, had been confined to the House floor since Monday night.

Some Democratic state lawmakers joined Collier Tuesday night for what Rep. Cassandra Garcia Hernandez dubbed "a sleepover for democracy."

Republicans issued civil arrest warrants to bring the Democrats back after they left the state Aug. 3, and Republican Gov. Greg Abbott asked the state Supreme Court to oust several Democrats from office. The lawmakers also face a fine of \$500 for every day they were absent.

## Top White House officials turn to public appearances with troops as a tense Washington watches

By CHRIS MEGERIAN, LINDSAY WHITEHURST and MATT BROWN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's law-enforcement crackdown on Washington expanded Wednesday and top administration officials visited National Guard troops to support a deployment that has left parts of the U.S. capital looking like occupied territory. Anger and frustration dotted the city as the vice president lauded an operation that he asserted has "brought some law and order back."

The tense situation, which began more than a week ago when Trump took control of the local police department, appeared primed for escalating confrontations between residents who say they feel under siege and federal forces carrying out the president's vision of militarized law enforcement in Democratic cities. Other residents have said they welcome the federal efforts as a way to cut crime and bolster safety.

As Trump ratcheted up the pressure, Vice President JD Vance and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth shared burgers with soldiers at the city's main railroad hub as demonstrators gathered nearby. The appearance, a striking scene that also included White House Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller, illustrated the Republican administration's intense dedication to an initiative that has polarized the Democratic-led city.

"You guys are doing a hell of a job," Vance told the troops assembled in the Union Station Shake Shack. While protest chants echoed through the restaurant, he rejected polling that shows city residents don't support the National Guard deployment as a solution to crime.

Someone booed Vance loudly and repeatedly as he left. The vice president grinned and said, "This is the guy who thinks people don't deserve law and order in their own community."

Trump has already suggested replicating his approach to D.C. in other cities, such as Chicago and Baltimore. He previously deployed the National Guard and the Marines in Los Angeles in response to immigration protests.

Swaths of the city are on edge

In the seven months since Trump took office for the second time, the traditionally liberal city of Wash-

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ington has buckled under his more aggressive presidency. Thousands of federal employees have been laid off, landmark institutions like the Smithsonian are being overhauled on grounds of doctrine, and local leaders have been increasingly wary of angering the commander-in-chief.

Now parts of the city are bristling with resentment over Trump's approach. Spectators chanted "free D.C." at a soccer game. Residents share sightings of immigration agents to help migrants steer clear. In the Columbia Heights neighborhood, crowds jeered federal officers and flipped middle fingers as they drove away. On some nights, people bang pots and pans outside their front doors in a cacophonous display of defiance.

Less than a mile from the U.S. Capitol, an armored National Guard vehicle collided with a civilian car in the early morning Wednesday, trapping the driver inside until emergency crews arrived. The massive military transport, designed to withstand improvised explosive devices in war zones, towered over the crushed silver sport utility vehicle. Bystanders gathered.

"You come to our city and this is what you do? Seriously?" a woman yelled at the troops in a video posted online.

More troops have been arriving in the city, many from six Republican-led states. An estimated 1,900 are being deployed in total, with most posted in downtown areas like the National Mall, metro stations and near the park where baseball's Washington Nationals play.

In addition, federal officers from the Drug Enforcement Administration, Immigration and Customs Enforcement and other agencies have circulated through D.C. to make arrests.

And a spokesman for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia said 20 members of the military's Judge Advocate General Corps would begin helping prosecute cases.

Col. Larry Doane, the commander of the joint task force in the D.C. National Guard, said they're trying to provide "an extra set of eyes and ears" for police and "helping them maintain control of the situation."

"This is our community, too," Doane said.

That's not how D.C. native LaVerne Smalls, 46, feels. "It's very different. It's very quiet," she said. "And I don't like it. It should be full of life."

Smalls knows D.C. has struggled with crime, but she didn't used to feel worried walking around. "I feel even more threatened," she said. "And I think that's how they want us to feel."

The actions from law enforcement have occasionally veered beyond safety and crime reduction and into regulating expression. Over the weekend, masked agents took down a profane protest banner in the Mount Pleasant neighborhood — to the apparent delight of the administration, which posted a video of the incident online. "We're taking America back, baby," one of the agents said in the video.

Corey Frayer, 42, who lives nearby, said "that sends a message."

"Mount Pleasant has always been a very activist, outspoken neighborhood," he said. "And I think they think if they can show up here and scare us, then they'll have done their job."

Arrests are increasing as local officials navigate the situation

The White House said more than 550 people have been arrested so far, and the U.S. Marshals are offering \$500 rewards for information leading to additional arrests. "Together, we will make DC safe again!" Attorney General Pam Bondi wrote on social media. City statistics show crime was already declining before Trump's intervention, despite his claims of a crisis necessitating the federal takeover of the D.C. police department.

The number of people arrested each day in Washington has increased by about 20% since the government began sending in a surge of federal agents, according to law enforcement data.

On average, there were 78 people booked in the city jail in the first 10 days, compared with 64 in the 10 days before that. Those numbers don't include immigration arrests, though they do include arrests by both local police and federal officers, according to a law enforcement official who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss data that has not been publicly released.

Policing experts say it's tough to draw firm conclusions over such a short period of time, especially since increases in police presence can relocate crime instead of preventing it.

Extending federal control of the city police department would require congressional approval, but Vance suggested the decision ultimately rests with Trump. "If the president of the United States thinks that he

has to extend this order to ensure that people have access to public safety, that's exactly what he'll do," he said.

Washington Mayor Muriel Bowser acknowledged the militarized backdrop in the city as she attended a back-to-school event with teachers and staff. She said it's important that children "have joy when they approach this school year," which starts Monday.

Bowser has been measured but directly critical of the federal operation, saying officers should not be wearing masks and arguing that the National Guard should not be used for law enforcement. "I don't think you should have an armed militia in the nation's capital," she said.

Meanwhile, the skewer-everyone cartoon television show "South Park," which has leaned into near-real-time satire in recent years, this week made the federal crackdown fodder for a new episode. Last month, the show's 27th-season premiere mocked the president's body in a raunchy manner and depicted him sharing a bed with Satan.

## Appeals court allows Trump to end temporary protections for migrants from Central America and Nepal

By JANIE HAR Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — A federal appeals court on Wednesday sided with the Trump administration and halted for now a lower court's order that had kept in place temporary protections for 60,000 migrants from Central America and Nepal.

This means that the Republican administration can move toward removing an estimated 7,000 people from Nepal whose Temporary Protected Status designations expired Aug. 5. The TPS designations and legal status of 51,000 Hondurans and 3,000 Nicaraguans are set to expire Sept. 8, at which point they will become eligible for removal.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco granted the emergency stay pending an appeal as lead plaintiff National TPS Alliance alleges that the administration acted unlawfully in ending Temporary Protected Status designations for people from Honduras, Nicaragua and Nepal.

"The district court's order granting plaintiffs' motion to postpone, entered July 31, 2025, is stayed pending further order of this court," wrote the judges, who are appointees of Democrat Bill Clinton and Republicans George W. Bush and Donald Trump.

Temporary Protected Status is a designation that can be granted by the Homeland Security secretary, preventing migrants from being deported and allowing them to work. The Trump administration has aggressively sought to remove the protection, thus making more people eligible for removal. It's part of a wider effort by the administration to carry out mass deportations of immigrants.

Secretary Kristi Noem can extend Temporary Protected Status to immigrants in the U.S. if conditions in their homelands are deemed unsafe for return due to a natural disaster, political instability or other dangerous conditions.

Immigrant rights advocates say TPS holders from Nepal have lived in the U.S. for more than a decade while people from Honduras and Nicaragua have lived in the country for 26 years, after Hurricane Mitch in 1998 devastated both countries.

"The Trump administration is systematically de-documenting immigrants who have lived lawfully in this country for decades, raising U.S.-citizen children, starting businesses, and contributing to their communities," said Jessica Bansal, attorney at the National Day Laborer Organization, in a statement.

Noem ended the programs after determining that conditions no longer warranted protections.

In a sharply written July 31 order, U.S. District Judge Trina L. Thompson in San Francisco kept the protections in place while the case proceeds. The next hearing is Nov. 18.

She said the administration ended the migrant status protections without an "objective review of the country conditions," such as political violence in Honduras and the impact of recent hurricanes and storms in Nicaragua.

In response, Tricia McLaughlin, the assistant secretary at DHS, said, "TPS was never meant to be a de



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facto asylum system, yet that is how previous administrations have used it for decades.”

The Trump administration has already terminated TPS designations for about 350,000 Venezuelans, 500,000 Haitians, more than 160,000 Ukrainians and thousands of people from Afghanistan and Cameroon. Some have pending lawsuits in federal courts.

Lawyers for the plaintiffs argued that Noem’s decisions are unlawful because they were predetermined by President Donald Trump’s campaign promises and motivated by racial animus.

But Drew Ensign, a U.S. deputy assistant attorney general, said at a hearing Tuesday that the government suffers an ongoing irreparable harm from its “inability to carry out the programs that it has determined are warranted.”

Honduras Deputy Foreign Minister Gerardo Torres said Wednesday that the appellate decision was unfortunate. He said the government hopes to at least buy time for Hondurans with the temporary status so they can seek out another way to stay legally in the U.S.

“We’re going to wait to see what the National TPS Alliance decides, it’s possible the case could be elevated to the United States Supreme Court, but we have to wait,” he said.

In May, the U.S. Supreme Court allowed the Trump administration to end TPS designations for Venezuelans. The justices provided no rationale, which is common in emergency appeals, and did not rule on the underlying claims.

