

# Groton Daily Independent

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**Neat lightning show in the east and south last night.** (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

## 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**  
**PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445**  
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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.**

## Migrant Deportations

Uganda has temporarily agreed to take in certain migrants under a new deal with the US, officials confirmed yesterday. The arrangement will apply to individuals without criminal records and not unaccompanied minors, making Uganda one of several African nations—including Rwanda, Eswatini, and South Sudan—to accept third country nationals.

The deal centers on people from other African countries who have been denied US asylum but are reluctant to return to their home countries, per Ugandan officials. They said the agreement is subject to specific conditions, but did not disclose further details. Officials did not specify how many deportees Uganda will receive or when the plan will begin.

Separately, a report yesterday found the number of unauthorized immigrants in the US reached 14 million people in 2023. Under President Donald Trump, more than 180,000 people have been deported, reaching almost 1,500 removals per day—a pace last seen under the Obama administration.

## Trump's Fine Nixed

A New York appeals court yesterday narrowly upheld a civil fraud ruling against President Donald Trump, two of his sons, and other Trump Organization executives, but voided a roughly \$527M penalty.

Last February, a state judge found Trump and his codefendants liable for inflating property values to secure favorable deals, including loans from Deutsche Bank. He ordered them to pay over \$350M in ill-gotten gains plus millions in interest—a punishment a five-judge appellate panel deemed excessive yesterday. The judges, however, were divided on the case's merits. One argued for its dismissal, while two favored a retrial to address perceived procedural errors. Ultimately, the majority agreed to sustain the civil fraud finding and certain temporary restrictions on Trump and his sons' dealings in New York.

NY Attorney General Letitia James (D), who brought the case, plans to appeal. The Justice Department subpoenaed James this month for records tied to the case. The DOJ is separately pressuring her to resign amid allegations of mortgage fraud.

## Nord Stream Pipeline Arrest

Italian authorities arrested a suspect yesterday in the Nord Stream gas pipeline explosions. The arrest—at Germany's direction—is the first of its kind following the September 2022 attacks.

The suspect is a 49-year-old Ukrainian citizen identified by German prosecutors as Serhii K. He allegedly used a yacht—chartered from a German port using forged documents—to sail with a small crew near a Danish island in the Baltic Sea. Divers went roughly 230 to 260 feet underwater to detonate explosives, damaging two of the 23 pipelines built to deliver gas from Russia to Europe. The pipelines were not operational at the time due to sanctions against Russia. Investigators found traces of an explosive material, octogen, on the yacht and at the blast sites.

The suspect will be extradited to Germany, the last of three countries investigating the attack. Germany has issued one other arrest warrant, for a Ukrainian diving instructor identified as Volodymyr Z. The Ukrainian government denies involvement.

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## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

The 2025 college football season kicks off tomorrow with a limited slate of Week 0 games, including No. 17 Kansas State taking on No. 22 Iowa State (12 pm ET, ESPN) from Dublin, Ireland.

Rapper Lil Nas X is arrested and hospitalized after walking in Los Angeles in only underwear, allegedly punching an officer twice in the face.

The 2025 US Open tennis championships begin this weekend in New York City.

## Science & Technology

CT scans and 3D mapping of an ancient child's bones discovered in modern-day Israel suggest humans and Neanderthals interacted 100,000 years earlier than previously believed.

Giraffe genetic data reveals Africa is home to four distinct species, not just one as long assumed; new taxonomy will enable more nuanced understandings of population threats and targeted conservation efforts.

Light pollution is interfering with songbirds' biological clocks, causing them to chirp an average of 50 minutes longer per day—18 minutes earlier in the morning and 32 minutes later in the evening.

## Business & Markets

US stock markets close down (S&P 500 -0.4%, Dow -0.3%, Nasdaq -0.3%) ahead of Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell's annual policy speech in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, today.

US existing home sales rise 2% month over month in July; median home price of \$422,400 is up 0.2% from a year ago, representing smallest annual increase since June 2023 but still the highest median home price for any July on record.

Cracker Barrel shares close down 7% following pushback on its new simplified logo—part of a larger brand refresh.

## Politics & World Affairs

Supreme Court clears the Trump administration to cut \$783M in National Institutes of Health grants linked to diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives while a lawsuit over the cuts continues.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) signs legislation sending redrawn congressional map to voters for approval.

Erik Menendez is denied parole 36 years after murdering his parents in Los Angeles, will next be eligible in three years; brother Lyle goes before the parole board today.

Influential evangelical leader James Dobson dies at age 89; the conservative activist served as an adviser to President Donald Trump and former presidents including Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and George W. Bush.



Groton  
Area  
Tigers  
Groton, SD

**GDILIVE**

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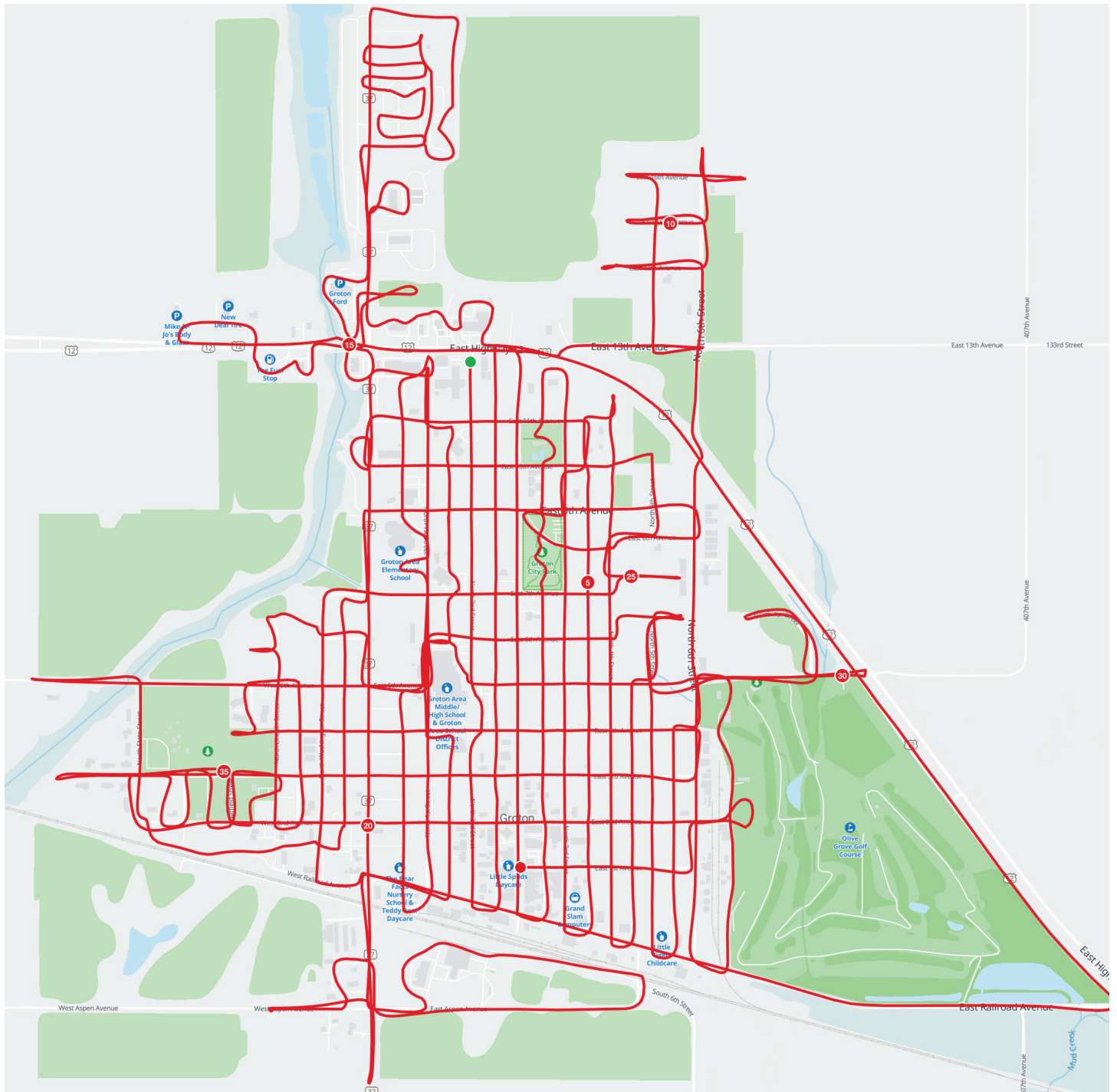
For more info: [GDILIVE.COM](http://GDILIVE.COM)

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



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## Adult Mosquito Control

The City of Groton conducted adult mosquito control last night. The temperature was 75-82 degrees . The wind was N at 8:30, NNW at 8:45, ENE at 9:00, E at 9:15, SSE at 9:30, NW at 10:00, NNW at 10:30, E at 10:45, N at 11:00, NNE at 11:30. Average wind speed was 1-4 mph. 10.8 gallons of MasterLine Kontrol 4-4 (with 4.6% Permethrin). Travel time was 2 hours and 45 minutes with a distance of 33.74 miles. Total cost of the application was around \$628.



## South Dakota Mosquito



SD WNV (as of August 21):

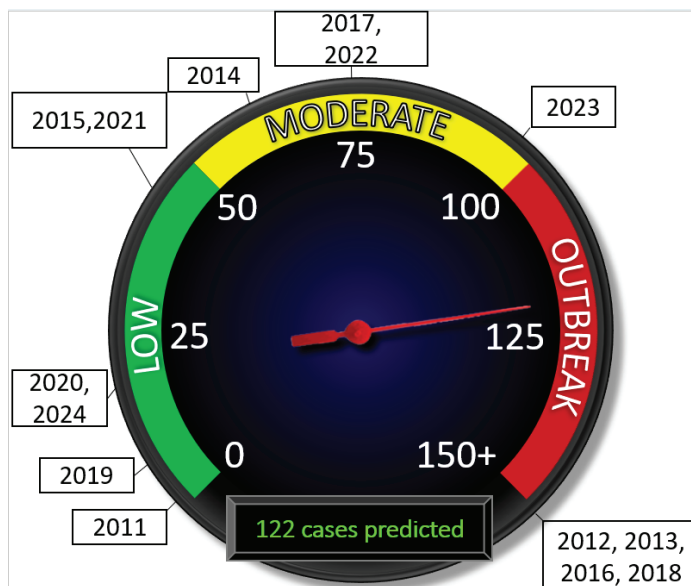
26 human cases (Beadle, Brookings, Brown, Corson, Codington, Grant, Hamlin, Hand, Lawrence, Lincoln, Marshall, Miner, Minnehaha, Sanborn, Spink, Walworth) and 2 deaths

4 human viremic blood donors (Brookings, Brown, Minnehaha)

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

US WNV (as of August 19): 320 cases (AL, AR, AZ, CA, CO, GA, IA, ID, IL, IN, KS, KY, LA, MA, MN, MO, MS, NC, ND, NE, NM, NY, OH, OK, PA, SC, SD, TN, TX, UT, VA, WI, WY)

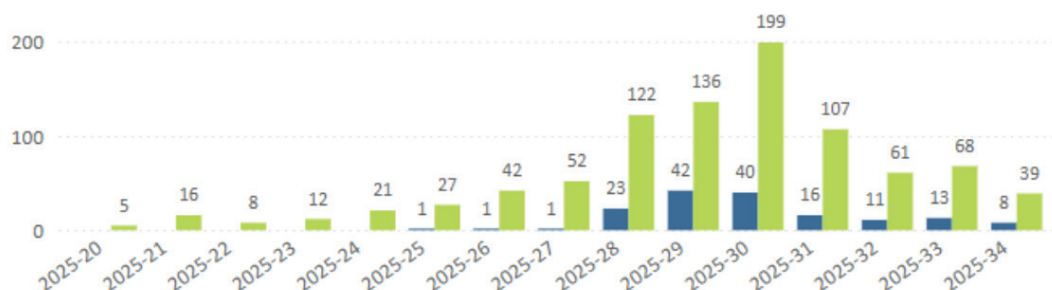
WNV Prediction Model – Total Number of Cases Projected for 2025, South Dakota (as of August 21)



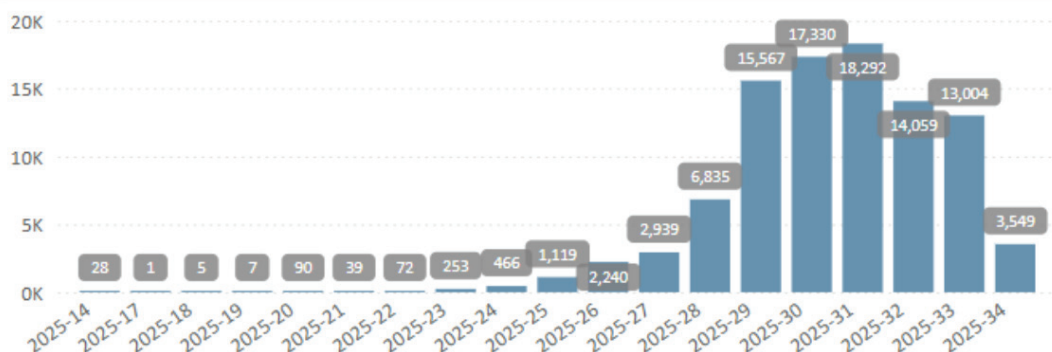
Total sites collecting mosquitoes: 57  
Total mosquito pools tested: 1071  
% positivity: 14.57%

Number of Mosquito Pools Tested by MMWR Week and Status

Test Status: ● Positive ● Negative



Culex Mosquitoes Collected by MMWR Week





## **Fact brief: Are South Dakota public schools among the lowest-funded in the nation?**

# Yes

South Dakota spends the seventh-lowest amount per student nationally in the public school system as of 2023.

The state spends \$12,005 per student, about \$2,000 more than the lowest state on the list: Idaho (\$10,247), which is followed by Utah (\$10,333) and Oklahoma (\$11,155).

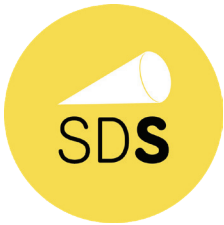
The data is collected by the U.S. Census Bureau and includes a per-student breakdown of salaries and wages, employee benefits, student support, instructional staff support, general administration and school administration.

The top states for per-student funding are New York (\$30,012) and Vermont (\$26,345).

Regionally, Minnesota spends \$16,117 per student, Iowa, \$13,792 and Nebraska, \$15,200.

In early 2025, the South Dakota Legislature approved an increase of education funding of 1.25%, much lower than average.

Budgets were strained even further when the federal government cut \$25.8 million from the state's education funding this summer.



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### 'In The Moment' and 'South Dakota Focus' shows caught in local public broadcasting cuts and layoffs

**SDPB plans to shed 15 employees and eliminate education resources due to loss of federal funding**

**BY: MAKENZIE HUBER**



**South Dakota Public Broadcasting Executive Director Julie Overgaard holds a press conference at the Sioux Falls SDPB studio on Aug. 21, 2025.** (Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

SIOUX FALLS — South Dakota Public Broadcasting Executive Director Julie Overgaard announced Thursday that the organization plans to lay off 15 employees and eliminate two locally produced shows due to a loss of federal funding.

SDPB depended on \$2.2 million in annual funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which was about 20% of SDPB's budget. Congress and President Donald Trump rescinded \$1.1 billion in previously approved nationwide funding for the corporation earlier this summer, causing the corporation to announce it will cease operations.

State funds account for a little more than half of SDPB's budget, while fundraising, private donations and other sources make up the rest.

The cuts will eliminate two in-

depth public affairs journalism programs, "South Dakota Focus" on television and "In The Moment" on the radio. The cuts will also eliminate education resources provided by SDPB and reduce the output of the magazine-style TV program "Dakota Life."