## China rushes to build out solar, and emissions edge downward

By KEN MORITSUGU and NG HAN GUAN Associated Press

TALATAN, China (AP) — High on the Tibetan plateau, Chinese government officials last month showed off what they say will be the world’s largest solar farm when completed — 610 square kilometers (235 square miles), the size of the American city of Chicago.

China has been installing solar panels at a blistering pace, far faster than anywhere else in the world, and the investment is starting to pay off. A study released Thursday found that the country’s carbon emissions edged down 1% in the first six months of the year compared to a year earlier, extending a trend that began in March 2024.

The good news is China’s carbon emissions may have peaked well ahead of a government target of doing so before 2030. But China, the world’s biggest emitter of greenhouse gases, will need to bring them down much more sharply to play its part in slowing global climate change.

For China to reach its declared goal of carbon neutrality by 2060, emissions would need to fall 3% on average over the next 35 years, said Lauri Myllyvirta, the Finland-based author of the study and lead analyst at the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air.

“China needs to get to that 3% territory as soon as possible,” he said.

China’s emissions have fallen even as it uses more electricity

China’s emissions have fallen before during economic slowdowns. What’s different this time is electricity demand is growing — up 3.7% in the first half of this year — but the increase in power from solar, wind and nuclear has easily outpaced that, according to Myllyvirta, who analyzes the most recent data in a study published on the U.K.-based Carbon Brief website.

“We’re talking really for the first time about a structural declining trend in China’s emissions,” he said.

China installed 212 gigawatts of solar capacity in the first six months of the year, more than America’s entire capacity of 178 gigawatts as of the end of 2024, the study said. Electricity from solar has overtaken hydropower in China and is poised to surpass wind this year to become the country’s largest source of clean energy. Some 51 gigawatts of wind power was added from January to June.

Li Shuo, the director of the China Climate Hub at the Asia Society Policy Institute in Washington, described the plateauing of China’s carbon emissions as a turning point in the effort to combat climate change.

“This is a moment of global significance, offering a rare glimmer of hope in an otherwise bleak climate landscape,” he wrote in an email response. It also shows that a country can cut emissions while still growing economically, he said.

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But Li cautioned that China's heavy reliance on coal remains a serious threat to progress on climate and said the economy needs to shift to less resource-intensive sectors. "There's still a long road ahead," he said.

One solar farm can power 5 million households

A seemingly endless expanse of solar panels stretches toward the horizon on the Tibetan plateau. White two-story buildings rise above them at regular intervals. Sheep graze on the scrubby vegetation that grows under them.

Solar panels have been installed on about two-thirds of the land. When completed, it will have more than 7 million panels and be capable of generating enough power for 5 million households.

Like many of China's solar and wind farms, it was built in the relatively sparsely populated west. A major challenge is getting electricity to the population centers and factories in China's east.

"The distribution of green energy resources is perfectly misaligned with the current industrial distribution of our country," Zhang Jinming, the vice governor of Qinghai province, told journalists on a government-organized tour.

Part of the solution is building transmission lines traversing the country. One connects Qinghai to Henan province. Two more are planned, including one to Guangdong province in the southeast, almost at the opposite corner of the country.

Making full use of the power is hindered by the relatively inflexible way that China's electricity grid is managed, tailored to the steady output of coal plants rather than more variable and less predictable wind and solar, Myllyvirta said.

"This is an issue that the policymakers have recognized and are trying to manage, but it does require big changes to the way coal-fired power plants operate and big changes to the way the transmission network operates," he said. "So it's no small task."

## **Gabbard slashing intelligence office workforce and cutting budget by over \$700 million**

By AAMER MADHANI, ERIC TUCKER and ALI SWENSON Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Office of the Director of National Intelligence will dramatically reduce its workforce and cut its budget by more than \$700 million annually, the Trump administration announced Wednesday.

The move amounts to a major downsizing of the office responsible for coordinating the work of 18 intelligence agencies, including on counterterrorism and counterintelligence, as President Donald Trump has tangled with assessments from the intelligence community.

His administration also this week has revoked the security clearances of dozens of former and current officials, while last month declassifying documents meant to call into question long-settled judgments about Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election.

"Over the last 20 years, ODNI has become bloated and inefficient, and the intelligence community is rife with abuse of power, unauthorized leaks of classified intelligence, and politicized weaponization of intelligence," Tulsi Gabbard, the director of national intelligence, said in a statement announcing a more than 40% workforce reduction.

She added: "Ending the weaponization of intelligence and holding bad actors accountable are essential to begin to earn the American people's trust which has long been eroded."

Division tackling foreign influence is targeted

Among the changes are to the Foreign Malign Influence Center, which is meant to track influence operations from abroad and threats to elections. Officials said it has become "redundant" and that its core functions would be integrated into other parts of the government.

The reorganization is part of a broader administration effort to rethink how it tracks foreign threats to American elections, a topic that has become politically loaded given Trump's long-running resistance to the intelligence community's assessment that Russia interfered on his behalf in the 2016 election.

In February, for instance, Attorney General Pam Bondi disbanded an FBI task force focused on investi-

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gating foreign influence operations, including those that target U.S. elections. The Trump administration also has made sweeping cuts at the U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, which oversees the nation's critical infrastructure, including election systems. And the State Department in April said it shut down its office that sought to deal with misinformation and disinformation that Russia, China and Iran have been accused of spreading.

Republicans cheer the downsizing, and Democrats pan it

Reaction to the news broke along partisan lines in Congress, where Sen. Tom Cotton, Republican chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, praised the decision as "an important step towards returning ODNI to that original size, scope, and mission. And it will help make it a stronger and more effective national security tool for President Trump."

The panel's top Democrat, Sen. Mark Warner, pledged to carefully review Gabbard's proposals and "conduct rigorous oversight to ensure any reforms strengthen, not weaken, our national security." He said he was not confident that would be the case "given Director Gabbard's track record of politicizing intelligence."

Gabbard's efforts to downsize the agency she leads is in keeping with the cost-cutting mandate the administration has employed since its earliest days, when Elon Musk and his Department of Government Efficiency oversaw mass layoffs of the federal workforce.

It's the latest headline-making move by an official who just a few month ago had seemed out of favor with Trump over her analysis of Iran's nuclear capabilities but who in recent weeks has emerged as a key loyalist with her latest actions.

Changes to efforts to combat foreign election influence

The Foreign Malign Influence Center was created by the Biden administration in 2022 to respond to what the U.S. intelligence community had assessed as attempts by Russia and other adversaries to interfere with American elections.

Its role, ODNI said when it announced the center's creation, was to coordinate and integrate intelligence pertaining to malign influence. The office in the past has joined forces with other federal agencies to debunk and alert the public to foreign disinformation intended to influence U.S. voters.

For example, it was involved in an effort to raise awareness about a Russian video that falsely depicted mail-in ballots being destroyed in Pennsylvania that circulated widely on social media in the weeks before the 2024 presidential election.

Gabbard said Wednesday she would be refocusing the center's priorities, asserting it had a "hyper-focus" on work tied to elections and that it was "used by the previous administration to justify the suppression of free speech and to censor political opposition." Its core functions, she said, will be merged into other operations.

The center is set to sunset at the end of 2028, but Gabbard is terminating it "in all but name," said Emerson Brooking, a resident fellow at the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab, which tracks foreign disinformation.

Though Gabbard said in a fact sheet that the center's job was redundant because other agencies already monitor foreign influence efforts targeting Americans, Brooking refuted that characterization and said the task of parsing intelligence assessments across the government and notifying decision-makers was "both important and extremely boring."

"It wasn't redundant, it was supposed to solve for redundancy," he said.

## Oregon man pleads guilty following fatal crash with community college softball team bus

By CLAIRE RUSH Associated Press

An Oregon man has pleaded guilty to two counts of second-degree manslaughter following a fatal crash with a bus carrying a community college softball team that left a player and the team's head coach dead, according to court documents filed Wednesday.

The petition to enter a guilty plea, filed in Coos County Circuit Court, shows Dowdy also pleaded guilty

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to three counts of third-degree assault, five counts of fourth-degree assault, one count of driving under the influence and one count of driving with a suspended license.

The attorney listed for Dowdy in court records, Jennifer Leigh Leseberg, did not immediately respond to requests seeking comment.

Dowdy was driving his pickup truck on April 18 when he crossed a center line and crashed into a bus carrying 10 members of the Umpqua Community College softball team, state police said.

Jami Strinz, 46, described on the school's website as the head softball coach, was driving the Chevrolet Express bus. Police said she was later declared dead at a hospital.

Kiley Jones, 19, was pronounced dead at the scene. The freshman from Nampa, Idaho, played first base, according to the athletics department's website.

The team was traveling from a game in Coos Bay, according to a statement from the school.

The other eight occupants of the bus received moderate to serious injuries, according to police.

Dowdy also was injured and was admitted to a hospital, state police said. It wasn't immediately clear what type of injuries he had. The Coos County Jail roster shows he was booked on April 21.

Dowdy's sentencing is scheduled for Sept. 11.

## **Dangerous heat descends on California and the Southwest, raising wildfire risk**

By CHRISTOPHER WEBER and DAMIAN DOVARGANES Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A dangerous, multiday heat wave descended on much of California and the U.S. Southwest, with near-record temperatures expected along with a higher risk of wildfires.

Officials opened cooling centers this week in Los Angeles, where residents are warned to avoid strenuous outdoor activities. California Gov. Gavin Newsom ordered state firefighting resources deployed in areas where blazes could ignite.

Here's what you need to know.

Sizzling hot

The National Weather Service issued an extreme heat warning for Southern California starting Wednesday into the weekend. If outdoor activities can't be avoided, forecasters say, they should be moved to early morning hours. And everyone should hydrate.

Downtown Los Angeles was forecast to reach 97 degrees Fahrenheit (36 degrees Celsius) on Friday, while valleys to the north braced for temperatures as high as 108 F (42 C). It will be several degrees hotter in desert areas including Palm Springs.

Candice Catlett, who uses a wheelchair, rolled herself toward some shade as temperatures started spiking Tuesday in downtown LA.

"It's sizzling hot out here," Catlett said. "I have sunblock. Hopefully, I can find some cold water. I'm trying to stay out of the direct sun."

Further north, nearly-always-hot Death Valley could see a severe 120 F (49 C), the weather service said, 14 degrees shy of its record high of 134 F (56 C) set more than a century ago when in 1913 it hit the highest-ever recorded temperature on Earth.

In Arizona, the peak of the heat wave will hit Thursday and Friday, with the mercury possibly reaching 110 F (43 C) in the southern and western parts of the state. Similar temperatures were likely in Las Vegas.

Fire risk

Red flag warnings, signaling elevated wildfire danger, have been issued across Los Angeles, Ventura, Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo counties until Saturday.

"If you live in a high fire danger area in the mountains or foothills, review your evacuation plans and route and stay tuned to your local emergency officials," the weather service said in a statement.

The state has sent 10 fire engines and multiple firefighting teams to LA County to assist local agencies if blazes break out.

"By prepositioning firefighting crews, equipment, and other resources in high-risk areas, we can respond



faster and more effectively when needed," said Nancy Ward, director of the Governor's Office of Emergency Services.

California's largest blaze this year, the Gifford Fire, was at 95% containment Wednesday after charring nearly 206 square miles (534 square kilometers) of San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties since erupting on Aug. 1. The cause is under investigation.

Thunderstorms too

Adding to the chance for wildfires, especially in mountain areas, is lightning that could accompany thunderstorms, said Sam Zuber, a meteorologist with the weather service's San Diego office.

"We have monsoonal moisture coming in, we have an unstable environment because of the heat, and that creates perfect condition for thunderstorms," Zuber said Wednesday. She added that lightning can strike in dry areas up to 15 miles (24 kilometers) away from where downpours occur.

Heavy rain could also cause localized flooding and mudslides, forecasters warned.

## Judge denies Justice Department request to unseal Epstein grand jury transcripts

By LARRY NEUMEISTER, MICHAEL R. SISAK and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A federal judge on Wednesday rejected the Trump administration's request to unseal grand jury transcripts from Jeffrey Epstein's sex trafficking case, joining two other judges who declined to release similar records from investigations into the late financier's sexual abuse of young women and girls.

Judge Richard Berman, who presided over the 2019 case, ruled a week after another Manhattan federal judge turned down the government's request to release transcripts from the grand jury that indicted Epstein's longtime confidante Ghislaine Maxwell.

Barring reversal on appeal, Berman's decision appears to foreclose the possibility of federal courts releasing Epstein-related grand jury testimony. A federal judge in Florida declined to release grand jury documents from an investigation there in 2005 and 2007, though some material from a state case against Epstein was made public last year.

The rulings were a resounding repudiation of the Justice Department's effort to unlock the records, a move the Republican administration undertook amid a fierce backlash over its refusal to release a massive trove of documents in its possession.

Berman and the judge in Maxwell's case, Paul A. Engelmayer, made clear in their rulings that the grand jury transcripts contain none of the answers likely to satisfy the immense public interest in the case.

President Donald Trump had called for the release of transcripts amid rumors and criticism about his long-ago involvement with Epstein. During last year's presidential campaign, Trump promised to release files related to Epstein, but he was met with criticism — including from many of his own supporters — when the small number of records released by his Justice Department lacked new revelations.

A Justice Department spokesperson declined to comment on Wednesday.

Each of the judges who declined to release transcripts cited longstanding grand jury secrecy rules and concluded that the government did not meet any of the extraordinary exceptions under federal law that could justify making them public. Berman said it was the first time since 1973 that the government sought to unseal grand jury records for "special circumstances."

The judges also noted that the Justice Department has voluminous records related to Epstein that aren't covered by grand jury secrecy rules. Berman wrote that the scant information contained in 70 pages of Epstein grand jury transcripts "pales in comparison to the Epstein investigative information and materials in the hands of the Department of Justice," which he said totals around 100,000 pages.

"The Government is the logical party to make comprehensive disclosure to the public of the Epstein Files," Berman wrote in an apparent reference to the Justice Department's refusal to release additional records. He said the request to release grand jury records "appears to be a 'diversion' from the breadth and scope of the Epstein files in the Government's possession. The grand jury testimony is merely a hearsay snippet

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of Jeffrey Epstein's alleged conduct."

The only witness to testify before the Epstein grand jury in 2019 was an FBI agent who, the judge noted, "had no direct knowledge of the facts of the case and whose testimony was mostly hearsay." The rest of the grand jury presentation consisted of a PowerPoint slideshow and a call log.

Last year, a judge in Florida unsealed around 150 pages of transcripts of the grand jury proceedings that led to Epstein's indictment on state charges there in 2006.

Maxwell, a British socialite and publishing heir, is serving a 20-year prison sentence after her 2021 conviction on sex trafficking charges for helping Epstein sexually abuse underage girls. She was recently transferred from a prison in Florida to a prison camp in Texas. Epstein's 2019 death in jail awaiting trial was ruled a suicide.

Maxwell's case has attracted heightened public attention amid an outcry by online sleuths, conspiracy theorists and elements of Trump's base after the Justice Department said last month that it would not release any more documents from the Epstein sex trafficking investigation.

Since then, officials in Trump's Republican administration have cast themselves as promoting transparency, including by requesting the unsealing of grand jury transcripts.

Meanwhile, Maxwell was interviewed at a Florida courthouse weeks ago by Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche. The House Oversight Committee also said it wanted to speak with Maxwell. Her lawyers said they would be open to an interview only if the panel were to ensure immunity from prosecution.

In a letter to Maxwell's lawyers, Rep. James Comer, the committee chair, wrote that the committee was willing to delay the deposition until after the resolution of Maxwell's appeal to the Supreme Court. That appeal is expected to be resolved in late September.

Comer wrote that while Maxwell's testimony was "vital" to the Republican-led investigation into Epstein, the committee would not provide immunity or any questions in advance of her testimony.

## **Federal Reserve official says she won't be 'bullied' by Trump into resigning**

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal Reserve governor Lisa Cook late Wednesday said she wouldn't leave her post after Trump on social media called on her to resign over an accusation from one of his officials that she committed mortgage fraud.

"I have no intention of being bullied to step down from my position because of some questions raised in a tweet," Cook said in a statement issued by the Fed.

Bill Pulte, the head of the agency that regulates mortgage giants Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac and a Trump appointee, alleged on the X social media platform early Wednesday that Cook had claimed two primary residences -- in Ann Arbor, Michigan and Atlanta -- in 2021 to get better mortgage terms. Mortgage rates are often higher on second homes or those purchased to rent.

Trump followed up Pulte's accusation by calling on Cook to resign, in the latest effort by the administration to exert greater control over one of the few remaining independent agencies in Washington. Trump has repeatedly attacked the Fed's chair, Jerome Powell, for not cutting its short-term interest rate, and even threatened to fire him.

If Cook is forced off the Fed's governing board, it would provide Trump an opportunity to appoint a loyalist. Trump has said he would only appoint officials who would support cutting rates.

Pulte urged the Justice Department to investigate Cook, who was appointed to the Fed's governing board by former president Joe Biden in 2022. She was reappointed the following year to a term that lasts until 2038, the longest remaining term among the seven governors.

Cook also said, "I do intend to take any questions about my financial history seriously as a member of the Federal Reserve and so I am gathering the accurate information to answer any legitimate questions and provide the facts."

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Pulte, in a letter to Attorney General Pam Bondi, said that on June 18, 2021, Cook purchased a home in Ann Arbor and then two weeks later bought a condo in Atlanta. Before joining the Fed, Cook taught at Michigan State University. Pulte also charged that Cook has listed her condo in Atlanta for rent.

A Justice Department spokesperson declined to comment.

Just last month, Trump blasted Powell for the ballooning cost of the renovation of two of the Fed's headquarters buildings, even suggesting that the run-up in costs could constitute a firing offense. He backed off his threats to fire Powell after receiving a tour of the project.

Pulte also suggested that Cook's alleged actions could constitute a fireable offense. Fed officials are protected by law from being removed by a president, except "for cause," which is generally seen as some kind of malfeasance or dereliction of duty.

Either way, if Trump seeks to fire Cook, it could lead to a court battle over a president's power to remove Fed governors.

Senate Democrats, including New York Sen. Chuck Schumer, expressed support for Cook and slammed Trump's actions.

"Trump is a liar. Lisa Cook—stand tough and don't let Trump intimidate you," Schumer wrote in a post on social media platform X.

Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren said in a statement that Trump "has been scrambling for a pretext to intimidate or fire Chair Powell and members of the Federal Reserve Board while blaming anyone but himself for how his failed economic policies are hurting Americans."

Trump will be able to replace Chair Jerome Powell in May 2026, when Powell's term expires. Yet 12 members of the Fed's interest-rate setting committee have a vote on whether to raise or lower interest rates, so even replacing the Chair doesn't guarantee that Fed policy will shift the way Trump wants.

But the more members of the Fed's governing board that Trump can appoint, the more control he will be able to assert over the Fed, which has long been considered independent from day-to-day politics.

All seven members of the Fed's governing board are able to vote on rate decisions. The other five voters include the president of the Fed's New York branch and a rotating group of four of the presidents of the Fed's other 11 regional branches.

Trump appointed two members of the Fed's board in his first term, Christopher Waller and Michelle Bowman. Both dissented July 30 from the central bank's decision to keep its rate unchanged, in favor of a rate cut.