"South Dakota Focus" Producer and Host Jackie Hendry will be repositioned, Overgaard confirmed in response to a South Dakota Searchlight question. "In The Moment" Host Lori Walsh's position is on the chopping block along with her show.

Overgaard has been in contact with U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson's office as well as U.S. Sens. Mike Rounds and John Thune, who are all Republicans and all voted in favor of rescinding the Corporation for Public Broadcasting's funding.

"They're sorry," Overgaard said. "But they're not going to be our champions on the Hill."

Johnson, who said he donates to the Friends of South Dakota Public Broadcasting, told South Dakota reporters Wednesday at Dakotafest in Mitchell that SDPB "does a really impressive job."

He supported the recission because he doesn't believe taxpayers should pay for some of the public broadcasting content he doesn't agree with in other states, he said. He also spoke of federal budgetary



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concerns, saying "at some point, when you're \$2 trillion upside down, you do actually have to start tightening the belt."

SDPB provides non-commercial public radio and television across South Dakota. In addition to news coverage, the organization provides live video and audio feeds of legislative and state government meetings, educational content, cultural programming, high school activities broadcasts, and emergency alerts.

SDPB will continue to deliver content from National Public Radio and the national Public Broadcasting Service. Broadcasts of high school sports and activities, which are among SDPB's most popular offerings, will also continue.

Overgaard said the layoffs and cuts weren't based on analytics.

"It was based on not endangering our state funding right now," she said.

Last winter, the organization fought off a reduction in state funding proposed by then-Gov. Kristi Noem. State Rep. Erik Muckey, D-Sioux Falls, invoked that effort Thursday in a news release while also saying South Dakota's members of Congress "have forgotten who they serve."

"This past session, state legislators on both sides of the aisle agreed: SDPB is necessary for the good of our state," Muckey said. "These cuts were 100% preventable, and if there is any reduction of SDPB programming that South Dakotans know and love, you know who to blame: Sen. Thune, Sen. Rounds, and Rep. Johnson."

In addition to the 15 layoffs, four open positions will remain unfilled. The layoffs represent about a 25% decrease in SDPB's current workforce. Overgaard warned of the reduction last month, saying she would make the details public after they were finalized.

The affected employees will remain in their positions until the end of October. Overgaard said some positions could be retained if more funding is secured.

Friends of SDPB, the nonprofit that raises money for the organization, has raised \$1.1 million since the potential layoffs were announced. The organization will continue to fundraise through October for the effort to avoid cuts.

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

## Judicial emergency undone as state systems come back online

BY: JOHN HULT

The South Dakota court system has rescinded a judicial emergency sparked by a state communications outage that lasted more than 24 hours.

The outage made it impossible for court employees to access court records and court schedules, file documents or take electronic payments for fines. The emergency declaration suspended deadlines across the state.

The state's network began to come back online Wednesday afternoon.

A Thursday press release from the Unified Judicial System said the emergency was rescinded "after carefully monitoring current



**An equal justice statue sits outside the doors of the Minnehaha County Courthouse in Sioux Falls.**

(Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)



circumstances related to a large-scale technical issue which impacted the State of South Dakota network.”

The state’s Bureau of Information and Technology announced Wednesday that “core” systems like phone lines, state radio, internet access and wireless services were back online, but that “full restoration is still in process.”

During the outage, which began on Tuesday, people couldn’t get vital records, driver’s licenses, vehicle registrations or license plates. For part of the outage, law enforcement was unable to run license plates during traffic stops to check for warrants or access state criminal background records.

The IT bureau has blamed the outage on a power supply problem but did not immediately respond to a request for comment Thursday morning on the cause of that problem. Previously, it said that the incident was not related to a cybersecurity breach, and that the cause was under investigation.

*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.*

## Conservation advocates applaud federal funding boosts, but worry USDA can’t distribute them

**Farmers express concerns to members of Congress at Dakotafest ag trade show**

**BY: MAKENZIE HUBER**

MITCHELL — Farmers and conservation organizations welcomed the additional funding for some conservation programs President Donald Trump signed into law this summer. But they also worry there won’t be enough federal staff around to ensure the programs’ success.

The topic came up Wednesday during sessions with advocates and South Dakota’s congressional delegation at the annual Dakotafest farm-and-ranch trade show in Mitchell.

The One Big Beautiful Bill consolidated conservation funding by redirecting unobligated conservation funding from the Biden administration to popular producer-conservation programs such as the Conservation Stewardship Program and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.



**South Dakota Republican congressional delegates, from left, Senate Majority Leader John Thune, Sen. Mike Rounds and Rep. Dusty Johnson speak at Dakotafest in Mitchell on Aug. 20, 2025.** (Makenzie Huber/

South Dakota Searchlight)

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But the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced in a memo on July 24 that the department would reduce its workforce and relocate most staff from Washington, D.C., to five locations throughout the country in North Carolina, Missouri, Indiana, Colorado and Utah.

The move would bring the department "closer to the people it serves," Secretary Brooke Rollins said in the memo. Rollins planned to speak at Dakotafest on Wednesday but was unable to attend.

Gene Stehly has farmed in the Mitchell area for 46 years. He said the staffing decision compounds an already "unpredictable" political atmosphere affecting agriculture.

Stehly incorporated a no-till strategy, planted cover crops, added a riparian buffer and placed land into the Conservation Reserve Program over the last four decades, he told South Dakota Searchlight.

He and his work partner wanted to save time and soil moisture, not realizing initially the benefit their decisions would have on productivity and overall soil health.

"None of it would have ever occurred without federal funding," Stehly said.

The Conservation Reserve Program specifically increased profitability, he said. The program pays farmers and ranchers to remove environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and maintain grass, trees and other plant species on enrolled acres. That helps prevent soil erosion, filters runoff that enters waterways, and establishes habitat for wildlife.

Invest in Our Land Executive Director Rebecca Bartels said farmers "overwhelmingly voted" for the Trump administration, and she had hoped to hear more about the USDA reorganization and staffing cuts from Rollins. The conservancy advocacy organization ran a booth at Dakotafest.

A recent report from the University of Illinois projects that the additional funding will infuse another \$2 billion into South Dakota conservation efforts over the next decade.

Bartels worries not enough staffers will relocate out of Washington, D.C., to manage the USDA workload. Democrats on the House Committee on Agriculture expressed similar concerns and questioned Rollins' reasoning for the reorganization in a letter last week.

"It's great that the funds are protected," Bartels said. "Now how do we make sure they actually get used and that farmers have partners in getting these practices on the ground?"

"We don't want to see a dip in program use and adoption because farmers don't have the support they need to use these practices for the first time," Bartels added. "Farmers are operating on razor thin margins, so to take a risk and take on a new practice is intimidating."

Members of South Dakota's congressional delegation spoke to the benefits of the conservation programs during a Dakotafest policy panel. Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-South Dakota, talked about his recently introduced bill to increase maximum annual payments from \$50,000 to \$125,000 for the Conservation Reserve Program.

The program expires at the end of September unless it is re-authorized by Congress.

"I want to encourage conservation," Thune said. "A lot of our conservation policies do that, but we also want to make sure that those are workable."

The bill would also provide cost-share funds for grazing infrastructure, like fencing and water tanks, and on conservation contracts that include grazing. It would also expand a program that helps landowners plant trees and create wetlands on enrolled acres, and make it easier to produce hay on land set aside for conservation during drought conditions.

Thune said after the presentation that his office will pay attention to whether USDA offices are able to keep up with the workload.

"At the end of the day, they've got a job to do," Thune said. "We want to make sure they get it done efficiently and in a timely way so that producers know what the rules are and begin to make their planning decisions."

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

## U.S. Supreme Court gives go-ahead for Trump to cancel \$783M in NIH research grants

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court on Thursday set aside a lower court's ruling, allowing the Trump administration to cancel hundreds of millions of dollars in National Institutes of Health grants that addressed diversity, equity and inclusion issues.

The 5-4 ruling narrowly divided the court, with Chief Justice John Roberts, Justice Sonia Sotomayor, Justice Elena Kagan and Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson dissenting from their colleagues.

The Trump administration originally requested the Supreme Court to intervene in the case in July, when Solicitor General D. John Sauer filed an application arguing "the district court lacked jurisdiction to order the government to pay out some \$783 million in terminated grants."

Sauer wrote the case was similar to one the Supreme Court had ruled on earlier this year, determining that a district court erred when it blocked "the Department of Education from terminating DEI-related grants."

In that case, the Supreme Court ruled that "such claims likely belonged in the Court of Federal Claims, that the district court accordingly lacked jurisdiction."

Sauer wrote in his application to the Supreme Court that the lower courts in the NIH grants case chose to ignore the justices' prior ruling.

"The district court's order directs the NIH to continue paying \$783 million in federal grants that are undisputedly counter to the Administration's priorities," Sauer wrote. "This Court has already intervened to stay a materially identical order ... and the same course is even more warranted here given the district court's brazen refusal to follow controlling Supreme Court precedent."

### Democratic AGs weigh in

Democratic attorneys general for Arizona, California, Colorado, Delaware, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Washington and Wisconsin opposed the Trump administration's request in a 49-page filing.

"The federal government's application spins a tale of lower courts disregarding established legal guardrails to block routine agency decisions," they wrote. "That narrative bears little resemblance to reality; indeed, it gets things exactly backward."

The Trump administration's decision to cancel the NIH grants, they wrote, came "without providing any meaningful explanation of their decisions."

"Defendants then executed the directives by, among other things, canceling hundreds of research grants to the plaintiff states' public universities for projects investigating heart disease, HIV/AIDS, Alzheimer's disease, alcohol and substance abuse, mental-health issues, and countless other health conditions."

The American Public Health Association also opposed the Trump administration's efforts to get the Su-



**The U.S. Supreme Court on Oct. 29, 2024.** (Photo by Jane

Norman/States Newsroom)



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preme Court to throw out the lower court's rulings.

The APHA wrote in its own filing that the Trump administration "failed to consider the reliance interests at stake—namely, the impact to researchers' career progression, the risk to human life, and the damage to the overall scientific endeavor and the body of public health."

## Siding with Trump administration

Justices Clarence Thomas, Samuel Alito, Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh disagreed, siding with the Trump administration and setting aside the lower court's rulings in the case. Justice Amy Coney Barrett wrote a concurring opinion.

Gorsuch sharply rebuked the district and appeals courts in his opinion, in which Kavanaugh joined in part and dissented in part.

"Lower court judges may sometimes disagree with this Court's decisions, but they are never free to defy them," Gorsuch wrote. "In *Department of Ed. v. California* ... this Court granted a stay because it found the government likely to prevail in showing that the district court lacked jurisdiction to order the government to pay grant obligations."

Barrett appeared to agree, writing in her concurring opinion that "the District Court likely lacked jurisdiction to hear challenges to the grant terminations, which belong in the Court of Federal Claims."

In a dissenting opinion, Jackson wrote that the justices did not take enough time to seriously consider the ramifications of their decision in the Education Department case when they spent "a mere nine days" deciding whether a federal district court or the Court of Federal Claims holds jurisdiction when the government terminates "federal grants en masse."

"I viewed the Court's intervention then—in an emergency stay posture, while racing against a fast-expiring temporary restraining order—as 'equal parts unprincipled and unfortunate,'" Jackson wrote. "As it turns out, the Court's decision was an even bigger mistake than I realized."

*Ariana Figueroa contributed to this report.*

*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.*

## New York appeals court overturns \$465M penalty against Trump; keeps fraud finding

BY: JACOB FISCHLER

A New York state appeals court on Thursday overturned as overly punitive a nearly \$500 million civil penalty against President Donald Trump, but left in place a finding of fraud based on records that inflated the value of Trump's business holdings.

A five-judge panel of the New York Appellate Division for the First Department disagreed over aspects of the case and the trial court's ruling that awarded \$465 million to the state after finding Trump liable for fraud, issuing three opinions that spanned more than 300 pages.

Two judges concluded that the finding of liability against Trump was correct, two said errors in the trial court meant a new trial should be held, and one judge said the case was wrongly decided.

Still, all five judges agreed the penalty was excessive, and the two judges who'd called for a retrial joined the two upholding the decision "for the sole purpose of ensuring finality, thereby affording the parties a path for appeal" to the state's highest court, according to the decision.

## Loan applications

A New York state court found last year that Trump committed financial fraud by submitting loan applications that exaggerated the value of some of his real estate assets, which resulted in more favorable loan terms from banks.



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**President Donald Trump speaks to the media as, left to right, Secretary of Commerce Howard Lutnick, Secretary of Labor Lori Chavez-DeRemer and Secretary of Education Linda McMahon look on after signing executive orders in the Oval Office at the White House on April 23, 2025 in Washington, D.C.** (Photo by Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images)

Writing the determinative opinion Thursday, Appeals Justice Peter Moulton said New York Attorney General Letitia James was within her power to sue over the statements, even though they were between private parties and did not involve the state.

The state has an interest in upholding "market hygiene" and discouraging fraudulent behavior, he wrote. But the fine went too far, he said.

"While the injunctive relief ordered by the court is well crafted to curb defendants' business culture, the court's disgorgement order, which directs that defendants pay nearly half a billion dollars to the State of New York, is an excessive fine that violates the Eighth Amendment of the United States Constitution," Moulton wrote.

The amendment says that "Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel

and unusual punishments inflicted."

## Trump celebrates

One judge, Justice David Friedman, said he would have thrown out the case entirely, arguing that James overstepped her authority by bringing the civil case because no one was actually harmed. Most of the valuations were not fraudulently high and even if they were, would have resulted in the same favorable terms Trump received, Friedman wrote.

"All parties to these private transactions profited handsomely from the deals, from which there was no discernable negative effect on the public interest," he wrote. "This action does not serve to protect the consuming public... This action does not protect the integrity or operation of the public securities market..., given that defendants do not issue publicly traded securities."

In a post to his social media site, Truth Social, Trump exaggerated the court's finding, saying it cleared him of wrongdoing.

"TOTAL VICTORY in the FAKE New York State Attorney General Letitia James Case!" Trump posted. "I greatly respect the fact that the Court had the Courage to throw out this unlawful and disgraceful Decision that was hurting Business all throughout New York State... The amount, including Interest and Penalties, was over \$550 Million Dollars. It was a Political Witch Hunt, in a business sense, the likes of which no one has ever seen before."

In a statement, James pledged to appeal the opinion, while highlighting that the appeals court had affirmed the finding of fraud.

"The First Department today affirmed the well-supported finding of the trial court: Donald Trump, his company and two of his children are liable for fraud," she wrote. "It should not be lost to history: yet another court has ruled that the president violated the law, and that our case has merit."

Thursday's order does not affect Trump's May 2024 criminal conviction on 34 felony counts of falsifying business records related to hush money payments to adult film actress Stormy Daniels.

*Jacob covers federal policy and helps direct national coverage as deputy Washington bureau chief for States Newsroom. Based in Oregon, he focuses on Western issues. His coverage areas include climate, energy development, public lands and infrastructure.*

## Appeals court lets Trump and Noem end temporary legal protections for 60,000 migrants

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA



**Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem at a Nashville press conference on July 18, 2025. An appeals court on Aug. 21, 2025, said it will allow Noem and the Trump administration, for now, to move forward with ending temporary protections for 60,000 immigrants from Honduras, Nepal and Nicaragua.** (Photo by John Partipilo/Tennessee Lookout)

WASHINGTON — An appeals court late Wednesday said it will allow the Trump administration, for now, to move forward with ending temporary protections for 60,000 immigrants from Honduras, Nepal and Nicaragua.

It means that Nepali immigrants with Temporary Protected Status, or TPS, will lose their legal status — including work permits and deportation protections — immediately. Honduran and Nicaraguan holders will lose their status by Sept. 8.

The judges on the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals — Michael Daly Hawkins, Consuelo M. Callahan and Eric D. Miller — did not give a reason for their decision. Former President Bill Clinton nominated Hawkins, former President George W. Bush nominated Callahan and President Donald Trump nominated Miller in his first term.