Another Fed governor, Adriana Kugler, stepped down unexpectedly Aug. 1, and Trump has nominated one of his economic advisers, Stephen Miran, to fill out the remainder of her term until January.

If Trump is able to replace Cook, the first Black woman to serve on the Fed's board, as well as Kugler, that would give him a clear majority on the board of governors. If Powell leaves the board when his term as chair ends next May, then Trump will be able to fill a fifth spot. However, Powell could stay on the board until early 2028 after finishing his term as chair.

The presidents of the regional Federal Reserve banks are selected by the boards of directors of those banks, but are subject to the approval of the Fed's board of governors. The terms of all 12 of the regional Fed presidents end next February.

Trump has for months demanded that the Federal Reserve reduce the short-term interest rate it controls, which currently stands at about 4.3%. He has also repeatedly insulted Powell, who has said that the Fed would like to see more evidence of how the economy evolves in response to Trump's sweeping tariffs before making any moves. Powell has also said the duties threaten to raise inflation and slow growth.

Trump says that a lower rate would reduce the government's borrowing costs on \$37 trillion in debt and boost the housing market by reducing mortgage rates. Yet mortgage borrowing costs and other interest rates, including many of the ones the government pays, do not always follow the Fed's rate decisions.

The Trump administration has made similar claims of mortgage fraud against Democrats that Trump has attacked, including California Sen. Adam Schiff and New York Attorney General Letitia James.

## Huckabee blames Europe for stalled Gaza talks, highlighting a growing Western divide

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — U.S. Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee sought Wednesday to blame a recent breakdown in Gaza ceasefire talks on the decision by some European leaders to recognize Palestinian statehood.

Talks over a lasting ceasefire have repeatedly stalled since the early months of the war sparked by Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack — and long before there was any talk of major European states recognizing Palestinian statehood.

The decisions were announced by France, Britain and other countries after the Trump administration's Mideast envoy had already walked away in frustration from the negotiations, which happened behind closed doors. It's unclear how and when they began to break down.

But Huckabee's remarks in an interview with The Associated Press point to a sharp divide among Western nations about how to approach the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the rift has only deepened since President Donald Trump took office.

Many European countries have sought to pressure Israel — the stronger party — and frame the pursuit of a two-state solution as a way to address the root causes of a conflict that long predates the war in Gaza. But the Trump administration has given Israel wide latitude to end the war on its terms.

A dispute over which side should be pressured

The White House fully supported Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's decision to end an earlier ceasefire that Trump had helped broker and resume wide-ranging military operations, during which Israel prevented food, medicine and other goods from entering Gaza for more than two months.

Trump appears to have adopted Israel's position that further military pressure — including a planned offensive into some of the most densely populated areas of Gaza — will force Hamas to surrender.

"We will only see the return of the remaining hostages when Hamas is confronted and destroyed!!!" Trump posted this week on his Truth Social site.

Meanwhile, France, Britain and more than two dozen other Western-aligned nations have expressed mounting outrage at Israel's actions, demanding that it halt the fighting and do more to facilitate humanitarian aid. The moves to recognize Palestinians statehood — which were largely symbolic — were in part aimed at pressuring Israel to halt its offensive.

Britain explicitly linked the two, saying it would hold off on recognizing a Palestinian state if Israel agreed to a ceasefire in Gaza, stopped building settlements in the West Bank and committed to a two-state solution.

Israel's current government and most of its political class were opposed to Palestinian statehood even before the war, and they now say it would reward Hamas and allow the militants to eventually carry out more Oct. 7-style attacks.

'A counterproductive effect'

Huckabee, who is himself a longtime opponent of Palestinian statehood, said the "noise that has been made by European leaders recently ... is having the counterproductive effect that they probably think that they want."

"If they believe that unilaterally calling for a two-state, a Palestinian state recognition, immediately brings them closer, the sad truth is it's taking them further away," he said.

The AP sought comment from the foreign ministries of France and Britain, which did not immediately respond.

Most Palestinians believe the decades-old conflict is rooted in Israel's military occupation of lands they want for an independent state and its continuous expansion of Jewish settlements. Attempts to negotiate a two-state solution going back to the early 1990s repeatedly broke down as violence flared, and no serious or substantive talks have been held since Netanyahu returned to office in 2009.

On Wednesday, Israel approved plans for settlements in an area known as E1 outside Jerusalem, which the Palestinians and others say will cut the West Bank in half and make the establishment of a viable and



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contiguous state virtually impossible.

Past U.S. administrations joined their Western allies in vehemently opposing such plans. Trump and Huckabee — a strong supporter of Israeli settlements — did not.

Ceasefire talks have shown signs of progress

The ceasefire talks have continued, with Hamas saying this week that it accepted a proposal from Arab mediators that is similar to an earlier one advanced by the U.S. and accepted by Israel. Israel and the U.S. have not yet responded to the offer.

Huckabee said he could not elaborate on the talks beyond saying he would not trust that Hamas is serious until they “put their signatures on it” and that the group could be “stringing this along,” as the U.S. and Israel have alleged in the past.

The main disagreement has been over the conditions in which the war would end.

Hamas has said it will only release the remaining hostages in exchange for a lasting ceasefire and an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, while Israel says it is committed to returning all the hostages, defeating and disarming Hamas, and maintaining lasting security control over the territory.

In Israel, many blame Netanyahu for the failure of the talks, accusing him of seeking to prolong the war in order to keep his far-right governing coalition intact. Hundreds of thousands took to the streets over the weekend to protest his planned offensive and call for a deal to return the captives.

## Fed minutes: Most officials worried about inflation moving higher

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Most Federal Reserve officials said last month that the threat of higher inflation was a greater concern than the potential for job losses, leading the central bank to keep its key rate unchanged.

According to the minutes of the July 29-30 meeting, released Wednesday, members of the Fed’s interest-rate setting committee “assessed that the effects of higher tariffs had become more apparent in the prices of some goods but that their overall effects on economic activity and inflation remained to be seen.”

The minutes underscored the reluctance among the majority of the Fed’s 19 policymakers to reduce the central bank’s short-term interest rate until they get a clearer sense of the impact of President Donald Trump’s sweeping tariffs on inflation. So far inflation has crept up in the past couple of months but hasn’t risen as much as many economists feared when Trump unveiled some of his duties.

The policymakers appeared to spend a substantial amount of time discussing the tariffs, and they said they expected inflation to increase in the coming months as a result. But they also “judged that considerable uncertainty remained about the timing, magnitude, and persistence of the effects of this year’s increase in tariffs.”

Last month’s meeting occurred two days before the government issued a disappointing jobs report for July, which showed that hiring was weak last month and far fewer jobs were added in May and June than originally estimated. Wall Street investors increased their bets that the Fed would cut rates at its next meeting Sept. 16-17 after that report was released, according to futures pricing.

The Fed left its key interest rate unchanged last month at about 4.3%, though two members of its governing board dissented in favor of a rate cut. Both dissenters — Christopher Waller and Michelle Bowman — were appointed to the board during Trump’s first term.

At a news conference after the meeting, Chair Jerome Powell signaled that it might take significant additional time for the Fed to determine whether Trump’s sweeping tariffs are boosting inflation.

Powell will speak for the first time after the disappointing jobs report on Friday, at the Fed’s annual economic symposium in Jackson, Wyoming. Economists generally expect he may signal that the Fed is likely to reduce rates this year without committing to a reduction in September.

Earlier Wednesday, Trump urged Fed governor Lisa Cook, an appointee of former president Joe Biden, to resign after an administration official accused Cook of committing mortgage fraud. It represented another effort by the Trump administration to gain control over the Fed, a traditionally independent institution that has been targeted by the White House because of its reluctance to cut its key rate, which Trump has

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repeatedly demanded.

When the Fed changes its rate, it often — though not always — affects borrowing costs for mortgages, auto loans, and credit cards.

The Fed typically keeps its rate high, or raises it, to cool borrowing and spending and combat inflation. It often cuts its rate to bolster the economy and hiring when growth is cooling.

According to the minutes, a few Fed officials at last month's meeting "observed that evidence so far suggested that foreign exporters were paying at most a modest part of the increased tariffs, implying that domestic businesses and consumers were predominantly bearing the tariff costs."

And several policymakers "expected that many companies would increasingly have to pass through tariff costs to end-customers over time."

Still, a few officials also insisted that the tariffs would likely lead to a one-time increase in prices, rather than an ongoing bout of inflation. Waller and Bowman have expressed that view and argued that as a result, the Fed should cut rates because inflation — excluding the tariffs — is cooling.

## What to know about the Menendez brothers' parole hearings

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Lyle and Erik Menendez are scheduled to face separate parole hearings beginning Thursday in California and — depending on the outcomes — could eventually be released from prison nearly 30 years after being convicted of killing their parents.

A panel of parole officers will evaluate each of the brothers via videoconference. They'll appear from prison in San Diego.

In 1995, a jury convicted both brothers of first-degree murder in the 1989 murders of Jose and Kitty Menendez inside their Los Angeles-area home. The brothers were sentenced to life in prison without parole in 1996.

They became eligible for parole after a Los Angeles judge in May reduced their sentences from life in prison without the possibility of parole to 50 years to life, making them immediately eligible for parole under California law because they were under the ages of 26 when they committed their crimes.

Who are the Menendez brothers and what did they do?

Lyle and Erik Menendez are the sons of Jose and Kitty Menendez. Jose Menendez, a Cuban-American business executive who at one time was an executive at RCA Records, moved his family from Princeton, New Jersey, to California when his sons were teenagers.

On Aug. 20, 1989, Lyle Menendez dialed 911 to report the shotgun-killings of their parents inside their home. Both brothers told investigators that the murders were related to the Mafia or had something to do with their father's business dealings. At the time, Erik was 18 and Lyle was 21. With access to the family's wealth, the brothers spent small fortunes on Rolex watches, cars and houses. But two months after the killings, Erik Menendez confessed to his psychologist that he and his brother killed their parents.

What were the brothers charged with?

They were arrested early the following year and each charged with first-degree murder. The brothers claimed their father had emotionally and sexually abused them since childhood. Prosecutors contended that getting hold of their father's money was the motive behind the couple's killings.

The brothers' first trial started in 1993. Their attorneys never disputed the pair killed their parents, but argued that they acted out of self-defense. Their trials resulted in hung juries. In 1995, a jury convicted both brothers of three counts, including first-degree murder, plus lying in wait and special circumstance allegations. They were sentenced to life in prison without parole in 1996.

How did they spend their years in prison?

For years after their conviction, the brothers filed petitions for appeals of their cases while in prison. State and federal judges denied the petitions.

The brothers have gotten an education, participated in self-help classes and started various support groups for fellow prisoners.

They also launched a prison beautification project inspired by the Norwegian approach to incarceration

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that believes rehabilitation in humane prisons surrounded by nature leads to successful reintegration into society, even for those who have committed terrible crimes.

Over the years, the Menendez case continued to fascinate the public and the young, handsome brothers became celebrities of sorts. They became the subjects of true crime shows, including last year's nine-episode crime drama "Monsters: The Lyle and Erik Menendez Story" on Netflix.

A few weeks after that was aired, then-LA County District Attorney George Gascón announced he was reviewing new evidence in the case. On Oct. 24, 2024, prosecutors said they will petition the court to resentence the brothers. In May 2025, an LA County Superior Court judge granted them a new sentence of 50 years to life, making them immediately eligible for parole.

What will the parole board consider?

Erik and Lyle Menendez will be evaluated, individually, by a panel of two or three parole hearing officers. Erik's hearing is scheduled Thursday morning. Lyle's will be held Friday.

The board will assess whether the brothers pose an "unreasonable risk of danger to society" if released, considering factors like criminal history, motivation for the crime, signs of remorse, behavior while in prison and plans for the future, according to the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

Nearly all of the Menendez family support the brothers' release from prison. Milton Andersen, the brothers' uncle who opposed their release, died from cancer in March.

Could one receive parole and not the other?

The brothers have separate hearings and will be evaluated independently of each other. Los Angeles trial attorney David Ring has said if one brother was "a troublemaker" in prison and the other wasn't, it's conceivable that one could stay locked up while the other is freed. But Ring, who's not involved with the Menendez case, said that's unlikely.

How soon could they get out?

If granted parole, it could be months before the brothers are released from prison. The chief legal counsel has 120 days to review the case. Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom then has 30 days to affirm or deny the parole. If he approves it, they could then leave prison. Newsom has not made any statements indicating his position on the case, but said during a May press conference that he has both approved and rejected decisions by the parole board before.

Where will they go if released?

That's not clear. The brothers' family members, who have spoken out in favor of their release, haven't shared details about where the brothers might live.

## Target CEO to step down amid company struggles

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Target named an insider as its next chief executive officer Wednesday, a decision that comes as the discount retailer tries to reverse a persistent sales malaise and to revive its reputation as the place to go for affordable but stylish products.

Minneapolis-based Target said CEO Brian Cornell, who has led the company for 11 years, would step down on Feb. 1. The board of directors chose Chief Operating Officer Michael Fiddelke, a 20-year Target veteran, to succeed him.

Target, which has about 1,980 U.S. stores, has struggled to find its footing since inflation caused pinched shoppers to curtail their discretionary spending. Customers have complained of messy stores with merchandise that did not reflect the expensive-looking but budget-priced niche that long ago earned the retailer the jokingly posh nickname "Tarzhay."

Consumer boycotts since late January, when Target joined rival Walmart and a number of other prominent American brands in scaling back corporate diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, have compounded its predicament.

Some retail analysts were surprised the board did not pick a candidate from outside the company to turn things around. Target's stock price was down more than 8% in early morning trading after the company

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announced both Fiddelke's appointment and another quarter of disappointing sales.

"The Street was looking for a fresh pair of eyes that might bring a solution to two years of stumbles," Stacey Widlitz, president of investment research firm SW Retail Advisors, said while noting that she thinks investors should give Fiddelke a chance.

During a call with reporters on Tuesday, Fiddelke acknowledged many of Target's problems. For example, he said he thought the company became too focused on basic home goods during the coronavirus pandemic, when demand for cozy furnishings and kitchen tools exploded.

Fiddelke said he would step in as CEO with three urgent priorities: reclaiming the company's position as a leader in selecting and displaying merchandise; improving the customer experience by making sure shelves are consistently stocked and stores are clean; and investing in technology.

"When we're leading with swagger in our merchandising authority, when we have swagger in our marketing and we're setting the trend for retail, those are some of the moments I think that Target has been at its highest in my 20 years," Fiddelke said.

Target has reported flat or declining comparable sales — those from established physical stores and online channels — in nine out of the past 11 quarters. On Wednesday, the company said comparable sales dipped 1.9% in its latest three-month period, when its net income also dropped 21%.

In March, members of Target's executive team told investors they planned to regain the chain's reputation for selling stylish goods at budget prices by expanding Target's lineup of store label brands and shortening the time it took to get new items from the idea stage into stores.

"In a world where we operate today, our guests are looking for Tarzhay," Cornell told investors. "Consumers coined that term decades ago to define how we elevate the everything everyday to something special, how we had unexpected fun in the shopping that would be otherwise routine."

Before joining Target in August 2014, Cornell spent more than 30 years in leadership positions at retail and consumer-product companies, including as CEO at Michaels, Walmart's Sam's Club and PepsiCo America Foods.

He replaced former CEO Gregg Steinhafel, who stepped down months after Target disclosed a huge data breach in which hackers stole millions of customers' credit- and debit-card records. The theft badly damaged the chain's reputation and profits.

In September 2022, the board of directors extended Cornell's contract for three more years and eliminated a policy requiring its chief executives to retire at age 65. Fiddelke will become the board's chair when he takes over, and Cornell will transition into the role of executive chair.

Cornell reenergized sales by having his team rev up Target's store brands. He focused on better tailoring stores to their local communities. Cornell also spearheaded the company's mission to transform its stores into hubs for shipping or picking up online orders.

The move helped to reduce costs and speed up deliveries, but the in-person experience for shoppers suffered as Target diverted store workers to fulfilling orders placed online, according to some analysts.

The coronavirus pandemic delivered outsized sales for Target as well as its peers as many people bought items to help them work and entertain themselves at home. Sales continued to surge when shoppers first returned to stores. But the spending sprees eventually subsided.

As inflation started to spike, Target reported a 52% drop in profits during its 2022 first quarter compared with a year earlier. Purchases of big TVs and appliances that Americans loaded up on during the pandemic faded, leaving the retailer with excess inventory that had to be sold off.

In July 2023, as shoppers feeling pinched by inflation curtailed their spending, Target said its comparable sales declined for the first time in six years. Its sales continued to languish as customers defected to Walmart and off-price department store chains like TJ Maxx in search of lower prices.

Although Walmart retreated from its diversity initiatives first, Target has been the focus of more concerted consumer boycotts. Organizers have said they viewed Target's action as a greater betrayal because the company previously had held itself out as a champion of inclusion. In 2023, a customer backlash over the annual line of LGBTQ+ Pride merchandise Target carried also cut into sales.

Many analysts think Target stumbled by losing sight of the winning mix of merchandising savvy and



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competitive price points that had distinguished it from Walmart, the nation's largest retailer. Walmart gained market share among households with incomes over \$100,000 as U.S. inflation caused consumer prices to rise rapidly.

"While we think Fiddelke is talented and has a somewhat different take on things compared to current CEO Brian Cornell, this is an internal appointment that does not necessarily remedy the problems of entrenched groupthink and the inward-looking mindset that have plagued Target for years," Neil Saunders, a managing director at GlobalData Retail, said Wednesday.

## US-led coalition captures a senior Islamic State member in Syria

BEIRUT (AP) — A U.S.-led coalition captured a senior member of the Islamic State group in northwest Syria on Wednesday, state media and a war monitor reported. It was not immediately clear if the man is the IS supreme leader.

Abu Hafs al-Qurayshi, an Iraqi citizen and IS commander, was detained during a pre-dawn operation that included landing troops from helicopters in the town of Atmeh, near the Turkish border. Another Iraqi citizen was killed, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

The U.S. military did not respond to a request for comment.

The Observatory said the man captured had a French-speaking woman with him, and it was not immediately clear if she was taken by the U.S. force or by Syrian security forces who later cordoned the area.

Two years ago, IS announced that a man called Abu Hafs al-Hashemi al-Qurayshi was named as its new leader after Turkish authorities killed his predecessor.

Syrian state TV on Wednesday quoted an unnamed security official as saying the Iraqi man targeted in the operation is known as Ali, adding that his real name is Salah Noman. It said Noman was living in an apartment with his wife, son and mother. It said he was killed in the raid.

There was no immediate clarification for the difference in names reported by state media and the war monitor.

U.N. counter-terrorism chief Vladimir Voronkov told the U.N. Security Council on Wednesday that while multiple leaders of the Islamic State have perished in the past few years, "the group has managed to retain its operational capacity."

"There is no indication that the killing of its deputy leader in charge of operational planning, which resulted from counter-terrorism operations in Iraq in March, will be any different," he said, citing unnamed countries as saying the extremist group may recover from such a loss within six months.

Acting U.S. Ambassador Dorothy Shea made no mention of Wednesday's arrest, but said the Trump administration has intensified counter-terrorism operations globally, including targeting the IS, also known as ISIL, and al-Qaida's leadership, infrastructure, and financial networks.