Wednesday's decision pauses a late July ruling from California District Judge Trina Thompson that

found Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem's decision to end deportation protections for those nationals to be rooted in racism.

Instead, Thompson extended TPS for nationals from Honduras, Nepal and Nicaragua until Nov. 18 while the case proceeded through the courts.

"The freedom to live fearlessly, the opportunity of liberty, and the American dream. That is all Plaintiffs seek," Thompson wrote in her 37-page ruling. "Instead, they are told to atone for their race, leave because of their names, and purify their blood. The Court disagrees."

As the Trump administration aims to carry out its plans of mass deportation of immigrants in the country without legal authorization, DHS has also moved to end the temporary legal status many immigrants have held.

Noem has acted to halt TPS for nationals from Haiti and Venezuela and end humanitarian protections for those from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela. The Supreme Court has allowed, for now, many of

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those moves by the Trump administration.

## DHS praises decision

DHS spokeswoman Tricia McLaughlin in a statement called the decision from the appeals court a victory for the Trump administration.

"TPS was never meant to be a de facto asylum system, yet that is how previous administrations have used it for decades while allowing hundreds of thousands of foreigners into the country without proper vetting," McLaughlin said. "This unanimous decision will help restore integrity to our immigration system to keep our homeland and its people safe."

Certain nationals are granted TPS because their home country is deemed too dangerous to return to due to war, disaster or other unstable conditions.

Immigrants who are granted TPS go through vetting by DHS, including a background check, and have to re-apply roughly every 18 months to keep work permits and have deportation protections. A misdemeanor could result in the loss of TPS status for an immigrant.

## 'Fear and uncertainty'

"I am heartbroken by the court's decision," Sandhya Lama, a TPS holder from Nepal who is a plaintiff in the case, said in a statement.

"I've lived in the U.S. for years, and my kids are U.S. citizens and have never even been to Nepal. This ruling leaves us and thousands of other TPS families in fear and uncertainty," Lama continued.

Many immigrants are on TPS for lengthy periods due to their home country's condition. Those from Nepal had TPS for more than 10 years and those nationals from Honduras and Nicaragua were on TPS for more than 26 years, attorneys at the American Civil Liberties Union, which is one of the groups that filed the suit, said.

"This administration's attack on TPS is part of a concerted campaign to deprive noncitizens of any legal status," Emi MacLean, an attorney at the ACLU Foundation of Northern California said in a statement. "(Wednesday's) ruling is a devastating setback, but it is not the end of this fight. Humanitarian protection—TPS—means something and cannot be decimated so easily."

Organizations that filed the suit include the ACLU Foundations of Northern California and Southern California, the National Day Laborer Organizing Network, the Center for Immigration Law and Policy at the UCLA School of Law and the Haitian Bridge Alliance.

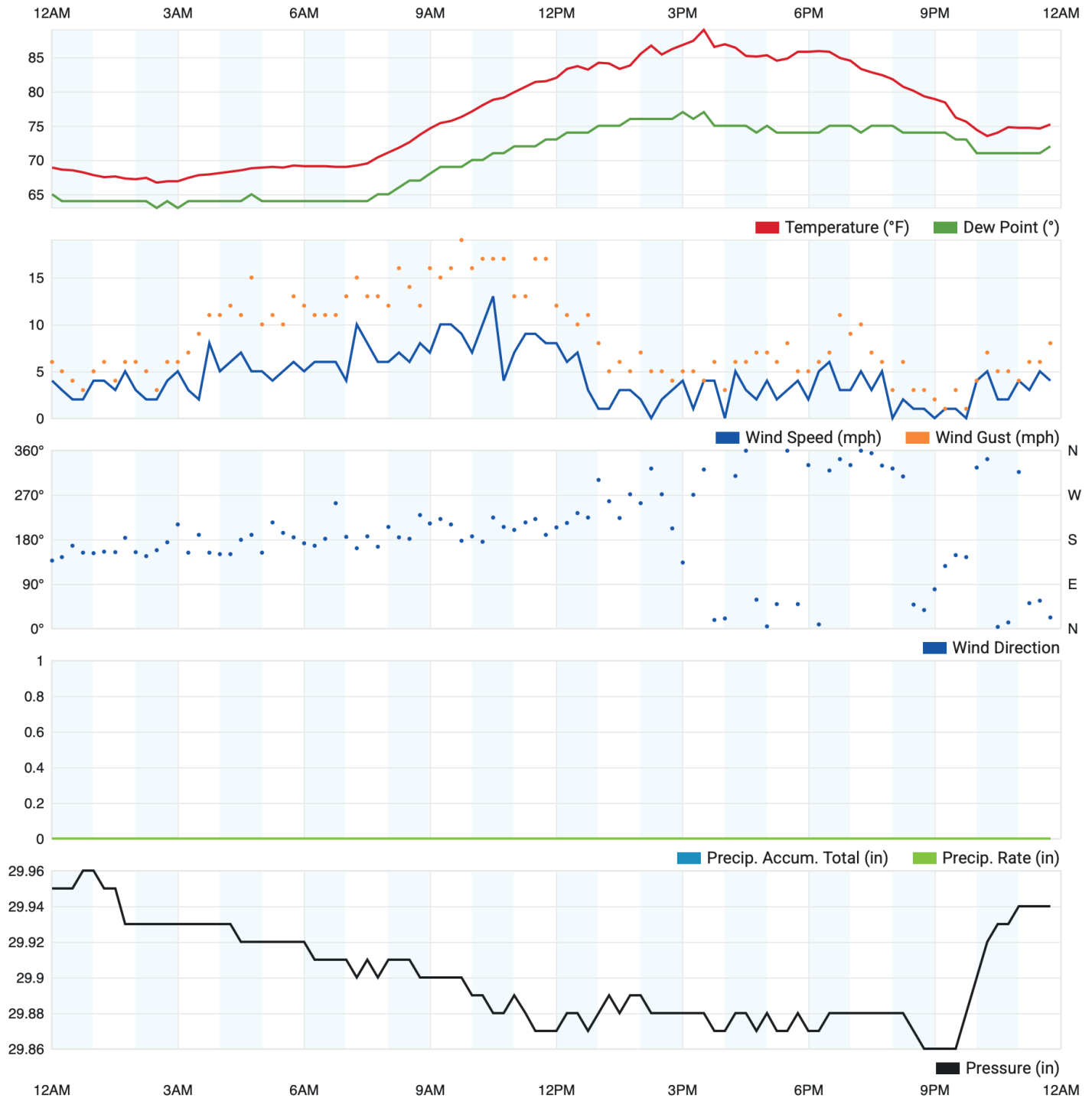
*Ariana covers the nation's capital for States Newsroom. Her areas of coverage include politics and policy, lobbying, elections and campaign finance.*

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

August 21, 2025

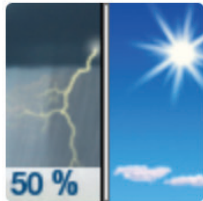




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Today



High: 81 °F

Chance  
T-storms then  
Sunny

Tonight



Low: 53 °F

Clear

Saturday



High: 72 °F

Sunny

Saturday Night



Low: 48 °F

Mostly Clear

Sunday



High: 68 °F

Sunny

## THREAT ASSESSMENT

### HIGHEST LOCAL RISK

1

WHAT THIS MEANS:  
Isolated Severe Storms  
Possible

### TIMING

Through Late Morning

### PRIMARY THREAT



DAMAGING  
WIND GUSTS



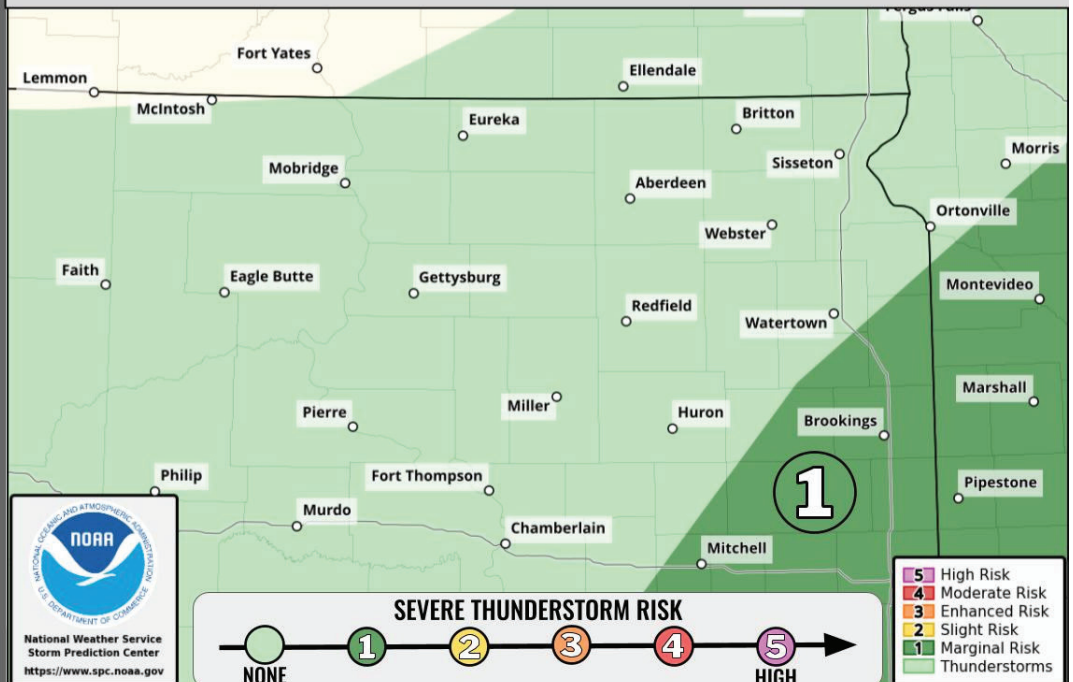
LARGE HAIL

### SECONDARY THREATS



HEAVY  
RAIN

## Severe Storms Possible This Morning



Scattered thunderstorms will continue to move across the area this morning. The severe threats have mostly diminished, but conditions still exist an isolated storm or two could be capable of producing large hail and 60 mph winds. The best chance for this activity is in the highlighted marginal risk (level 1 of 5) area across east central South Dakota, or south and east of the Watertown area. Storms should move away from the area by midday and early this afternoon.

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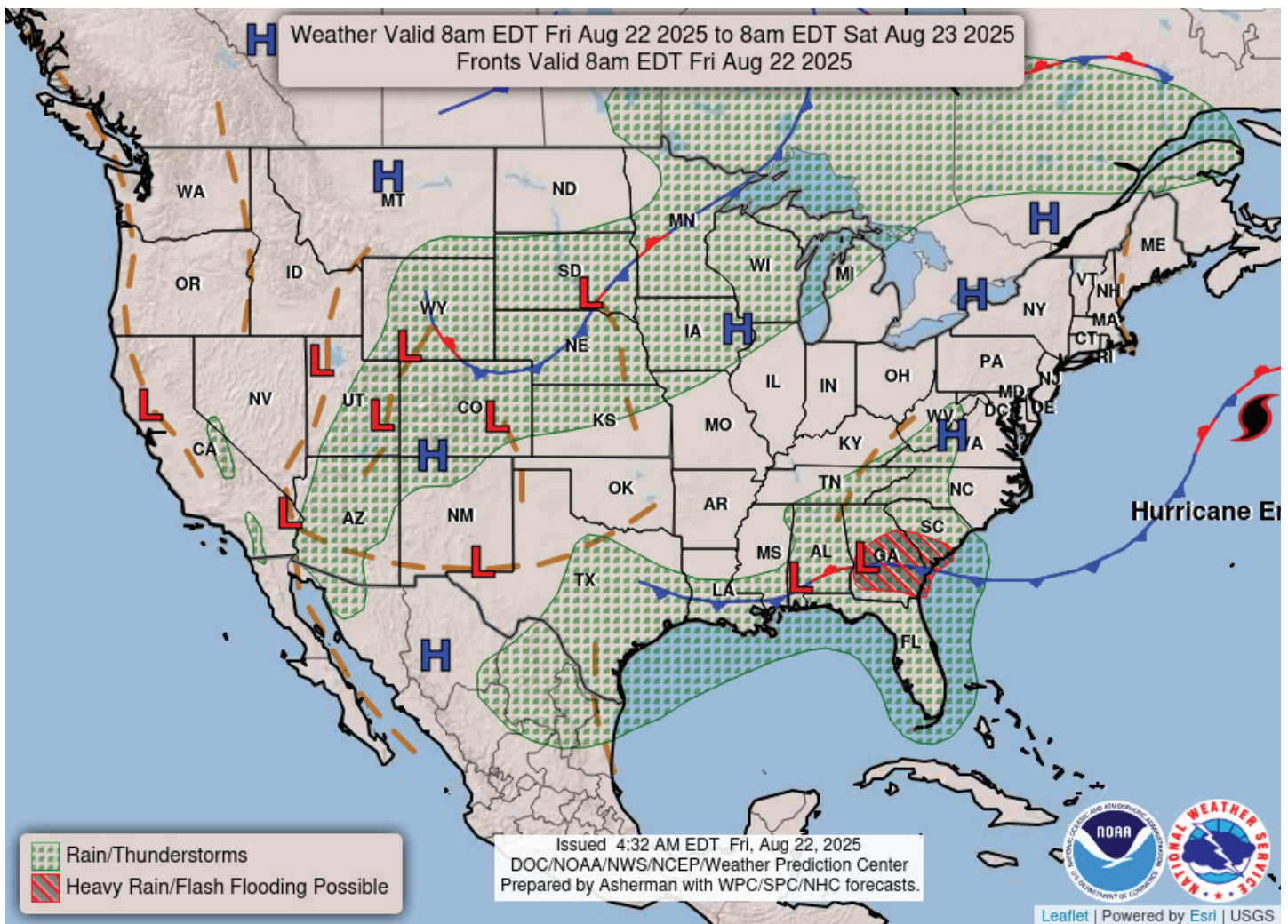
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp:** 89 °F at 3:31 PM  
**Heat Index:** 101 °F at 3:30 PM  
**Low Temp:** 67 °F at 2:32 AM  
**Wind:** 19 mph at 9:39 AM  
**Precip:** : 0.00

Day length: 13 hours, 48 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 105 in 1971  
Record Low: 36 in 1904  
Average High: 82  
Average Low: 55  
Average Precip in August.: 1.59  
Precip to date in August: 4.40  
Average Precip to date: 15.69  
Precip Year to Date: 20.28  
Sunset Tonight: 8:29:24 pm  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:42:08 am



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## Today in Weather History

August 22, 1985: Intense thunderstorms moved from near Shadehill Reservoir in northwest South Dakota late in the evening of the 21st, to northern Brown County after sunrise on the 22nd. These thunderstorms produced high winds, large hail, rain, and lightning. Considerable crop and property damage were caused mainly by the strong winds and hail. Winds gusts ranged from 55 mph at Mobridge to 60 mph in and around Akaska. Winds of 70 mph were reported at Onaka and Faulkton. The strongest wind gust was reported in Hoven with a peak gust of 72 mph. Widespread damage was reported throughout the area. Many mobile homes, storage sheds, silos, and roofs were damaged or destroyed. Nine miles south and four miles west of Keldron, over two inches in diameter hail fell for 40 minutes, breaking windows and piling in ditches to a depth of four feet. These intense thunderstorms also produced brief heavy rainfall ranging from three-quarters of an inch to over four inches.

August 21, 2011: The Missouri River at Pierre, Fort Pierre, and Chamberlain/Oacoma fell throughout August as releases on the Oahe Dam were slowly decreased. The Missouri River at Chamberlain/Oacoma fell below flood stage on August 22nd. The extensive damage to homes and roads began to surface as the water receded. The river continued to fall into September.

1816 - The growing season for corn was cut short as damaging frosts were reported from North Carolina to interior New England. (David Ludlum)

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.