IS broke away from al-Qaida more than a decade ago and attracted supporters from around the world after it declared a so-called caliphate in 2014 in large parts of Syria and Iraq. Despite its defeat in Iraq in 2017 and in Syria two years later, IS militants still carry out deadly attacks in both countries and elsewhere.

Al-Qurayshi is not the real name of IS leaders but comes from Quraish, the name of the tribe to which Islam's Prophet Muhammad belonged. IS claims its leaders hail from the tribe, and "al-Qurayshi" is part of their nom de guerre.

## Texas can't put the Ten Commandments in certain school districts' classrooms, judge says

By ANDREW DeMILLO Associated Press

Texas cannot require public schools in Houston, Austin and other select districts to display the Ten Commandments in every classroom, a judge said Wednesday in a temporary ruling against the state's new requirement.

Texas is the third state where courts have blocked recent laws about putting the Ten Commandments

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in schools.

A group of families from the school districts sought a preliminary injunction against the law, which goes into effect on Sept. 1. They say the requirement violates the First Amendment's protections for the separation of church and state and the right to free religious exercise.

Texas is the largest state to attempt such a requirement, and U.S. District Judge Fred Biery's ruling from San Antonio is the latest in a widening legal fight that's expected to eventually go before the U.S. Supreme Court.

"Even though the Ten Commandments would not be affirmatively taught, the captive audience of students likely would have questions, which teachers would feel compelled to answer. That is what they do," Biery, who was appointed by President Bill Clinton, wrote in the ruling that begins by quoting the First Amendment and ends with "Amen."

The ruling prohibits the 11 districts and their affiliates from posting the displays required under state law. The law is being challenged by a group of Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Unitarian Universalist, and nonreligious families, including clergy, who have children in the public schools.

A broader lawsuit that names three Dallas-area districts as well as the state education agency and commissioner is pending in federal court. And although Friday's ruling marks a major win for civil liberties groups, the legal battle is likely far from over.

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton said he planned to appeal the ruling, calling it "flawed."

"The Ten Commandments are a cornerstone of our moral and legal heritage, and their presence in classrooms serves as a reminder of the values that guide responsible citizenship," the Republican said in a statement, echoing sentiments from religious groups and conservatives who support the law.

Texas has a Ten Commandments monument on the Capitol grounds and won a 2005 Supreme Court case that upheld the monument.

The families who sued were represented by the American Civil Liberties Union, Americans United for the Separation of Church and State and the Freedom from Religion Foundation.

"The court affirmed what we have long said: Public schools are for educating, not evangelizing," Tommy Buser-Clancy, senior staff attorney at the ACLU of Texas, said in a statement.

A federal appeals court has blocked a similar law in Louisiana, and a judge in Arkansas told four districts they cannot put up the posters, although other districts in the state said they're not putting them up either. In Louisiana, the first state that mandated the Ten Commandments be displayed in classrooms, a panel of three appellate judges in June ruled that the law was unconstitutional.

Biery, the judge, cited both the Louisiana and Arkansas cases in his 55-page ruling. He also includes extensive historical references, quotes that range from the Founding Fathers to evangelist Billy Graham, and even a Rembrandt painting of Moses holding the stone tablets alongside an image of actor Charlton Heston in the film "The Ten Commandments."

Having the displays in classrooms, Biery wrote, would likely pressure children of the parents challenging them into adopting the state's preferred religion and suppressing their own religious beliefs. The judge said there are ways students could be taught the Ten Commandments' history without it being placed in every classroom.

"For those who disagree with the Court's decision and who would do so with threats, vulgarities and violence, Grace and Peace unto you," he wrote. "May humankind of all faiths, beliefs and non-beliefs be reconciled one to another."

## Scientists get a rare peek inside of an exploding star

By ADITHI RAMAKRISHNAN AP Science Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Scientists for the first time have spotted the insides of a dying star as it exploded, offering a rare peek into stellar evolution.

Stars can live for millions to trillions of years until they run out of fuel. The most massive ones go out with a bang in an explosion called a supernova.

Using telescopes that peer deep into space, researchers have observed many such explosions. The

cosmic outbursts tend to jumble up a dying star's layers, making it hard for scientists to observe the inner structure.

But that wasn't the case for the new discovery, a supernova called 2021yfr located in our Milky Way galaxy.

The collapsing star's outermost layers of hydrogen and helium had peeled away long ago, which wasn't surprising. But the star's dense, innermost layers of silicon and sulfur had also shed during the explosion.

"We have never observed a star that was stripped to this amount," said Northwestern University's Steve Schulze, who was part of the discovery team that published the research Wednesday in the journal *Nature*.

The finding lends evidence to ideas scientists have about how large stars look near the end of their lives, organized into layers with lighter elements on the outside and heavier ones close to the core.

"Because so many of the layers had been stripped off this star, this basically confirmed what those layers were," said Anya Nugent, who studies supernovas at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics. She was not involved with the new research.

It's not yet clear how this star got so whittled down — whether its layers were flung off violently in the final stages of its life or yanked away by a twin star. Future research may yield clues, though scientists acknowledged such an event may be tough to capture again.

## **World Boxing will require sex testing for fighters before world championships in September**

By GREG BEACHAM AP Sports Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The governing body for Olympic-style boxing will require sex testing for all fighters wishing to compete in the women's division at its world championships next month.

World Boxing already had announced its plan to require competitors to undergo a polymerase chain reaction test or an equivalent genetic screening test to determine their sex at birth. The rules will be implemented ahead of the World Boxing Championships in Liverpool, England, in early September, the organization announced Wednesday.

The tests identify the presence or absence of Y chromosome genetic material as the indicator of biological sex.

"World Boxing respects the dignity of all individuals and is keen to ensure it is as inclusive as possible," World Boxing president Boris Van Der Vorst said. "Yet in a combat sport like boxing, we have a duty of care to deliver safety and competitiveness fairness, which are the key principles that have guided the development and creation of this policy."

Paris Olympic champion Imane Khelif of Algeria declined to enter a World Boxing tournament in the Netherlands in June, shortly after the governing body initially announced its plans to introduce sex testing. Van Der Vorst later apologized for specifically naming Khelif, who initially planned to fight in the tournament, while outlining World Boxing's future testing plans.

Khelif and fellow gold medalist Lin Yu-ting from Taiwan excelled in Paris under a harsh spotlight of widespread scrutiny and misconception about their sex. The 26-year-old Khelif repeatedly has said she was born a woman, and she has competed at all levels of women's amateur boxing for nearly a decade.

Chromosome testing was common in Olympic sports during the 20th century but was largely abandoned in the 1990s because of numerous ambiguities that couldn't be easily resolved by the tests, collectively known as differences in sex development. Many sports switched to hormone testing to determine sex eligibility, but those tests require governing bodies to make difficult decisions on the eligibility of women with naturally high testosterone levels.

World Boxing said athletes with DSD in which male androgenization occurs will be eligible to compete only in the men's category.

But the governing body also said it would offer extensive additional analysis and evaluation for athletes with Y chromosome genetic material who wish to compete in the women's categories, including genetic screening, hormonal profiles, anatomical examination and further evaluation of endocrine profiles by medical specialists. An appeals process also is available.

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National federations are responsible for conducting the tests and submitting the results, World Boxing said. Earlier this year, World Athletics — the governing body for track and field — became the first Olympic sport to reintroduce chromosome testing, requiring athletes who compete in the women's events to submit to the test once in their careers. World Athletics has set a deadline of Sept. 1 for athletes to submit to the gene tests ahead of the world championships.

The last two Olympic boxing tournaments were run by a task force from the International Olympic Committee under previous rules of sex eligibility. World Boxing, which was founded two years ago after a split from the scandal-plagued International Boxing Association, has been provisionally recognized by the IOC and will organize the next cycle of Olympic qualification heading to the Los Angeles Games in 2028.

## How a ship that glides like a pelican could change travel and defense

By MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writer

NORTH KINGSTOWN, R.I. (AP) — The winged passenger ferry gliding over the surface of Narragansett Bay could be a new method of coastal transportation or a new kind of warship.

Its maker, Regent Craft, is betting on both.

Twelve quietly buzzing propellers line the 65-foot (20-meter) wingspan of Paladin, a sleek ship with an airplane's nose. It looks nothing like the sailboats and fishing trawlers it speeds past through New England's largest estuary.

"We had this vision five years ago for a seaglider — something that is as fast as an aircraft and as easy to drive as a boat," said CEO Billy Thalheimer, jubilant after an hours-long test run of the new vessel.

On a cloudy August morning, Thalheimer sat in the Paladin's cockpit and, for the first time, took control of his company's prototype craft to test its hydrofoils. The electric-powered watercraft has three modes — float, foil and fly.

From the dock, it sets off like any motorized boat. Farther away from land, it rises up on hydrofoils — the same kind used by sailing ships that compete in America's Cup. The foils enable it to travel more than 50 miles per hour — and about a person's height — above the bay.

What makes this vessel so unusual is that it's designed to soar about 30 feet (10 meters) above the water at up to 180 miles per hour — a feat that hasn't quite happened yet, with the first trial flights off Rhode Island's seacoast planned for the end of summer or early fall.

If successful, the Paladin will coast on a cushion of air over Rhode Island Sound, lifting with the same "ground effect" that pelicans, cormorants and other birds use to conserve energy as they swiftly glide over the sea. It could zoom to New York City — which takes at least three hours by train and longer on traffic-clogged freeways — in just an hour.

Who will ride a seaglider?

As it works to prove its seaworthiness to the U.S. Coast Guard and other regulators around the world, Regent is already lining up future customers for commercial ferry routes around Florida, Hawaii, Japan and the Persian Gulf.