1923 - The temperature at Anchorage, AK, reached 82 degrees, a record for August for the location which was later tied on the 2nd in 1978. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A cold front lowered temperatures 20 to 40 degrees across the north central U.S., and produced severe thunderstorms in Ohio and Lower Michigan. An early morning thunderstorm near Sydney MI produced high winds which spun a car around 180 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Afternoon highs of 88 degrees at Astoria, OR, and 104 degrees at Medford, OR, were records for the date, and the number of daily record highs across the nation since the first of June topped the 2000 mark. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Evening thunderstorms in the central U.S. produced golf ball size hail at May City IA, and wind gusts to 66 mph at Balltown IA. Lightning struck a barn in Fayette County IA killing 750 hogs. Evening thunderstorms in Montana produced wind gusts to 70 mph at Havre. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1992 - Hurricane Andrew makes landfall in Southern Florida as a Category 5 storm with wind gusts estimated in excess of 175 m.p.h. Estimated damages exceeded \$20 billion, more than 60 people were killed and approximately 2 million people were evacuated from their homes. (University of Illinois WW2010)

1994: Hurricane John, about 345 miles south of Hilo, Hawaii had winds of 175 mph and pressure at 920 millibars or 27.17 inches of mercury, making it one of the strongest hurricanes ever in the Central Pacific. The 31-day existence made John the longest-lasting tropical cyclone recorded in both the Pacific Ocean and worldwide, surpassing both Hurricane Tina's previous record in the Pacific of 24 days in the 1992 season and the 1899 San Ciriaco hurricane's previous world record of 28 days in the 1899 Atlantic season. John was also the farthest-traveling tropical cyclone in both Pacific Ocean and worldwide, with distance traveled of 7,165 miles, out-distancing previous record holders Hurricane Fico in the Pacific of 4,700 miles in the 1978 season and Hurricane Faith worldwide of 6,850 miles in the 1966 Atlantic season.

2003: The Okanagan Mountain fire reaches its destructive peak, destroying 250 homes. Nearly 40,000 residents have been evacuated or are on evacuation alert. The Okanagan Mountain Park Fire is estimated to be 17,000 hectares and continues to grow.



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## Seeds of Hope Guido Ministries

*Pride and an attitude of  
humility and our complete  
dependence on God, cannot  
exist in the same heart...*

"Warning: Construction work next 10 miles."

Most of us have seen road signs that warn us of impending dangers. Wise motorists follow their warning if they want to be safe. Careless ones normally take risks to prove they make their own rules and create their own destiny.

The attitude that "Rules were made to be broken" suggests that they can get away with the limits and boundaries of life.

Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall — a warning that is well worth admitting.

There is little doubt that one of the most fundamental foes Christians face is pride. In fact, Solomon stated in verse five that "The Lord detests all the proud of heart."

Pride, once it invades our hearts, is often the beginning step in walking away from God. Pride will destroy us because it cancels the first rule of wisdom: the fear of the Lord. Pride

and an attitude of humility and our complete dependence on God cannot exist in the same heart.

It is well worth noting that the word "destruction" carries with it a picture of the shattering of a bone. When our hearts become filled with pride and we no longer see the need for God to be at the center of our lives, all of our dreams and visions will be shattered and destroyed.

A good way to understand the word haughty is to think of the woozy feelings that come with being dizzy. Life becomes blurred, steps uncertain and unsteady, and will eventually lead to a fall.

Warning: pride is lurking in the depths of your heart. Forewarned is forearmed.

Today's Prayer: Help us, Lord, to understand the subtle power of pride. May we become dependent on You to guide us, guard us, and give us an attitude of humility. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Today's Scripture: "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall." Proverbs 16:18

*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 15 Hrs 40 Mins 34  
DRAW: 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 1 Days 14 Hrs 55 Mins  
DRAW: 34 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 08.21.25

23 27 32 41 46 15

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT 15 Hrs 10 Mins 34  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 08.20.25

5 13 29 30 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$20,000**

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 10 Mins  
DRAW: 33 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 08.20.25

16 17 23 46 52 3

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 39 Mins  
DRAW: 34 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 1 Days 15 Hrs 39 Mins  
DRAW: 34 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: Trump thanks police and troops as DC crackdown on crime and immigration intensifies**

By The Associated Press undefined

President Donald Trump took a field trip Thursday to the U.S. Park Police operations facility in Washington, where he addressed about 300 National Guard troops and federal law enforcement officials and praised his military crackdown on crime and immigration in the city.

The White House said there have been 630 arrests, including 251 people who are in the country illegally, since Aug. 7, when Trump began ordering federal agents into the city. Trump has been ratcheting up the intensity since then, seizing control of the D.C. police department on Aug. 11 and deploying more National Guard troops, mostly from Republican-led states.

Trump suggested that operations in Washington could be drawn out and serve as a model for others around the country.

"We're going to make it safe, and we're going to go on to other places, but we're going to stay here for a while," he said.

The Latest:

#### **Florida must stop expanding 'Alligator Alcatraz' immigration center, judge says**

Advocates have said the immigration detention center built in the middle of the Florida Everglades violates environmental laws.

U.S. District Judge Kathleen Williams' injunction formalizes a temporary halt she ordered two weeks ago as witnesses continued to testify in a multiday hearing to determine whether construction should end until the ultimate resolution of the case.

The judge says she expects the population of the facility to decline within 60 days through the transferring of detainees to other facilities, and once that happened, fencing, lighting and generators should be removed.

Environmental groups' lawsuit claims the project threatens environmentally sensitive wetlands that are home to protected plants and animals and would reverse billions of dollars' worth of environmental restoration.

#### **Defamation case against Fox News highlights role of its hosts in promoting 2020 election falsehoods**

Court papers in a voting technology company's \$2.7 billion defamation lawsuit against Fox News point to Maria Bartiromo, Lou Dobbs and Jeanine Pirro as leaders in spreading false stories about election fraud in the weeks after Democrat Joe Biden's victory over President Donald Trump in 2020.

Arguments for summary judgment by Smartmatic were filed in lightly redacted form this week at the New York Supreme Court. It's like a bad rerun for Fox: Similar revelations about its conduct following the 2020 election came in a lawsuit by another company falsely accused of doctoring votes. Fox agreed to pay Dominion Voting Systems \$787 million after the judge found it was "CRYSTAL CLEAR" none of the claims against Dominion were true.

In short: Fox let Trump aides spread conspiracy theories despite knowing they were false because it was what their viewers wanted to hear.

But Fox said it was just covering a newsworthy story.

#### **Hundreds protest peacefully in DC streets**

What began as a group of just 200 protesters grew steadily throughout Thursday evening, eventually spilling into the streets as police and National Guard troops lined the perimeter. At times, officers shut down roads and parked their vehicles across intersections but largely refrained from engaging directly with the crowd.

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Protesters chanted and voiced opposition to the increased law enforcement presence in D.C., but the atmosphere remained positive and upbeat for the most part. As the rally drew to a close, many stayed and danced while a musician performed.

## **California Gov. Newsom signs legislation calling special election on redrawn congressional map**

California voters will decide in a November special election whether to approve a redrawn congressional map designed to help Democrats win five more U.S. House seats next year.

Lawmakers voted mostly along party lines Thursday to approve legislation calling for the special election in response to Texas Republicans' push to redraw their state's congressional map. Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom then signed it.

## **FBI has reached settlements with 10 current and former agents who had faced discipline, director says**

FBI Director Kash Patel did not identify the 10 in a social media post announcing the agreements but said the resolutions included a combination of reinstatement, back pay compensation and the restoration of security clearances. The 10 current and former agents had faced discipline before Patel took over as director.

The move follows urgings in March by Empower Oversight, a group founded and led by former staffers of Republican Sen. Chuck Grassley, to reverse disciplinary action taken against 10 current and former agents, including four whose names were redacted.

That group included an agent who was suspended after he says he objected to participating in a SWAT team operation to arrest a suspect in the Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the U.S. Capitol, and another who was accused of leaking sensitive information.

## **Trump returns to White House after field trip**

The president went back to the Executive Mansion despite saying in an interview earlier Thursday that he would join anti-crime patrols with the National Guard and federal law enforcement officers.

He spent about 35 minutes at the U.S. Park Police office.

## **California Legislature approves special election on new congressional map favoring Democrats**

California lawmakers have passed legislation advancing a partisan redistricting plan that could help Democrats win five more U.S. House seats in 2026 in response to Texas Republicans' push to redraw their state's congressional map at Trump's urging.

Lawmakers voted mostly along party lines after hours of debate. Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom is expected to sign the legislation later Thursday.

Republicans, who have filed a lawsuit and called for a federal investigation into the plan, promised to keep fighting to stop it.

The state currently relies on an independent commission that is supposed to be nonpartisan to draw maps. Voters' permission is needed to implement the new one. The legislation calls for a November special election on the matter.

## **Trump says he'll ask Congress for money to support his DC federal intervention and plans to beautify Washington**

"We're going back to Congress for some money and we're going to redo a lot of the pavement, the medians," he said at the U.S. Park Service facility. "The graffiti is going to come down real fast."

He didn't say when he'd send the request to Congress or how much money he'll be asking for.

Trump said he'll be redoing parks in the city with new grass and new sprinkler systems, and replacing signage throughout the capital.

He said he knows a lot about grass because he owns a lot of golf courses.

"We have a life and grass has a life, and the grass here died about 40 years ago," Trump said. "Let's say, at the end of a year, this place will be maxed out in terms of beauty."

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## **Trump says he's there to thank National Guard forces**

Standing outside the U.S. Park Police facility as Trump arrived were approximately 300 men and women with various agencies, including DEA, ATF, US Marshals, National Guard and the FBI. Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem and Interior Secretary Doug Burgum were also on hand.

Trump said he came to thank National Guard troops, and he talked about efforts to quickly reduce crime as well as removing graffiti, fixing medians and repairing roads.

"We're going to have the best capital ever," he said. "It's going to look better than it ever did."

## **Trump heads out for firsthand look at military efforts in DC**

Trump has left the White House to visit with law enforcement personnel and National Guard troops deployed in Washington as part of what his administration says is an effort to reduce crime.

The president climbed into his limo with Attorney General Pam Bondi, Deputy White House chief of staff Stephen Miller and White House chief of staff Susie Wiles shortly after 5 p.m.

"I'm going to be going out tonight, I think, with the police and with the military, of course," Trump told radio host Todd Starnes earlier Thursday.

It is unclear why Trump is planning to join law enforcement later in the day.

## **Supreme Court lets Trump administration cut \$783 million of research funding in anti-DEI push**

The Trump administration can slash hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of research funding in its push to cut federal diversity, equity and inclusion efforts, the Supreme Court decided Thursday.

The high court majority lifted a judge's order blocking \$783 million worth of cuts made by the National Institutes of Health to align with Trump's priorities.

The order marks the latest Supreme Court win for Trump and allows the administration to forge ahead with canceling hundreds of grants while the lawsuit continues to unfold. The plaintiffs, including states and public-health advocacy groups, have argued that the cuts will inflict "incalculable losses in public health and human life."

## **Pentagon emphasizes small US role in Ukraine security guarantee**

The Pentagon's policy chief has attended meetings with European military leaders this week to personally deliver a message that the U.S. military will have a small part in any possible security guarantee for Ukraine.

Undersecretary of Defense Elbridge Colby attended a meeting Tuesday "to relay President Trump's and Secretary Hegseth's guidance related to security guarantees for Ukraine," Pentagon press secretary King-sley Wilson said in a statement.

He "focused on ensuring the discussion reflected President Trump's statements on the matter," Wilson said.

Earlier Tuesday, Trump gave his assurance that U.S. troops would not be deployed to Ukraine.

Politico first reported on Colby's message. He was reported to be driving force behind a decision earlier this summer to halt some promised, high-demand weapons to Ukraine that included Patriot missiles.

## **Trump signs order creating national chief design officer**

The president is creating a new role as chief design officer, tasked with improving digital and physical spaces where Americans interact with their government, which Trump says have "lagged behind in usability and aesthetics."

An executive order signed Thursday and titled "IMPROVING OUR NATION THROUGH BETTER DESIGN" says the new officer will "consult with" the director of the Office of Management and Budget to make improvements.

Trump said he was directing a national program called "America by Design," which was meant to "improve experiences for Americans, starting by breathing new life into the design of sites where people interface with their Government."

"It is time to update the Government's design language to be both usable and beautiful," the order says.



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## **Judge says former Trump lawyer Alina Habba has been unlawfully serving as US attorney in New Jersey**

A federal judge ruled Thursday that Trump's former lawyer, Alina Habba, has been unlawfully serving as the top federal prosecutor in New Jersey.

The court, saying the administration used "a novel series of legal and personnel moves," held that Habba's term as the interim U.S. attorney ended in July, and the Trump administration's maneuvers to keep her in the role without getting confirmation from the U.S. Senate didn't follow procedures required by federal law.

"Faced with the question of whether Ms. Habba is lawfully performing the functions and duties of the office of the United States Attorney for the District of New Jersey, I conclude that she is not," Chief U.S. District Judge Matthew Brann wrote.

Brann said he's putting his order on hold pending an appeal.

## **Trump blames wind and solar for electricity price hikes, but experts disagree**

With electricity prices rising at more than twice the rate of inflation, Trump has lashed out at renewable energy sources such as wind and solar power, blaming them for skyrocketing energy costs.

Trump called wind and solar power "THE SCAM OF THE CENTURY!" in a social media post and vowed not to approve wind or "farmer destroying Solar" projects.

Energy analysts say renewable sources have little to do with recent price hikes, which are based on increased demand, aging infrastructure and increasingly extreme weather events such as wildfires that are exacerbated by climate change.

Trump promised during the 2024 campaign to lower Americans' electric bills by 50%. Democrats have been quick to blame him for the price hikes, citing actions to hamstring clean energy in the sprawling tax-and-spending cut bill approved last month, as well as regulations since then to further restrict wind and solar power.

## **US reviewing more than 55 million visa holders for potentially deportable violations**

The State Department says it's reviewing the records of more than 55 million foreigners who currently hold valid U.S. visas for potential revocation or deportable violations of immigration rules.

In a written answer to a question posed by The Associated Press, the department said Thursday that it all U.S. visa holders are subject to "continuous vetting" with an eye toward any indication that they could be ineligible for the document. Should such information found, the visa will be revoked and, if the visa holder is in the United States he or she would be subject to deportation.

The department said it was looking for indicators of ineligibility including visa overstay, criminal activity, threats to public safety, engaging in any form of terrorist activity, or providing support to a terrorist organization.

"We review all available information as part of our vetting, including law enforcement or immigration records or any other information that comes to light after visa issuance indicating a potential ineligibility," the department said.

## **No orders yet for Guard to be armed**

Troops aren't carrying weapons on the streets of Washington because neither Trump nor any of the law enforcement agencies that the troops are supporting have ordered them to do so, a defense official said Thursday.

If troops do get that order, they will be issued weapons that they are qualified and trained for, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to more candidly describe the ongoing operations.

The city has been informed about the intent for the National Guard to be armed, though it has not received details about when that could happen, a person familiar with the conversations said earlier this week. The person was not authorized to disclose the plans and spoke on condition of anonymity.

— Konstantin Toropin and Mike Pesoli

## **Nearly 2,000 National Guard troops are in Washington**

All troops arriving from out of state are going through an integration process that takes about a week, but some, like military police, can shorten that time because of their existing training, a defense official says.

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That's why South Carolina troops are already on the city's streets to support Trump's law enforcement crackdown, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to more candidly describe the ongoing operations.

Guard members in the nation's capital now number 1,997, according to Joint Task Force District of Columbia, the military unit overseeing all the Guard members in Washington.

Besides those from South Carolina, troops from Ohio, West Virginia, Louisiana, Mississippi and Tennessee also have arrived.

— Konstantin Toropin and Mike Pesoli

## **South Carolina governor gets promise troops can come back if hurricane threatens**

South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster said Thursday he didn't change his mind earlier this month when he said he didn't think National Guard troops from the state would head to Washington, D.C. Instead, he said he hadn't been asked yet.

U.S. Army Secretary Dan Driscoll called on Aug. 12 requesting the soldiers and McMaster said he agreed to send 200 troops and about 50 officers to the nation's capital for a month with an option to stay longer, if needed.

The governor said they aren't troops designated to help out if a hurricane hits the state but he still got a promise from Driscoll to send them back if a disaster strikes and they are needed in South Carolina.

McMaster said he was happy to help his old friend, Trump.

"I'm worried about people in Washington, in the District of Columbia — those living there and visiting who are in fear of being hurt. There's no doubt it has gotten out of hand up there," McMaster said.

## **California kicks off redistricting payback**

The Democratic-controlled Legislature on Thursday started debate on a package of bills that would put a new, pro-Democratic congressional map on the November ballot.

The move is an explicit response to Texas Republicans' push to redraw their own map to add up to five winnable House seats before the 2026 midterms.

Voters will have to approve the California action because, unlike Texas, the state has a nonpartisan commission that normally draws lines.

"We don't want this fight and we didn't choose this fight, but with our democracy on the line we will not run away from this fight," Assemblyman Marc Berman said.

## **The president himself now plans to patrol the streets of DC**

"I'm going to be going out tonight," Trump told a conservative commentator as his crackdown in the nation's capital continues.

Trump said on The Todd Starnes show that he would go out with law enforcement and the military.

Bowser: 'Why do they need masks?'

Washington, D.C., Mayor Muriel Bowser continues to question why so many of the federal officers flooding the capital city's streets are covering their faces.

Earlier this week, she asked police chief Pamela Smith to address the issue with the Trump administration, but said Thursday that there has been no response.

"Why do they need masks?" Bowser asked. "They are federal officials, they're paid by the taxpayers. They should be doing their jobs in a way that's lawful and constitutional. That's part of the job."

## **Could Louisiana be the next GOP state to consider redrawing its congressional map?**

Louisiana lawmakers are being told to keep their calendars open in the weeks after the U.S. Supreme Court is scheduled to hear arguments over the state's embattled congressional map.

Legislators say they have received texts and emails from House Speaker Phillip DeVillier telling them to keep their schedules flexible between Oct. 23 and Nov. 13. While the communications did not specify the reasoning, multiple lawmakers have told The Associated Press that it is assumed to be for a possible special legislative session for congressional redistricting.

DeVillier could not immediately be reached for comment.

Rep. Edmond Jordan, a Democrat and chair of the Louisiana Legislative Black Caucus, stressed that it

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was never specified to lawmakers that a special redistricting session was being considered – but if that is the reality, he believes the legislative gathering would be “premature”

“I think we need to wait until the Supreme Court decides until we take any moves,” Jordan told the AP. Arguments over Louisiana’s contested map are scheduled to take place before the U.S. Supreme Court on Oct. 15. It’s possible that the court won’t rule on the congressional boundaries until months later, and it is unclear what type of actions lawmakers may have to take as a result.

## **Ruling upholds leadership bans on Trump and his eldest sons**

Thursday’s ruling spares Trump from a potential half-billion-dollar fine while upholding other punishments, such as banning him and his two eldest sons from serving in corporate leadership for a few years. The panel was sharply divided, issuing a total of 323 pages of concurring and dissenting opinions with no majority.

New York Attorney General Letitia James, who has said the businessman-turned-politician engaged in “lying, cheating, and staggering fraud,” had no immediate comment.

Trump and his co-defendants have denied wrongdoing. In a six-minute summation of sorts after his trial, Trump proclaimed in January 2024 that he was “an innocent man” and the case was a “fraud on me.”

## **Split ruling leaves a pathway for more appeals**

The appellate ruling split on the lawsuit’s merits and the lower court’s fraud finding, but dismissed the penalty Judge Arthur Engoron imposed in its entirety while also leaving a pathway for further appeals to the state’s highest court.

“While the injunctive relief ordered by the court is well crafted to curb defendants’ business culture, the court’s disgorgement order, which directs that defendants pay nearly half a billion dollars to the State of New York, is an excessive fine that violates the Eighth Amendment of the United States Constitution,” Judges Dianne T. Renwick and Peter H. Moulton wrote in one of several opinions shaping the appeals court’s ruling.

## **Appeals court throws out massive Trump civil fraud penalty**

A panel of five judges in New York’s mid-level Appellate Division said the trial judge’s penalty against Trump for exaggerating his wealth was ‘excessive.’

After finding that Trump engaged in fraud by flagrantly padding financial statements that went to lenders and insurers, Engoron ordered him last year to pay \$355 million in penalties. With interest, the sum has topped \$515 million. Combined with penalties on other Trump Organization executives including sons Eric and Donald Jr., the total now exceeds \$527 million.

## **Trump suggests Ukraine should attack inside Russia**

Candidate Trump frequently criticized Joe Biden’s administration for spending too much U.S. taxpayer money to assist Ukraine’s efforts to repel Russia’s invasion. But after Russia launched massive aerial attacks on Ukraine overnight, Trump said Biden didn’t give Kyiv the weaponry it needed to “fight back.”

“It is very hard, if not impossible, to win a war without attacking an invaders country,” Trump posted on social media. “It’s like a great team in sports that has a fantastic defense, but is not allowed to play offensive. There is no chance of winning! It is like that with Ukraine and Russia.”

The Kremlin has yet to confirm that Russian President Vladimir Putin will take part in the face-to-face negotiations Trump has sought to arrange with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

## **Zelenskyy condemns latest Russian attacks as peace efforts drag on**

Russia launched 574 drones and 40 ballistic and cruise missiles overnight, in one of its biggest aerial attacks on Ukraine of the year, 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 intensified even after Trump’s talks with Russia’s Putin in Alaska and Ukraine’s Zelenskyy and European leaders at the White House.

Zelenskyy said Russia carried out the attack “as if nothing were changing at all.”



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## **Marco Rubio to host Ukraine security talks with Europe**

The U.S. secretary of state will host a conference call Thursday with the national security advisers of European countries expected to play a role in future security guarantees for Ukraine, a senior U.S. official said.

One of Kyiv's conditions for signing any peace deal is getting Western-backed military assurances to deter Russia from mounting another invasion in the coming years. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Wednesday that making security arrangements for Ukraine without Moscow's involvement is pointless.

It was not immediately clear which countries would be represented on the call with Rubio. The U.S. official spoke on condition of anonymity to outline a discussion that had not been publicly announced.

— Matthew Lee

## **Trump warns 'harsh measures' for Colorado if convicted clerk isn't freed**

Mesa County clerk Tina Peters was sentenced to nine years behind bars for a data-breach scheme spawned from the rampant false claims about voting machine fraud in the 2020 presidential race. But Trump is calling her "a brave and innocent Patriot who has been tortured by Crooked Colorado politicians."

"Let Tina Peters out of jail, RIGHT NOW. She did nothing wrong, except catching the Democrats cheat in the Election," Trump posted Thursday on his Truth Social platform. "She is an old woman, and very sick. If she is not released, I am going to take harsh measures!!!"

## **Is empathy a sin? Some conservative Christians argue it can be**

Empathy is usually regarded as a virtue key to human decency. Voices on the Christian right are preaching that it's become a vice, a cudgel for the left that can manipulate caring people into accepting opposing views of abortion access, LGBTQ+ rights, illegal immigration and opposing views of social and racial justice.

Pastor Joe Rigney, whose denomination includes Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, describes empathy as a sin. The idea is gaining traction as Trump issues executive orders denounced for lacking empathy. As foreign aid stopped and more deportations began, Trump's then-adviser Elon Musk told podcaster Joe Rogan: "The fundamental weakness of Western civilization is empathy."

And Vice President JD Vance, a Catholic convert, framed it as his concept of *ordo amoris*, or order of love, putting immediate family first and the wider world last — an interpretation Pope Francis rejected.

## **US-EU negotiators issue trade deal framework**

Trump administration and European Union negotiators released on Thursday a bare-bones account of their trade deal imposing a stiff 15% import tax on 70% of European goods exported to the U.S. It leaves key areas blank, including wine and spirits and steel.

They called it just "a first step in a process" as they deal with a vast range of goods in the world's largest bilateral trading relationship, involving \$2 trillion in annual trans-Atlantic business.

EU officials said Thursday the agreement brings stability and avoids a trade war with even higher tariffs, or import taxes.

## **Trump escalates threats against California over transgender policies**

"Any California school district that doesn't adhere to our Transgender policies, will not be funded," Trump said in a Thursday morning social media posting.

The Trump administration sued the California Department of Education last month for allowing transgender girls to compete on girls sports teams, alleging the policy violates federal law.

The lawsuit filed by the Justice Department says California's transgender athlete policies violate Title IX, the federal law that bans discrimination in education based on sex.

California has sued the Trump administration, alleging it has unlawfully intimidated health care providers into stopping gender-affirming care for young transgender people. The lawsuit was filed with attorneys general from 15 states and the District of Columbia, plus the governor of Pennsylvania.

## **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.

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"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.

Abbott spoke after the Texas Republicans used their majority in the House to approve the new congressional voting maps on Wednesday.

## Top European diplomat says Putin is setting 'a trap' by demanding Ukraine concessions

By The Associated Press undefined

The European Union's foreign policy chief said Friday that the possibility of Ukraine ceding land to Russia as part of a peace deal to end their three-year war is "a trap" set by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The Russian leader is demanding Ukrainian concessions in return for halting his army's invasion but granting him those demands would amount to rewarding the country that started the fighting, Kaja Kallas said.

The recent talk about handing Putin concessions is "exactly the trap that Russia wants us to walk into," Kallas said in an interview with the BBC.

"I mean, the discussion all about what Ukraine should give up, what the concessions that Ukraine is willing to (make), whereas we are forgetting that Russia has not made one single concession and they are the ones who are the aggressor here, they are the ones who are brutally attacking another country and killing people," she said.

U.S.-led peace efforts have struggled to get traction, despite U.S. President Donald Trump discussing the war with Putin in Alaska last week before hosting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and European leaders at the White House on Monday.

Numerous details for a formal peace proposal need to be hammered out. Meanwhile, Russia has continued to attack Ukraine and has raised objections to some key Ukrainian demands.

Establishing postwar Western security guarantees for Ukraine, which Kyiv insists are needed to deter another Russian attack, is under discussion by a variety of countries, Kallas said, noting that "it does sound like we are some way off in terms of pinning that down."

"Russia is just dragging feet. It's clear that Russia does not want peace," Kallas said. "President Trump has been repeatedly saying that the killing has to stop and Putin is just laughing, not stopping the killing, but increasing the killing."

Ukraine, meanwhile, has hit back at Russia with long-range weapons that are targeting infrastructure supporting Moscow's war effort. It has hit oil refineries, among other targets, and Russian wholesale gasoline prices have reached record highs in recent days.

Ukrainian forces on Friday targeted the Druzhba oil pipeline in Russia, hitting the Unecha oil pumping station in the Bryansk region, according to the commander of Ukraine's Unmanned Systems Forces, Robert Brovdy, also known as Magyar.

The Druzhba pipeline starts in Russia and takes oil through Belarus and Ukraine to Slovakia and Hungary. In Russia, a section of it goes through the Bryansk region and the Unecha district.

Ukraine fired HIMARS rockets and drones at the region in a combined attack, Bryansk regional Gov. Alexander Bogomaz said in a Telegram post.

The pipeline supplies Hungary with more than half of its crude oil. Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó wrote on Facebook on Friday that the Druzhba pipeline had been attacked "for the third time in a short time."

"This is another attack on the energy security of our country. Another attempt to drag us into war," the minister wrote.

Hungary under Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has taken a combative stance toward both Kyiv and its EU backers while most EU countries have offered political, financial, and military support to Kyiv.

Orbán visited Moscow to meet with Putin last month in a rare trip to Russia by a European leader.

Slovakia and Hungary are the only remaining EU member states still receiving oil from Russia. The other 25 stopped buying it as part of EU sanctions following Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

## Inside the facility where ICE is training recruits to take on Trump's deportation goals

By REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

BRUNSWICK, Ga. (AP) — At an obstacle course in the humid Georgia heat, an instructor shows recruits how to pull a wounded partner out of danger. In a classroom with desks cluttered with thick legal books about immigration law, recruits learn about how the Fourth Amendment governs their work. And on a firing range littered with shell casings, new recruits for Immigration and Customs Enforcement practice shooting their handguns.

"Instructors, give me a thumbs up when students are ready to go," a voice over the loudspeaker said before a group of about 20 ICE recruits practiced drawing and firing their weapons.

The Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Brunswick, Georgia, is the epicenter of training for almost all federal law enforcement officers, including the Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers who are at the center of President Donald Trump's mass deportation efforts.

Now, with lots of money approved by Congress this summer starting to flow into ICE, the agency is in midst of a huge hiring effort as it aims to get thousands of new deportation officers into the field in the coming months.

On Thursday, The Associated Press and other news organizations got a rare look at the Basic Immigration Law Enforcement Training Program that new ICE recruits — specifically those in the Enforcement and Removal Operations unit responsible for finding, arresting and removing people from the country — go through and what they learn.

Ramping up hiring, training

ICE is getting \$76.5 billion in new money from Congress to help it meet Trump's mass deportation goal. That's nearly 10 times the agency's current annual budget. Nearly \$30 billion of that money is for new staff.

They're hiring across the agency, including investigators and lawyers, but the numbers they're hiring in those areas pale in comparison to how many deportation officers are coming on board. Todd Lyons, the acting director of ICE, was at the training demonstration Thursday. He said the agency currently has about 6,500 deportation officers and is aiming to hire 10,000 more by the end of the year.

With that hiring surge has come concerns that vetting or training of new recruits will be shortchanged. The Border Patrol went through a similar hiring surge in the early 2000s when hiring and training standards were changed; arrests for employee misconduct rose.

Lyons pushed back on concerns that ICE might cut corners when it comes to training. although he said they have made changes designed to streamline the process.

"I wasn't going to water down training," said Lyons.

Caleb Vitello, the assistant director of ICE in charge of training, says new recruits will go through about eight weeks of training at the Georgia facility. But they also have training before and after they come here.

One key change, Vitello noted: ICE cut out five weeks of Spanish-language training because he said recruits were only getting to the point of being "moderately" competent in Spanish. He said language translation technology can help fill that void in the field.

What does the training look like?

During the six-days-a-week training, new recruits live on the grounds of the sprawling facility, which is covered with pine forests and sits near the Atlantic Ocean a little less than an hour's drive north of the Florida state line. Hundreds have gone through the training here in recent months.

During the course, new recruits train on firearms in a large indoor shooting range that looks as big as a football field. On Thursday, the floor was littered with spent shell casings as roughly 20 new recruits wearing blue shirts and blue pants practiced shooting from a bent-elbow position and transitional shooting — involving transferring their guns from one hand to another. Instructors in red shirts walked behind them, occasionally giving them instruction. Everyone wore eye protection and red, noise-reducing earmuffs with earplugs underneath.



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Dean Wilson, who oversees the firearms training, compared some of the operations that ICE agents face to a haunted house where they don't know what might be coming at them.

"We do our very best to make sure that even though they're in that environment, that they have the wherewithal to make the proper decision," said Wilson. "Nobody wants to be the one to make a bad shot, and nobody wants to be the one that doesn't make it home."

In a big field with various driving tracks and courses, they also train on driving techniques — how to recover from a skid on wet pavement or how to navigate a winding course similar to an urban environment where they have to come to a full stop or navigate blind corners.

The curriculum also includes de-escalation techniques designed to prevent the use of force in the first place, Lyons said.

"In any type of law enforcement situation," he said, "you'd rather de-escalate with words before you have to use any use of force."

Learning the law and the Fourth Amendment

Not all of the training is in the field.