Regent is also working with the U.S. Marines to repurpose the same vessels for island-hopping troops in the Pacific. Those vessels would likely trade electric battery power for jet fuel to cover longer journeys.

With backing from influential investors including Peter Thiel and Mark Cuban, Thalheimer says he's trying to use new technology to revive the "comfort and refined nature" of 1930s-era flying boats that were popular in aviation's golden age before they were eclipsed by commercial airlines.

This time, Thalheimer added, they're safer, quieter and emission-free.

"I thought they made travel easier in a way that made total sense to me," Cuban said by email this week. "It's hard to travel around water for short distances. It's expensive and a hassle. Regent can solve this problem and make that travel fun, easy and efficient."

Co-founders and friends Thalheimer, a skilled sailor, and chief technology officer Mike Klinker, who grew up lobster fishing, met while both were freshmen at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and later



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worked together at Boeing. They started Regent in 2020.

They've already tested and flown a smaller model. But the much bigger, 12-passenger Paladin — prototype of a product line called Viceroy — began foil testing this summer after years of engineering research and development. A manufacturing facility is under construction nearby, with the vessels set to carry passengers by 2027.

Taking flight but not an aircraft

The International Maritime Organization classifies "wing-in-ground-effect" vehicles such as Regent's as ships, not aircraft. But a database of civilian ships kept by the London-based organization lists only six around the world, all of them built before it issued new safety guidance on such craft in 2018 following revisions sought by China, France and Russia.

The IMO says it treats them as marine vessels because they operate in the vicinity of other watercraft and must use the same rules for avoiding collisions. The Coast Guard takes a similar approach.

"You drive it like a boat," Thalheimer said. "If there's any traffic on the harbor, you'll see it on the screen. If you see a boat, you'd go around it. We're never flying over boats or anything like that."

One of the biggest technical challenges in Regent's design is the shift from foiling to flying. Hydrofoils are fast for a seafaring vessel, but far slower than the speeds needed to lift a conventional airplane from a runway.

That's where air blown by the 12 propellers comes in, effectively tricking the wing into generating high lift at low speeds.

All of this has worked perfectly on the computer simulations at Regent's headquarters in North Kingstown, Rhode Island. The next step is testing it over the water.

Capitalizing on concerns over tensions with China

For decades, the only warship known to mimic such a ground-effect design was the Soviet Union's hulking ekranoplan, which was built to fly under radar detection but never widely used. Recently, however, social media images of an apparent Chinese military ekranoplan have caught the attention of naval experts amid increasingly tense international disputes in the South China Sea.

Regent has capitalized on those concerns, pitching its gliders to the U.S. government as a new method for carrying troops and cargo across island chains in the Indo-Pacific region. It could also do clandestine intelligence collection, anti-submarine warfare and be a "mothership" for small drones, autonomous watercraft or medical evacuations, said Tom Huntley, head of Regent's government relations and defense division.

They fly below radar and above sonar, which makes them "really hard to see," Huntley said.

While the U.S. military has shown increasing interest, questions remain about their detectability, as well as their stability in various sea states and wind conditions, and their "cost at scale beyond a few prototypes and maintainability," said retired U.S. Navy Capt. Paul S. Schmitt, an associate research professor at the Naval War College, across the bay in Newport, Rhode Island.

Schmitt, who has seen Paladin from afar while sailing, said he also has questions about what kind of military mission would fit Regent's "relatively short range and small transport capacity."

Floating past Interstate 95

The possibilities that most excite Cuban and other Regent backers are commercial.

Driving Interstate 95 through all the cities that span Florida's Atlantic Coast can take the better part of a day, which is one reason why Regent is pitching Miami as a hub for its coastal ferry trips.

The Viceroy seaglidery can already carry more passengers than the typical seaplane or helicopter, but a growing number of electric hydrofoil startups, such as Sweden's Candela and California-based Navier, are trying to stake out ferry routes around the world.

Thalheimer sees his vehicles as more of a complement than a competitor to electric hydrofoils that can't travel as fast, since they will all use the same docks and charging infrastructure but could specialize in different trip lengths.

## NATO defense chiefs hold 'candid discussion' on security guarantees for Ukraine

By SAM McNEIL and ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — NATO defense chiefs held a "candid discussion" Wednesday about what security guarantees they could offer Kyiv to help forge a peace agreement that ends Russia's three-year war on Ukraine, a senior alliance official said.

Italian Admiral Giuseppe Cavo Dragone, the chair of NATO's Military Committee, said that 32 defense chiefs from across the alliance held a video conference amid a U.S.-led diplomatic push to end the fighting.

He said there was a "great, candid discussion" in the call. "I thanked everyone for their always proactive participation in these meetings: we are united, and that unity was truly tangible today, as always," he wrote on social platform X without providing further details.

Assurances that it won't be invaded again in the future are one of the keys for getting Ukraine to sign up for a peace deal with Russia. It wants Western help for its military, including weapons and training, to shore up its defenses, and Western officials are scrambling to figure out what commitments they might offer.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov chided efforts to work on security arrangements in Ukraine without Moscow's involvement.

"We cannot agree with the fact that it is now proposed to resolve collective security issues without the Russian Federation. This will not work," Lavrov said Wednesday, according to state news agency RIA Novosti.

Russia will "ensure (its) legitimate interests firmly and harshly," Lavrov added at a news conference in Moscow with Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman al-Safadi.

U.S. Gen. Alexis Grynkeiwich, NATO's supreme allied commander Europe, took part in the virtual talks, Dragone said. U.S. Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was also due to participate, a U.S. defense official said.

Caine also met with European military chiefs Tuesday evening in Washington to assess the best military options for political leaders, according to the defense official, who wasn't authorized to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Defense chiefs work on details of a Ukraine security force

U.S. President Donald Trump met last Friday with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Alaska and on Monday hosted Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and prominent European leaders at the White House. Neither meeting delivered concrete progress.

Trump is trying to steer Putin and Zelenskyy toward a settlement more than three years after Russia invaded its neighbor, but there are major obstacles. They include Ukraine's demands for Western-backed military assurances to ensure Russia won't mount another invasion in the coming years.

"We need strong security guarantees to ensure a truly secure and lasting peace," Zelenskyy said in a Telegram post Wednesday after Russian missile and drone strikes hit six regions of Ukraine overnight.

Kyiv's European allies are looking to set up a force that could backstop any peace agreement, and a coalition of 30 countries, including European nations, Japan and Australia, has signed up to support the initiative.

Military chiefs are figuring out how that security force might work. The role that the U.S. might play is unclear. Trump on Tuesday ruled out sending U.S. troops to help defend Ukraine against Russia.

Russia has repeatedly said that it would not accept NATO troops in Ukraine.

Attacks on civilian areas in Sumy and Odesa overnight into Wednesday injured 15 people, including a family with three small children, Ukrainian authorities said. Russian strikes also targeted ports and fuel and energy infrastructure, officials said.

Zelenskyy said the strikes "only confirm the need for pressure on Moscow, the need to introduce new sanctions and tariffs until diplomacy works to its full potential."

Switzerland could host a Putin-Zelenskyy summit

Trump said Monday he has begun arrangements for a face-to-face meeting between Putin and Zelenskyy, although the Kremlin hasn't publicly confirmed such a possibility and no venue was suggested.

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Lavrov, in his Moscow press conference, said Russia is prepared to continue negotiations with Ukraine in any format.

He said Putin proposed to Trump raising the level of representation in delegations that recently took part in largely fruitless direct talks in Istanbul. He added that "a separate block (of talks) should be devoted to examining the political aspects of the settlement, along with the military and humanitarian ones."

Ukraine and Western leaders have accused Putin of dragging out peace negotiations in the hope of capturing more land before any settlement.

French President Emmanuel Macron has said the summit could happen in Europe and proposed the Swiss city of Geneva. Switzerland has expressed its willingness to act as host.

Putin's ability to travel abroad is limited because he is wanted by the International Criminal Court in The Hague on a warrant dating back to March 2023 for alleged involvement in the abduction of Ukrainian children. More than 100 countries are ICC signatories and have a legal obligation to arrest the Russian leader on their soil.

Switzerland intends to ask the ICC to exempt it from sanctions in order to allow Putin in for a summit, according to a senior official in The Hague with direct knowledge of the request. The official was not authorized to speak about the proceedings and spoke on condition of anonymity.

## Paris residents fight overtourism and 'Disneyfication' of beloved Montmartre neighborhood

By THOMAS ADAMSON Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — When Olivier Baroin moved into an apartment in Montmartre about 15 years ago, it felt like he was living in a village in the heart of Paris. Not anymore.

Stores for residents are disappearing, along with the friendly atmosphere, he says. In their place are hordes of people taking selfies, shops selling tourist trinkets, and cafés whose seating spills into the narrow, cobbled streets as overtourism takes its toll.

Baroin has had enough. He put his apartment up for sale after local streets were designated pedestrian-only while accommodating the growing number of visitors.

"I told myself that I had no other choice but to leave since, as I have a disability, it's even more complicated when you can no longer take your car, when you have to call a taxi from morning to night," he told The Associated Press.

Overtourism in European cities

From Venice to Barcelona to Amsterdam, European cities are struggling to absorb surging numbers of tourists.

Some residents in one of Paris' most popular tourist neighborhoods are now pushing back. A black banner strung between two balconies in Montmartre reads, in English: "Behind the postcard: locals mistreated by the Mayor." Another, in French, says: "Montmartre residents resisting."

Atop the hill where the Basilica of Sacré-Cœur crowns the city's skyline, residents lament what they call the "Disneyfication" of the once-bohemian slice of Paris. The basilica says it now attracts up to 11 million people a year — even more than the Eiffel Tower — while daily life in the neighborhood has been overtaken by tuk-tuks, tour groups, photo queues and short-term rentals.