ICE agents like to point out that when it comes to complexity, immigration law is second only to the tax code.

At the training academy, they get about 12 hours of classroom instruction on things like the Fourth Amendment — the part of the Constitution that protects against unreasonable searches and seizures — and the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, which has evolved over the decades and governs all facets of immigration. Those legal lessons are also interspersed throughout the rest of the training.

On the desks in one classroom are training manuals and immigration law handbooks roughly two to three inches thick. Recruits learn about how to determine if someone is removable from the country, under what circumstances they can go into someone's house to search and when they have to leave.

ICE staff pushed back on accusations that they are indiscriminately pulling people over or setting up checkpoints in Washington, D.C., or elsewhere as part of immigration enforcement.

They said they have to have probable cause to go after someone, and they do targeted operations. They said they can't — and don't — do traffic stops but can work with local authorities who are.

"Once local law enforcement makes a stop, and then they contact ICE saying we have somebody that we possibly think might be an alien," said Greg Hornsby, an associate legal adviser at ICE. "And that's where we step in."

## Trump embraces tough-on-crime mantra amid DC takeover as he and Democrats claim political wins

By STEVE PEOPLES and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — President Donald Trump stood among several hundred law enforcement officers, National Guard troops and federal agents at a U.S. Park Police operations center in one of Washington, D.C.'s most dangerous neighborhoods. As the cameras rolled, he offered a stark message about crime, an issue he's been hammering for decades, as he thanked them for their efforts.

"We're not playing games," he said. "We're going to make it safe. And we're going to then go on to other places."

The Republican president is proudly promoting the work of roughly 2,000 National Guard troops in the city, loaned by allied governors from at least six Republican-led states. They're in place to confront what Trump describes as an out-of-control crime wave in the Democratic-run city, though violent crime in Washington, like dozens of cities led by Democrats, has been down significantly since a pandemic high.

Trump and his allies are confident that his stunning decision to dispatch troops to a major American city is a big political winner almost certain to remind voters of why they elected him last fall.

Democrats say this is a fight they're eager to have.

Maryland Gov. Wes Moore, an Army veteran, cast Trump's move as a dangerous political stunt designed to distract the American people from his inability to address persistent inflation, rising energy prices and

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major health insurance cuts, among other major policy challenges.

"I'm deeply offended, as someone who's actually worn the uniform, that he would use the lives of these men and women and the activation of these men and women as political pawns," Moore told The Associated Press.

Trump's extraordinary federal power grab comes as the term-limited president has threatened to send troops to other American cities led by Democrats, even as voters voice increasing concern about his authoritarian tendencies. And it could be a factor for both sides in elections in Virginia and New Jersey this fall — and next year's more consequential midterms.

Inside the White House strategy

The president and White House see Trump's decision to take over the D.C. police department as a political boon and have been eager to publicize the efforts.

The White House offered a livestream of Trump's Thursday evening appearance, and on Wednesday, Vice President JD Vance and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth made a surprise visit to Union Station, D.C.'s busy transit hub, to thank members of the National Guard over Shake Shack burgers.

Each morning, Trump's press office distributes statistics outlining the previous night's law enforcement actions, including total arrests and how many of those people are in the country illegally.

The strategy echoes Trump's crackdown on illegal immigration, which has often forced Democrats to come to the defense of people living in the country illegally, including some who have committed serious crimes.

A White House official, speaking on background to discuss internal deliberations, dismissed concerns about perceptions of federal overreach in Washington, saying public safety is a fundamental requirement and a priority for residents.

Trump defended his efforts during an interview on "The Todd Starnes Show" Thursday.

"Because I sent in people to stop crime, they said, 'He's a dictator.' The real people, though, even Democrats, are calling me and saying, 'It's unbelievable' how much it has helped," he said.

The White House hopes to use its actions in D.C. as a test case to inspire changes in other cities, though Trump has legal power to intervene in Washington that he doesn't have elsewhere because the city is under partial federal control.

"Everyday Americans who support commonsense policies would deem the removal of more than 600 dangerous criminals from the streets of our nation's capital a huge success," said White House spokesperson Taylor Rogers. "The Democrats continue to be wildly unpopular because they oppose efforts to stop violent crime and protect law-abiding citizens."

Democrats lean in

Moore, Maryland's Democratic governor, suggested a dark motivation behind Trump's approach, which is focused almost exclusively on cities with large minority populations led by Democratic mayors of color.

"Once again, we are seeing how these incredibly dangerous and biased tropes are being used about these communities by someone who is not willing to step foot in them, but is willing to stand in the Oval Office and defend them," Moore said.

Even before Trump called the National Guard to Washington, Democratic mayors across the country have been touting their success in reducing violent crime.

Cleveland Mayor Justin Bibb, who leads the Democratic Mayors Association, noted that over half of the 70 largest Democratic-led cities in the country have seen violent crime decrease so far this year.

"He's stoking racial division and stoking fear and chaos," Bibb said. "We need someone who wants to be a collaborator, not a dictator."

Democratic strategists acknowledge that Trump's GOP has enjoyed a significant advantage in recent years on the issues of crime and immigration — issues Trump has long sought to connect. But as Democratic officials push back against the federal takeover in Washington, party strategists are offering cautious optimism that Trump's tactics will backfire.

"This is an opportunity for the party to go on offense on an issue that has plagued us for a long time," said veteran Democratic strategist Daniel Wessel. "The facts are on our side."

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A closer look at the numbers

FBI statistics released this month show murder and nonnegligent manslaughter in the U.S. in 2024 fell nearly 15% from a year earlier, continuing a decline that's been seen since a coronavirus pandemic-era crime spike.

Meanwhile, recent public polling shows that Republicans have enjoyed an advantage over Democrats on the issue of crime.

A CNN/SSRS poll conducted in May found that about 4 in 10 U.S. adults said the Republican Party's views were closer to their own on crime and policing, while 3 in 10 said they were more aligned with Democrats' views. About 3 in 10 said neither party reflected their opinions. Other polls conducted in the past few years found a similar gap.

Trump also had a significant edge over Democrat Kamala Harris on the issue in the 2024 election. About half of voters said Trump was better able to handle crime.

At the same time, Americans have expressed more concern about the scope of presidential power since Trump took office for a second time in January.

An AP-NORC poll conducted in April found that about half of U.S. adults said the president has "too much" power in the way the U.S. government operates these days, up from 32% in March 2024.

The unusual military presence in a U.S. city, which featured checkpoints across Washington staffed in some cases by masked federal agents, injected a sense of fear and chaos into daily life for some people in the nation's capital.

At least one day care center was closed Thursday as childcare staff feared the military action, which has featured a surge in immigration enforcement, while local officials raised concerns about next week's public school openings.

Moore said he would block any push by Trump to send the National Guard into Baltimore.

"I have not seen anything or any conditions on the ground that I think would justify the mobilization of our National Guard," he said. "They think they're winning the political argument. I don't give a s--- about the political argument."

## **6 people are found dead at a Colorado dairy.**

### **Authorities suspect an accident involving gas exposure**

By MORGAN LEE and AUDREY McAVOY Associated Press

An apparent accident at a dairy in a rural farming community in Colorado involving exposure to gas killed six people, including a high school student, authorities said Thursday.

Investigators are looking into what kind of gases may have played a role in the deaths Wednesday at Prospect Valley Dairy in Keenesburg, about 35 miles (55 kilometers) northeast of Denver. Crews recovered the bodies in a confined space at the dairy, the Southeast Weld Fire Protection District said.

"We are investigating these deaths as the possible consequence of gas exposure in a confined space," said Jolene Weiner, chief deputy coroner for Weld County.

The identities of those who died, all Hispanic males, were being withheld pending notification of the families, Weiner said. A local school district said a high school student was among those who died.

Weld County Sheriff's Office spokesperson Melissa Chesmore said her agency didn't find anything indicating a crime took place.

"It looks like an accident," she said, declining to elaborate or say where exactly the bodies were found, referring questions to occupational safety regulators.

Chauntra Rideaux, a U.S. Department of Labor spokesperson, said in an email that the Occupational Safety and Health Administration was investigating. The farm is a member of the Dairy Farmers of America, the group said.

"We are deeply saddened by this incident, and our thoughts and most sincere condolences go out to the friends and families of the deceased. At this early stage, we have no further details," the farmer-owned cooperative said in a statement.

County tax records say the property is owned by Prospect Valley Dairy LLC and list a Bakersfield, California, address for the owners. Phone messages left for a number at the California address were not immediately returned.

Weld County is a major agricultural producer. Three-quarters of its land is devoted to farming and raising livestock. It's Colorado's leading dairy producer and the state's biggest source of beef cattle, grain and sugar beets.

Census data from 2020 shows 30% of the county was Hispanic or Latino, compared to 22% for the state overall.

## **Judge says former Trump lawyer Alina Habba has been unlawfully serving as US attorney in New Jersey**

By MIKE CATALINI Associated Press

A federal judge ruled Thursday that President Donald Trump's former lawyer, Alina Habba, has been unlawfully serving as the top federal prosecutor in New Jersey since last month.

U.S. District Judge Matthew Brann held that Habba's term as the interim U.S. attorney ended in July, and the Trump administration's "novel series of legal and personnel moves" to keep her in the role without getting confirmation from the U.S. Senate didn't follow procedures required by federal law.

"Faced with the question of whether Ms. Habba is lawfully performing the functions and duties of the office of the United States Attorney for the District of New Jersey, I conclude that she is not," wrote Chief U.S. District Judge Matthew Brann wrote.

The judge said Habba's actions since July "may be declared void," though he put his order on hold so the Justice Department could appeal.

It wasn't immediately clear if that meant Habba would remain in charge of the U.S. attorney's office temporarily, or who would make key decisions in the prosecutor's office if she was sidelined. A message seeking comment was sent to Habba's office.

In a social media post, Attorney General Pam Bondi said the administration would appeal, saying Habba was "doing incredible work in New Jersey — and we will protect her position from activist judicial attacks."

If upheld, the ruling could lead to challenges against a handful of other U.S. attorneys who have been similarly installed by the Trump administration without Senate approval after their temporary assignments have expired.

At its core, Brann's opinion took aim at the administration's strategy of using a string of temporary appointments to allow Trump's favored candidates to bypass the usual requirement that U.S. attorneys be confirmed by the Senate — something that requires a degree of bipartisan support.

"Taken to the extreme, the President could use this method to staff the United States Attorney's office with individuals of his personal choice for an entire term without seeking the Senate's advice and consent," wrote Brann, a Republican appointed to a federal court in Pennsylvania by President Barack Obama.

Brann's decision came after several people charged with federal crimes in New Jersey challenged the legality of Habba's tenure. They sought to block the charges against them, arguing Habba didn't have the authority to prosecute their cases after her 120-day term as interim U.S. attorney expired.

Lawyers for one of those defendants applauded the court's ruling.

"Prosecutors wield enormous power, and with that comes the responsibility to ensure they are qualified and properly appointed," attorneys Abbe D. Lowell and Gerald Krovatin said in statement. "We challenged the authority of Alina Habba because her appointment ignored the rules that give legitimacy to the U.S. Attorney's office. We appreciate the thoroughness of the court's opinion, and its decision underscores that this Administration cannot circumvent the congressionally mandated process for confirming U.S. Attorney appointments."

Habba represented Trump in criminal and civil proceedings before he was elected to a second term. She briefly served as a White House adviser before Trump appointed her as a federal prosecutor in March.



Shortly after her appointment, she said in an interview that she hoped to help “turn New Jersey red,” a rare overt political expression from a prosecutor, and said she planned to investigate the state’s Democratic governor and attorney general.

She then brought a trespassing charge, which was eventually dropped, against Newark Mayor Ras Baraka stemming from his visit to a federal immigration detention center. Habba later charged Democratic U.S. Rep. LaMonica McIver with assault stemming from the same incident, a rare federal criminal case against a sitting member of Congress other than for corruption. McIver denied the charges and pleaded not guilty.

Questions about whether Habba would continue in the job arose in late July when her temporary appointment was coming to a close and it became clear that New Jersey’s two Democratic U.S. senators, Cory Booker and Andy Kim, would block her nomination.

With her appointment expiring, federal judges in New Jersey exercised their power under the law to replace Habba with a career prosecutor who had served as her second in-command.

Bondi then retaliated by firing the prosecutor installed by the judges and renaming Habba as acting U.S. attorney. The Justice Department said the judges acted prematurely and said Trump had the authority to appoint his preferred candidate to enforce federal laws in the state.

Brann’s ruling said the president’s appointments are still subject to the time limits and power-sharing rules laid out in federal law.

## **Bones of ancient child suggest humans could have interbred with Neanderthals earlier than thought**

By MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Modern humans and Neanderthals were interacting 100,000 years earlier than previously thought, according to researchers who used CT scans and 3D mapping to study the bones of a child they believe was the result of interbreeding between the two distinct groups.

The child, described in a recent study published in the peer-reviewed journal *L’Anthropologie*, was buried in a cave in Israel some 140,000 years ago. Because no ancient DNA was extracted from the fossilized remains, it’s impossible to confirm the child’s origins, but scientists say microscopic details in the bones indicate the child had traits of both groups.

When the bones were first excavated from Skhul Cave in northern Israel in 1931, archaeologists recognized that the child belonged to neither *Homo sapiens*, who had arrived in the region from Africa, nor Neanderthals, who arrived from Europe. They concluded it was a separate species indigenous to the area.

But the new 3D mapping allowed researchers to study small details of the skull that had previously been difficult to see or decipher. Researchers were able to examine distinctive traits such as the construction of the inner ear and the imprint of blood vessels that supplied the brain.

By comparing known characteristics of both *Homo sapiens* and Neanderthals, the researchers concluded the child was the result of interbreeding.

Previously, the earliest known example of interbreeding between the groups was around 40,000 years ago in central Europe, explained Israel Hershkovitz, the lead researcher of the study and a professor of archaeology and human evolution at Tel Aviv University.

A new glimpse into ancient relations

The new research helps shed light on when the two groups began interacting and offers clues about their relationships.

“What we’re saying now is that there was an extensive relationship between *Homo sapiens* and Neanderthals that started around 140,000 years ago,” and the two groups “managed to live side by side with no evidence for hostile encounters,” Hershkovitz said.

The interbreeding and shared cultural practices, including burials and tool construction, challenge the notion of *Homo sapiens* as “intolerant” to other human groups due to their eventual dominance, Hershkovitz said.

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Without DNA, it will be impossible to prove that the child was a hybrid human, said Pascal Gagneux, an evolutionary biologist studying human origins at the University of California San Diego who was not involved in the research. Still, he said, the details revealed by the mapping, including the internal structure of some bones and several features, support the hybrid hypothesis.

Peering inside an ancient skull

Researchers took thousands of isolated scans of the skull and jaw of the child and then created a virtual 3D model of the fossil.

The model allowed them to analyze tiny details that are impossible to see on the fossilized bones, including delicate parts inside the skull. Blood vessels, for example, make a small imprint on the inside of a skull.

While some of the grooves are visible to the naked eye, the 3D scans allowed researchers to see the blood vessels like "tributaries of a river," HersHKovitz said.

The patterns are distinct between the two groups, because Neanderthals and Homo sapiens have different brain shapes that require different blood delivery.

The virtual mapping created a more accurate reconstruction of the child's skull than could be built from the bones and plaster when the remains were originally excavated. The new reconstruction is much more elongated, which is more typical for Neanderthals, Gagneux said.

However, the detailed reconstruction does not answer many of the questions surrounding the discovery, Gagneux said. Were the parents of the child also interbred? Or was one Neanderthal and the other Homo sapien? Why was the child, or anyone else, buried in the cave?

Thomas Levy, a professor in cyber-archaeology also at the University of California San Diego, said he was impressed by the study's use of 3D models. The advances in scientific visualization allow more accurate measurements and comparisons of specimens, said Levy, who was not involved in the research.

The technology also offers archaeologists a fresh opportunity to review conclusions from objects excavated many years ago.

Living in harmony

Skhul Cave is one of three caves in the region that represent some of the oldest known intentional burials in the world, dating to more than 100,000 years ago, in the middle of the Paleolithic era. Multiple sets of remains were found at each site, and some are still being painstakingly excavated with tiny drills, which could provide more clues in the future.

In ancient times, Israel was a land bridge and point of interaction between Neanderthals and Homo sapiens.

Because Homo sapiens eventually replaced Neanderthals in the region and across the world, many people speculate that their interactions were violent and hostile, with Homo sapiens eventually responsible for the "total elimination" of Neanderthals, HersHKovitz said.

"What Skhul is telling us is that Homo sapiens are not a vicious, aggressive creature, but one that managed to live in peace" with other groups, he said. "Our aggressive behavior, which continues today in our long history, is a recent phenomenon that has cultural roots and not biological roots."

## Former Sri Lankan President Wickremesinghe arrested on allegations of misusing state funds

By BHARATHA MALLAWARACHI Associated Press

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) — Sri Lankan police on Friday arrested the country's former president and senior opposition politician Ranil Wickremesinghe over allegations of misusing public funds during his tenure as president, police said.

Wickremesinghe, who served as the island nation's president from 2005 to 2015, was arrested on allegations of using public funds to attend his wife's graduation ceremony in London after an official visit to the U.S, police spokesman Fedrick Wootler told The Associated Press.

Wickremesinghe's aide, Danushka Ramanayake, said that the former president has been taken to a court after being arrested by the Financial Crimes Investigations Department.

Wickremesinghe is the first Sri Lankan former head of state to be arrested and is the most high profile leader who is under investigation for corruption under President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's government which came to power last year promising to punish those accused of corruption under previous governments.

Dissanayake won the presidential election in September last year in an election that saw voters reject an old guard accused of leading the country into an economic crisis. Two months later, his party won a landslide victory in the parliamentary election that enabled him to form a strong government.

Already, more than a dozen political leaders of the previous government and ex-high government officials have been arrested and are under investigation for alleged corruptions and malpractices.

Wickremesinghe became president after Sri Lanka's economic upheaval led to a political crisis that forced then-President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to resign in 2022.

Wickremesinghe is credited with stabilizing the crumbling economy with inflation falling, the local currency strengthened and foreign reserves increased under him. But he was severely criticized for implementing stringent austerity measures including raising taxes and utility bills that came as a part of a bailout package with the International Monetary Fund entered into by his government.

## **Israel's defense minister says Gaza City could be destroyed as Israeli strikes kill 17 Palestinians**

By WAFAA SHURAFU and SAM METZ Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israel's defense minister warned Friday that Gaza's largest city would be destroyed unless Hamas yields to Israel's terms, as the world's leading authority on food crises said the city was gripped by famine from fighting and blockade.

A day after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he would authorize the military to mount a major operation to seize Gaza City, Defense Minister Israel Katz warned that the enclave's largest city could "turn into Rafah and Beit Hanoun," areas reduced to rubble earlier in the war.

"The gates of hell will soon open on the heads of Hamas' murderers and rapists in Gaza — until they agree to Israel's conditions for ending the war," Katz wrote in a post on X.

He restated Israel's cease-fire demands: the release of all hostages and Hamas' complete disarmament. Hamas has said it would release captives in exchange for ending the war, but rejects disarmament without the creation of a Palestinian state.

Netanyahu on Thursday said he had instructed officials "to begin immediate negotiations" to release hostages and end the war on acceptable terms — Israel's first public response to the latest ceasefire proposal.

With ground troops already active in strategic areas, the wide-scale operation in Gaza City could start within days.

Gaza City is Hamas' military and governing stronghold, atop of what Israel believes is an extensive tunnel network. It is also sheltering hundreds of thousands of civilians and still houses some of the strip's critical infrastructure and health facilities.

Hamas said earlier this week that it had agreed to a ceasefire proposal from Arab mediators, which — if accepted by Israel — could forestall the offensive. The parties do not negotiate directly and similar announcements have been made in the past that did not lead to ceasefires.

The proposal outlines a phased deal involving hostage and prisoner exchanges and a pullback of Israeli troops, while talks continue on a longer-term cease-fire. Israeli leaders have resisted such terms since abandoning a similar agreement earlier this year amid divisions within Netanyahu's coalition and strong opposition from his right.

Many Israelis fear an assault could doom the roughly 20 hostages who have survived captivity since Hamas-led militants' Oct. 7, 2023 attack. Aid groups and international leaders warn it would worsen Gaza's humanitarian crisis.

The logistics of evacuating civilians are expected to be daunting. Many residents say repeated displacement is pointless since nowhere in Gaza is safe, while medical groups warn Israel's calls to move patients south is unworkable, with no facilities to receive them.

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But Netanyahu has argued the offensive is the surest way to free captives and crush Hamas.

"These two things — defeating Hamas and releasing all our hostages — go hand in hand," Netanyahu said Thursday while touring a command center near in southern Israel.

Since 251 people were taken hostage more than 22 months ago, ceasefire agreements and other deals have accounted for the vast majority of the 148 released, including the bodies of eight deceased hostages.

Israel has only managed to rescue eight hostages alive and retrieved the bodies of 49 others. Fifty hostages remain in Gaza, about 20 of whom Israel believes to be alive.

Airstrike hits area ahead of broader offensive

Gaza City's Shifa Hospital said at least 17 Palestinians were killed Friday as Israel escalates its activity in the area in the lead-up to its broader planned offensive.

An Israeli airstrike hit a school in Sheikh Radwan, a Gaza City neighborhood where tens of Palestinians shelter in makeshift tents in the schoolyard. It killed at least seven people, according to an eyewitness and hospital records.

Israel's military said they weren't aware of a strike in the area.

The strike is part of Israel's ongoing push in Gaza City, where the military says it is operating and witnesses have reported intense bombardment in the days since Israel approved its plans to take the city.

Amal Aboul Aas, who is now sheltering in Gaza City after being displaced four times, said the explosions were so intense he couldn't sleep, yet she couldn't leave either.

"We do not have the money, the resources, or the energy to evacuate again. I just wish for a quick death right where I am here because I am not going anywhere. Eventually one of these missiles will hit me," she told AP.

The Gaza Health Ministry said Thursday that at least 62,192 Palestinians have been killed in the war. Another two people have died from malnutrition-related causes, bringing the total number of such deaths to 271, including 112 children, the Health Ministry said.

The ministry is part of the Hamas-run government and staffed by medical professionals. It does not say whether those killed by Israeli fire are civilians or combatants, but it says around half were women and children. The U.N. and many independent experts consider its figures to be the most reliable estimate of wartime casualties. Israel disputes its toll but has not provided its own.

Hamas-led militants started the war when they attacked Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking hostages.

## Court orders stray dogs in New Delhi released, easing its order to move them all to shelters

NEW DELHI (AP) — India's Supreme Court ordered the release of all stray dogs that were removed from New Delhi streets after sterilization and immunization following an increase in the number of people who were bitten by dogs.

The court's ruling Friday modified its earlier judgment by ordering the dogs to be released to the same localities they were removed from. The order also calls for designated feeding spaces across the capital.

Animal lovers and activists filed an appeal against the Aug. 11 ruling ordering permanent relocation to shelters.

While many dogs roaming New Delhi's streets are harmless, the court's order aimed to control rising cases of biting, including incidents involving children. Some estimates based on hospital records suggest New Delhi sees nearly 2,000 dog bite episodes every day.

Rabies through dog bites is caused by a virus that invades the central nervous system and is almost always fatal if left untreated.

There were 49 cases of rabies in New Delhi from January 2025 to July 2025 but it was unclear whether all of those were the result of dog bites.

The court's judgment Friday ordered the dogs to be released to the same localities they were removed from and called for designated feeding spaces across the capital. The order does not apply to dogs infected



with rabies or exhibiting aggressive behavior.

Estimates put the number of stray dogs in New Delhi between 500,000 and 1 million.

## **Famine grips Gaza's largest city and is likely to spread, authority on food crises says**

By SAM MEDNICK and WAFAA SHURAFU Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — The world's leading authority on food crises said Friday the Gaza Strip's largest city is gripped by famine, and that it is likely to spread across the territory without a ceasefire and an end to restrictions on humanitarian aid.

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, or IPC, said famine is occurring in Gaza City, home to hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, and that it could spread south to Deir al-Balah and Khan Younis by the end of next month.

The IPC determination comes after months of warnings by aid groups that Israel's restrictions of food and other aid into Gaza, and its military offensive, were causing high levels of starvation among Palestinian civilians, particularly children.

Gaza City offensive could exacerbate hunger

The grim milestone — the first time the IPC has confirmed a famine in the Middle East — is sure to ramp up international pressure on Israel, which has been in a brutal war with Hamas since the militant group's Oct. 7, 2023, attack. Israel says it plans to escalate the war soon by seizing Gaza City and other Hamas strongholds, which experts say will exacerbate the hunger crisis.

The IPC said hunger has been driven by fighting and the blockade of aid, and magnified by widespread displacement and the collapse of food production in Gaza, pushing hunger to life-threatening levels across the entire territory after 22 months of war.

More than half a million people in Gaza, about a quarter of the population, face catastrophic levels of hunger, and many are at risk of dying from malnutrition-related causes, the IPC report said. Last month, the IPC said the "worst-case scenario of famine" was unfolding in Gaza, but stopped short of an official determination.

Israel disputes report of famine

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has denied there is hunger in Gaza, calling reports of starvation "lies" promoted by Hamas. After the publication of images of emaciated children in Gaza and reports of hunger-related deaths, Israel announced measures to let more humanitarian aid in. Yet the U.N. and Palestinians in Gaza say what's entering is far below what's needed.

The Israeli military agency in charge of transferring aid to the territory rejected the report Friday, calling it "false and biased." The agency, known as COGAT, rejected the claim that there was famine in Gaza and said that significant steps had been taken to expand the amount of aid entering the strip in recent weeks.

In a post on social media, Israel's ministry of foreign affairs also rejected the findings, saying the IPC report was "based on Hamas lies." It said that more than 100,000 trucks of aid have entered Gaza since the start of the war, including a massive influx in recent weeks with staple foods.

"A rapidly increasing number of people, especially young children, are dying preventable deaths from starvation and disease because Israel made starvation a core part of its campaign to control the strip," said Chris Newton, an analyst for the International Crisis Group.

Israel's plan to escalate the war in Gaza City weeks after a warning that famine was beginning there demonstrates how "intentional the famine is and how Israel wields starvation," he said.

Netanyahu says more military pressure is needed to achieve Israel's goals of freeing the hostages held by Hamas and eliminating the militant group altogether.

How a famine is determined

Formal famine determinations are rare. The IPC has previously determined famines in Somalia in 2011, South Sudan in 2017 and 2020, and parts of Sudan's western Darfur region last year.

The IPC says a famine exists in an area when all three of the following conditions are confirmed:

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At least 20% of households have an extreme lack of food, or are essentially starving. At least 30% of children 6 months to 5 years old suffer from acute malnutrition or wasting, meaning they're too thin for their height. And at least two people, or four children under 5, per 10,000 are dying daily due to starvation or the interaction of malnutrition and disease.

Israel's offensive and its restrictions on access to Gaza have made collecting data difficult.

The data analyzed between July 1 and Aug. 15 showed clear evidence that thresholds for starvation and acute malnutrition have been reached. Gathering data for mortality has been harder, but the IPC said it is reasonable to conclude from the evidence that the necessary threshold has likely been reached.

The IPC warned that a third of Gaza's population could face catastrophic levels of hunger by the end of September, and that this is probably an undercount.

Alex de Waal, author of "Mass Starvation: The History and Future of Famine" and executive director of the World Peace Foundation, said that had Israel allowed the IPC better access to collect data, a famine might have been determined months ago, which would have raised global awareness sooner.

"Sadly, it seems that it's necessary for experts to shout 'famine!' before the world takes notice, by which time it is too late," he said.

Israel has restricted aid to varying degrees throughout the war. In March, it cut off the entry of all goods, including fuel, food and medicine, to pressure Hamas to free hostages.

Israel eased those restrictions in May and says there's currently no limit on how many aid trucks can enter Gaza. But it also pushed ahead with a new U.S.-backed aid delivery system that requires Palestinians to travel long distances and pass through Israeli military lines to get aid.

The traditional, U.N.-led aid providers say deliveries have been hampered by Israeli military restrictions and incidents of looting, while criminals and hungry crowds overwhelm entering convoys.

Witnesses, health officials and the U.N. rights office say hundreds of people have been killed by Israeli forces while seeking aid from both providers, while Israel says it has only fired warning shots and that the toll is exaggerated.

A parent in Gaza City watches his children waste away

On the eve of the war, Gaza City was home to some 700,000 people, about the population of Washington.

Throughout the conflict, it has been the focus of regular Israeli bombardment and ground operations. Several neighborhoods have been almost completely destroyed. Hundreds of thousands fled under Israeli evacuation orders at the start of the war but many returned during a ceasefire earlier this year.

Doctors and nurses in Gaza in recent weeks have seen rising numbers of visibly malnourished patients.

Kirsty Blacka, an Australian emergency nurse who worked in Gaza City's Al-Quds hospital through June, said emaciated men with no preexisting conditions were coming in looking like teenagers because they were starving.

She said the lack of food has been compounded by contaminated water causing diarrhea and infections, and that diseases are harder to recover from when people are malnourished.

If Israel evacuates people from the city ahead of its new offensive, thousands will be too weak to leave, said Blacka. "Because of the starvation it will put extra strain on already depleted bodies and will lead to the death of many of the Palestinians," she said.

Families in Gaza City say they're watching their loved ones waste away.

Yousef Sbeteh's two teenage children were injured by shrapnel during an Israeli airstrike in June and have spent the last two months in the hospital. While there, they've both lost weight because there hasn't been enough food, he said, adding that he can't afford to buy more because prices at markets have soared. Doctors say the teenagers had no preexisting conditions.

His 15-year-old daughter Aya lost nearly 20 kilograms (44 pounds), or about 30% of her body weight, according to her doctors. Her 17-year-old brother Ahmad has lost about 15 kilograms (33 pounds). The lack of nutritional supplements and healthy food is slowing their recovery, doctors say.

"Doctors say she needs protein, meat and fish," Sbeteh said while sitting beside his frail daughter. "But I can't provide that now."

## Thai court acquits former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra of royal defamation charge

By CHALIDA EKVITTHAYAVECHNUKUL and GRANT PECK Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Thailand's former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra was acquitted of a royal defamation charge by a court on Friday, in a case that could have sent him to prison for up to 15 years.

The 76-year-old Thaksin, smiling as he walked away from the courtroom, was the first to reveal the verdict, responding to journalists' questions with the single word: "Dismissal."

His lawyer, Winyat Chatmontree, also confirmed the acquittal verdict, as did the Bangkok Criminal Court later in a news release.

The law on defaming the monarchy, an offense known as lese majeste, is punishable by three to 15 years in prison. It is among the harshest such laws globally and increasingly has been used in Thailand to punish government critics.

The legal aid group Thai Lawyers for Human Rights has said that since early 2020, more than 270 people — many of them student activists — have been charged with violating the law.

The court's news release said it had found the witnesses and evidence were too weak to support conviction.

Thaksin was originally charged in 2016 over remarks he made a year earlier to journalists in South Korea. The case was not pursued at that time because he was in exile and the necessary legal procedures could not be completed.

The news release said the court determined that the account of the interview presented by the prosecution was incomplete and lacked context, and a key point did not clearly refer specifically to then-King Bhumibol Adulyadej.

It also said the court thought that witnesses in the case against Thaksin might have been motivated by political bias, because they have participated in political protests against him, leaving open the possibility they may have unfairly interpreted his words.