"Now, there are no more shops at all, there are no more food shops, so everything must be delivered," said 56-year-old Baroin, a member of a residents' protest group called Vivre a Montmartre, or Living in Montmartre.

The unrest echoes tensions across town at the Louvre Museum, where staff in June staged a brief wildcat strike over chronic overcrowding, understaffing and deteriorating conditions. The Louvre logged 8.7 million visitors in 2024, more than double what its infrastructure was designed to handle.

A postcard under pressure

Paris, a city of just over 2 million residents if you count its sprawling suburbs, welcomed 48.7 million

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tourists in 2024, a 2% increase from the previous year.

Sacré-Cœur, the most visited monument in France in 2024, and the surrounding Montmartre neighborhood have turned into what some locals call an open-air theme park.

Local staples like butchers, bakeries and grocers are vanishing, replaced by ice-cream stalls, bubble-tea vendors and souvenir T-shirt stands.

Paris authorities did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Visitors seemed largely to be enjoying the packed streets on a sunny Tuesday this week.

"For the most part, all of Paris has been pretty busy, but full of life, for sure," said American tourist Adam Davidson. "Coming from Washington, D.C., which is a lively city as well, I would say this is definitely full of life to a different degree for sure."

Europe's breaking point

In Barcelona, thousands have taken to the streets this year, some wielding water pistols, demanding limits on cruise ships and short-term tourist rentals. Venice now charges an entry fee for day-trippers and caps visitor numbers. And in Athens, authorities are imposing a daily limit on visitors to the Acropolis, to protect the ancient monument from record-breaking tourist crowds.

Urban planners warn that historic neighborhoods risk becoming what some critics call "zombie cities" — picturesque but lifeless, their residents displaced by short-term visitors.

Paris is trying to mitigate the problems by cracking down on short-term rentals and unlicensed properties.

But tourism pressures are growing. By 2050, the world's population is projected to reach nearly 10 billion, according to United Nations estimates. With the global middle class expanding, low-cost flights booming and digital platforms guiding travelers to the same viral landmarks, many more visitors are expected in iconic cities like Paris.

The question now, residents say, is whether any space is left for those who call it home.

## Trump thinks owning a piece of Intel would be a good deal for the US. Here's what to know

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — President Donald Trump wants the U.S. government to own a piece of Intel, less than two weeks after demanding the Silicon Valley pioneer dump the CEO that was hired to turn around the slumping chipmaker. If the goal is realized, the investment would deepen the Trump administration's involvement in the computer industry as the president ramps up the pressure for more U.S. companies to manufacture products domestically instead of relying on overseas suppliers.

What's happening?

The Trump administration is in talks to secure a 10% stake in Intel in exchange for converting government grants that were pledged to Intel under President Joe Biden. If the deal is completed, the U.S. government would become one of Intel's largest shareholders and blur the traditional lines separating the public sector and private sector in a country that remains the world's largest economy.

Why would Trump do this?

In his second term, Trump has been leveraging his power to reprogram the operations of major computer chip companies. The administration is requiring Nvidia and Advanced Micro Devices, two companies whose chips are helping to power the craze around artificial intelligence, to pay a 15% commission on their sales of chips in China in exchange for export licenses.

Trump's interest in Intel is also being driven by his desire to boost chip production in the U.S., which has been a focal point of the trade war that he has been waging throughout the world. By lessening the country's dependence on chips manufactured overseas, the president believes the U.S. will be better positioned to maintain its technological lead on China in the race to create artificial intelligence.

Didn't Trump want Intel's CEO to quit?

That's what the president said August 7 in an unequivocal post calling for Intel CEO Lip-Bu Tan to resign



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less than five months after the Santa Clara, California, company hired him. The demand was triggered by reports raising national security concerns about Tan's past investments in Chinese tech companies while he was a venture capitalist. But Trump backed off after Tan professed his allegiance to the U.S. in a public letter to Intel employees and went to the White House to meet with the president, who applauded the Intel CEO for having an "amazing story."

Why would Intel do a deal?

The company isn't commenting about the possibility of the U.S. government becoming a major shareholder, but Intel may have little choice because it is currently dealing from a position of weakness. After enjoying decades of growth while its processors powered the personal computer boom, the company fell into a slump after missing the shift to the mobile computing era unleashed by the iPhone's 2007 debut.

Intel has fallen even farther behind in recent years during an artificial intelligence craze that has been a boon for Nvidia and AMD. The company lost nearly \$19 billion last year and another \$3.7 billion in the first six months of this year, prompting Tan to undertake a cost-cutting spree. By the end of this year, Tan expects Intel to have about 75,000 workers, a 25% reduction from the end of last year.

Would this deal be unusual?

Although rare, it's not unprecedented for the U.S. government to become a significant shareholder in a prominent company. One of the most notable instances occurred during the Great Recession in 2008 when the government injected nearly \$50 billion into General Motors in return for a roughly 60% stake in the automaker at a time it was on the verge of bankruptcy. The government ended up with a roughly \$10 billion loss after it sold its stock in GM.

Would the government run Intel?

U.S. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick told CNBC during a Tuesday interview that the government has no intention of meddling in Intel's business, and will have its hands tied by holding non-voting shares in the company. But some analysts wonder if the Trump administration's financial ties to Intel might prod more companies looking to curry favor with the president to increase their orders for the company's chips.

What government grants does Intel receive?

Intel was among the biggest beneficiaries of the Biden administration's CHIPS and Science Act, but it hasn't been able to revive its fortunes while falling behind on construction projects spawned by the program.

The company has received about \$2.2 billion of the \$7.8 billion pledged under the incentives program — money that Lutnick derided as a "giveaway" that would better serve U.S. taxpayers if it's turned into Intel stock. "We think America should get the benefit of the bargain," Lutnick told CNBC. "It's obvious that it's the right move to make."

## Today in History: August 21, Nat Turner launches rebellion

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, Aug. 21, the 233rd day of 2025. There are 132 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Aug. 21, 1831, Nat Turner launched a violent slave rebellion in Virginia, resulting in the deaths of at least 55 white people; scores of Black people were killed in retribution in the aftermath of the rebellion, and Turner was later executed.

Also on this date:

In 1858, the first of seven debates took place between Illinois senatorial contenders Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas.

In 1911, Leonardo da Vinci's "Mona Lisa" was stolen from the Louvre Museum in Paris. (It was recovered two years later in Italy.)

In 1944, the United States, Britain, the Soviet Union and China opened talks at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington that helped pave the way for establishment of the United Nations.

In 1959, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed a proclamation officially declaring Hawaii the 50th state.

In 1983, Filipino politician Benigno Aquino Jr. was assassinated as he exited an aircraft at Manila Inter-

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national Airport. (His widow, Corazon Aquino, would become president of the Philippines three years later.)

In 1991, a hardline coup against Soviet President Mikhail S. Gorbachev collapsed in the face of a popular uprising led by Russian Federation President Boris N. Yeltsin.

In 1992, an 11-day siege began at the cabin of white separatist Randy Weaver in Ruby Ridge, Idaho, as government agents tried to arrest Weaver for failing to appear in court on charges of selling two illegal sawed-off shotguns; on the first day of the siege, Weaver's teenage son, Samuel, and Deputy U.S. Marshal William Degan were killed.

In 1993, in a serious setback for NASA, engineers lost contact with the Mars Observer spacecraft as it was about to reach the red planet on a \$980 million mission.

In 2000, rescue efforts to reach the sunken Russian nuclear submarine Kursk ended with divers announcing none of the 118 sailors had survived.

In 2010, Iranian and Russian engineers began loading fuel into Iran's first nuclear power plant, which Moscow promised to safeguard to prevent material at the site from being used in any potential weapons production.

In 2015, a trio of Americans, U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Spencer Stone, National Guardsman Alek Skarlatos and college student Anthony Sadler, and a British businessman, Chris Norman, tackled and disarmed a Moroccan gunman on a high-speed train between Amsterdam and Paris.

In 2017, Americans witnessed their first full-blown coast-to-coast solar eclipse since World War I, with eclipse-watchers gathering along a path of totality extending 2,600 miles across the continent

In 2018, Michael Cohen, President Donald Trump's former personal lawyer and fixer, pleaded guilty to campaign-finance violations and other charges; Cohen said Trump directed him to arrange the payment of hush money to porn star Stormy Daniels and former Playboy model Karen McDougal to fend off damage to his White House bid. (Trump was found guilty of 34 felony counts of falsifying business records related to the payments in May 2024.)

In 2020, a former police officer who became known as the Golden State Killer, Joseph James DeAngelo, told victims and family members in a Sacramento courtroom that he was "truly sorry" before he was sentenced to multiple life prison sentences for a decade-long string of rapes and murders.

Today's Birthdays: Rock and Roll Hall of Famer James Burton is 86. Singer Jackie DeShannon is 84. Film director Peter Weir is 81. Football Hall of Famer Willie Lanier is 80. Actor Loretta Devine is 76. Two-time Heisman Trophy winner Archie Griffin is 71. Actor Kim Cattrall is 69. Former NFL quarterback Jim McMahon is 66. Rock musician Serj Tankian (System of a Down) is 58. Actor Carrie-Anne Moss is 58. Google co-founder Sergei Brin is 52. Singer Kelis (kuh-LEES') is 46. TV personality Brody Jenner is 42. Olympic gold medal sprinter Usain (yoo-SAYN') Bolt is 39. Country singer Kacey Musgraves is 37. Soccer player Robert Lewandowski is 37. Actor Hayden Panettiere (pan'-uh-tee-EHR') is 36. Comedian-singer-filmmaker Bo Burnham is 35.