Thaksin's opponents, who were generally staunch royalists, accused him of corruption, abuse of power and disrespecting then-King Bhumibol, who died in 2016. Thaksin has always asserted that the cases against him were politically motivated.

When he was indicted last year, Thaksin's freedom on bail was approved with the condition that he could not travel out of Thailand unless approved by court. His passport was confiscated.

Despite facing various prosecutions since leaving office, Thaksin has spent no time in prison. He was abroad in 2006 when a military coup ousted him. He briefly returned in 2008, only to return quickly to exile to avoid a possible prison term.

He returned to Thailand in 2023 when the Pheu Thai political party that he is closely associated with came to power. He was sent to serve an eight-year prison term on charges related to corruption and abuse of power but was transferred immediately to a hospital on medical grounds. After six months in a hospital suite, he was granted a pardon and parole and set free.

The decision to send him to a hospital instead of prison was widely questioned as to whether he was granted a special, undeserved privilege. The Supreme Court's Criminal Division for Political Office Holders will rule next month in another case that puts him in jeopardy of imprisonment.

Since his return, Thaksin has maintained a high profile, traveling the country making public appearances and political observations that could upset the powerful conservative establishment that was behind his 2006 ouster.

His daughter, Paetongtarn Shinawatra, who became prime minister last year, is also in hot water. She stands accused of failing to handle in an ethical manner a June 15 call with Cambodian Senate President Hun Sen in which they discussed tensions over territory claimed by both nations. The Constitutional Court suspended her from her duties on July 1 and next week will rule whether she will lose her prime minister position for breaching ethics laws.

Thais have long been accustomed to sudden changes of government due to military coups, numbering

more than a dozen since the 1930s. But in the past two decades, they have increasingly seen such changes imposed by the courts, which have ousted four prime ministers and dissolved three election-winning political parties, often on narrow technical grounds.

In most cases, the targets were viewed as challengers to the traditional royalist establishment, whose most powerful defenders are the army and the courts.

## **Funeral home owner who stashed nearly 200 decaying bodies set to be sentenced for corpse abuse**

By JESSE BEDAYN, MATTHEW BROWN and COLLEEN SLEVIN Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — It's been two years since nearly 200 decaying bodies were discovered throughout a fetid, room temperature building in rural Colorado. On Friday, the man responsible, a funeral home owner, is set to be sentenced in state court for 191 counts of corpse abuse.

Jon Hallford and his wife, Carie, ran a morbid racket for four years out of their Return to Nature Funeral Home in Colorado Springs: assuring people they were handling their loved ones' cremations only to stash the bodies in a bug-infested building and then giving them dry concrete resembling ashes.

Jon Hallford is already headed to prison after pleading guilty to federal fraud charges. Friday's sentencing hearing will focus on state charges related to mistreatment of the bodies. Family members will have the chance to describe the anguish of learning a loved one slowly decayed among piles of others.

"To me it's the heart of the case. It's the worst part of the crime," said Tanya Wilson, who is traveling from Georgia to speak at the sentencing. She hired the funeral home to cremate her mother and later discovered the supposed ashes the family spread in Hawaii weren't from her mother's body, which had been wasting away in the building in Penrose, a small town 35 miles from Colorado Springs.

A plea agreement calls for Hallford to receive a 20-year prison sentence for the corpse abuse charges.

Wilson said she and some other families want Judge Eric Bentley to reject the agreement because Hallford's state sentence is expected to run concurrently with his 20-year federal sentence, meaning he could be freed many years earlier than if the sentences ran consecutively.

"The scale of this is staggering. Why does the state believe they deserve a plea deal?" Wilson asked. "There needs to be accountability."

If the judge rejects the agreement, Hallford would not be immediately sentenced and the case would likely go to an arraignment, the first step toward a criminal trial, said Kate Singh with the Fourth Judicial District District Attorney's Office.

Colorado has struggled to effectively oversee funeral homes and for many years had some of the weakest regulations in the nation. It's had a slew of abuse cases, including an estimated 20 decomposing corpses discovered this week at a funeral home in Pueblo.

Carie Hallford is accused of the same crimes as her husband and also pleaded guilty. Her sentencing on the corpse abuse charges has not been scheduled.

The couple was accused of letting 189 bodies decay. In two other instances the wrong bodies were buried. Four remains have yet to be identified, Singh said.

The Hallfords got a license for their funeral home in 2017, and authorities said the bodies started piling up by 2019. Many languished for years in states of decay, some decomposed beyond recognition, some unclothed or on the floor in inches of fluid from the bodies.

As the gruesome count grew, Jon and Carie Hallford were also defrauding the federal government out of nearly \$900,000 in COVID-19 era aid.

With the money from families and the federal government, the Hallfords bought ritzy items from stores like Tiffany & Co., a GMC Yukon and Infiniti worth \$120,000 combined, laser body sculpting and \$31,000 in cryptocurrency.

In 2023, a putrid smell poured from the building and the police turned up. Investigators swarmed the building, donning hazmat suits and painstakingly extracting the bodies. Hallford and his wife were arrested in Oklahoma, where Jon Hallford had family, more than a month later.



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Families learned that their cathartic moments of grief — spreading a mother's ashes in Hawaii or cradling a son's urn in a rocking chair — were tainted by a deception. It was as if those signposts of the grieving process had been torn away, unraveling months and years of working through their loved ones' deaths.

Some had nightmares of what their relatives' decayed bodies must have looked like. Others were anguished by the fear their family members' souls were trapped, unable to go free.

A mother, Crystina Page, demanded to watch as her son's body, rescued from the Return to Nature building, was cremated for real. Wilson, who had thought she already spread her mother's ashes in Hawaii, said the family cremated her mother's remains after they were recovered by authorities. She is waiting for the court cases to conclude before returning to Hawaii again to spread the ashes.

The Hallfords pleaded guilty in the federal case to conspiracy to commit wire fraud. Jon Hallford has appealed his federal prison sentence. Carie Hallford faces a December sentencing in that case.

## **Villanova says a report of a campus shooter was a 'cruel hoax'**

By MICHAEL CASEY, HOLLY RAMER and MATT SLOCUM Associated Press

VILLANOVA, Pa. (AP) — False reports of active shooters at Villanova University and the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga on Thursday led to panic and temporary lockdowns at the two campuses as they kicked off their fall semesters.

In Pennsylvania someone called 911 at about 4:30 p.m. reporting a shooter in a Villanova law school building with at least one wounded victim. Students received texts from the school's alert system saying "ACTIVE SHOOTER on VU campus. Move to secure location. Lock/barricade doors."

The school's president later said it was a hoax.

"Today, as we are celebrating Orientation Mass to welcome our newest Villanovans and their families to our community, panic and terror ensued," the Rev. Peter M. Donohue said in a statement. "Mercifully, no one was injured and we now know it was a cruel hoax."

About four hours earlier, the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga locked down its campus, telling students: "Possible active shooter in the University Center or Library. Run. Hide. Fight. More info forthcoming."

After multiple law enforcement agencies including the FBI responded alongside local fire and emergency crews, the lockdown was lifted less than an hour later. School officials said there was no evidence of any threat.

At Villanova, where new student orientation was underway and classes begin next week, a call came in reporting a man with an AR-15-style weapon, Delaware County spokesperson Michael Connolly said in a statement. There were also "multiple" calls with gunshot-like sounds in the background, and about 30 minutes after the initial call, someone called to report a gunshot wound.

The initial report sent police scouring the campus and even had some law enforcement officials suggesting they believed there was a shooter.

"I know today was every parent's nightmare and every student's biggest fear," Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro said on the social platform X.

Shapiro told state police to use all tools available "to find the person or people who called in this fake threat and hold them accountable."

Courtenay Harris Bond was walking near the law school with her husband and son, a freshman, when word spread of the supposed shooting.

"Really tough way to start freshman year at college," she said shortly after getting the all-clear to leave the bookstore where the family spent the lockdown.

Villanova is a private Catholic university in the Philadelphia suburbs. It borders Lower Merion Township and Radnor Township at the center of the city's wealthy Main Line neighborhoods.

The Augustinian school got extra attention this year as the alma mater of new Pope Leo XIV.

## California parole board denies release for Erik Menendez due to misbehavior in prison

By JAIMIE DING Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Erik Menendez was denied parole Thursday by a California board that said his continued misbehavior during decades in prison for murdering his parents with his older brother in 1989 showed he is still a risk to public safety.

A panel of two California commissioners denied Menendez parole for three years, after which he will be eligible again, in a case that continues to fascinate the public. A parole hearing for his brother Lyle Menendez, who is being held at the same prison in San Diego, is scheduled for Friday morning.

The commissioners determined that Menendez should not be freed after an all-day hearing during which they questioned him about why he committed the crime and violated prison rules. They rejected parole despite strong support from family members who have advocated for the brothers' release for months.

"Two things can be true. They can love and forgive you, and you can still be found unsuitable for parole," commissioner Robert Barton said.

Barton said the primary reason for the decision was not the seriousness of the crime but Menendez's behavior in prison. The repeated use of a cellphone was "selfish" and a sign of Menendez believing that rules don't apply to him, Barton said to Menendez, who was clearly visibly hurt by the decision but listened intently.

"Contrary to your supporters' beliefs, you have not been a model prisoner and frankly we find that a little disturbing," Barton said, questioning if that meant Menendez was not entirely honest with family members about his behavior.

The parole hearings marked the closest they have come to winning freedom since their convictions almost 30 years ago.

The brothers were sentenced to life in prison in 1996 for fatally shooting their father, Jose Menendez, and mother, Kitty Menendez, in their Beverly Hills mansion. While defense attorneys argued that the brothers acted out of self-defense after years of sexual abuse by their father, prosecutors said the brothers sought a multimillion-dollar inheritance.

A judge reduced their sentences in May, and they became immediately eligible for parole.

Erik Menendez made his case to two parole commissioners, offering his most detailed account in years of how he was raised, why he made the choices he did, and how he transformed in prison. He noted the hearing fell almost exactly 36 years after he killed his parents — on Aug. 20, 1989.

"Today is August 21st. Today is the day that all of my victims learned my parents were dead. So today is the anniversary of their trauma journey," he said, referring to his family members.

The state corrections department chose a single reporter to watch the videoconference and share details with the rest of the press.

Erik Menendez's prison record

Menendez, gray-haired and spectacled, sat in front of a computer screen wearing a blue T-shirt over a white long-sleeve shirt in a photo shared by officials.

The panel of commissioners scrutinized every rules violation and fight on his lengthy prison record, including allegations that he worked with a prison gang, bought drugs, used cellphones and helped with a tax scam.

He told commissioners that since he had no hope of ever getting out then, he prioritized protecting himself over following the rules. Then last fall, LA prosecutors asked a judge to resentence him and his brother — opening the door to parole.

"In November of 2024, now the consequences mattered," Menendez said. "Now the consequences meant I was destroying my life."

A particular sticking point for the commissioners was his use of cellphones.

"What I got in terms of the phone and my connection with the outside world was far greater than the consequences of me getting caught with the phone," Menendez said.

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The board also brought up his earliest encounters with the law, when he committed two burglaries in high school.

"I was not raised with a moral foundation," he said. "I was raised to lie, to cheat, to steal in the sense, an abstract way."

The panel asked about details like why he used a fake ID to purchase the guns he and Lyle Menendez used to kill their parents, who acted first and why they killed their mother if their father was the main abuser.

Barton asked: "You do see that there were other choices at that point?"

"When I look back at the person I was then and what I believed about the world and my parents, running away was inconceivable," Menendez said. "Running away meant death."

His transformation behind bars

Erik Menendez's parole attorney, Heidi Rummel, emphasized 2013 as the turning point for her client.

"He found his faith. He became accountable to his higher power. He found sobriety and made a promise to his mother on her birthday," Rummel said. "Has he been perfect since 2013? No. But he has been remarkable."

Commissioner Rachel Stern also applauded him for starting a group to take care of older and disabled inmates.

Since the brothers reunited, they have been "serious accountability partners" for each other. At the same time, he said he's become better at setting boundaries with Lyle Menendez, and they tend to do different programming.

More than a dozen of their relatives delivered emotional statements at Thursday's hearing via video-conference.

"Seeing my crimes through my family's eyes has been a huge part of my evolution and my growth," Menendez said. "Just seeing the pain and the suffering. Understanding the magnitude of what I've done, the generational impact."

His aunt Teresita Menendez-Baralt, who is Jose Menendez's sister, said she has fully forgiven him. She noted that she is dying from Stage 4 cancer and wishes to welcome him into her home.

"Erik carries himself with kindness, integrity and strength that comes from patience and grace," she said.

One relative promised to the parole board that she would house him in Colorado, where he can spend time with his family and enjoying nature.

The board brushed off prosecutor's questions

LA County District Attorney Nathan Hochman said ahead of the parole hearings that he opposes parole for the brothers because of their lack of insight, comparing them to Sirhan Sirhan, who assassinated presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy in 1968. Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom denied him parole in January 2022 because of his "deficient insight."

During the hearing, LA prosecutor Habib Balian asked Menendez about his and his brothers' attempts to ask witnesses to lie in court on their behalf, and if the brothers staged the killings as a mafia hit. Commissioners largely dismissed the questions, saying they were not retrying the case.

In closing statements, Balian questioned whether Menendez was "truly reformed" or saying what commissioners wanted to hear.

"When one continues to diminish their responsibility for a crime and continues to make the same false excuses that they've made for 30-plus years, one is still that same dangerous person that they were when they shotgunned their parents," Balian said.

What happens next

Lyle Menendez is set to appear by videoconference Friday for his parole hearing. The brothers still have a pending habeas corpus petition filed in May 2023 seeking a review of their convictions based on new evidence supporting their claims of sexual abuse by their father.

The case has captured the attention of true crime enthusiasts for decades and spawned documentaries, television specials and dramatizations. The Netflix drama "Monsters: The Lyle and Erik Menendez Story

“ and a documentary released in 2024 have been credited for bringing new attention to the brothers. Greater recognition of the brothers as victims of sexual abuse has also helped mobilize support for their release. Some supporters have flown to Los Angeles to hold rallies and attend court hearings.

## California Gov. Newsom signs legislation calling special election on redrawn congressional map

By SOPHIE AUSTIN, TRẦN NGUYỄN and NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif (AP) — California voters will decide in November whether to approve a redrawn congressional map designed to help Democrats win five more U.S. House seats next year, after Texas Republicans advanced their own redrawn map to pad their House majority by the same number of seats at President Donald Trump’s urging.

California lawmakers voted mostly along party lines Thursday to approve legislation calling for the special election. Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom, who has led the campaign in favor of the map, then quickly signed it — the latest step in a tit-for-tat gerrymandering battle.

“This is not something six weeks ago that I ever imagined that I’d be doing,” Newsom said at a press conference, pledging a campaign for the measure that would reach out to Democrats, Republicans and independent voters. “This is a reaction to an assault on our democracy in Texas.”

Republicans, who have filed a lawsuit and called for a federal investigation into the plan, promised to fight the measure at the ballot box as well.

California Assemblyman James Gallagher, the Republican minority leader, said Trump was “wrong” to push for new Republican seats elsewhere, contending the president was just responding to Democratic gerrymandering in other states. But he warned that Newsom’s approach, which the governor has dubbed “fight fire with fire,” was dangerous.

“You move forward fighting fire with fire and what happens?” Gallagher asked. “You burn it all down.”

Texas’ redrawn maps still need a final vote in the Republican-controlled state Senate, which advanced the plan out of a committee Thursday but did not bring the measure to the floor. The Senate was scheduled to meet again Friday.

After that, Republican Gov. Greg Abbott’s signature will be all that is needed to make the map official. It’s part of Trump’s effort to stave off an expected loss of the GOP’s majority in the U.S. House in the 2026 midterm elections.

A battle for the US House control waged via redistricting

On a national level, the partisan makeup of existing districts puts Democrats within three seats of a majority. The incumbent president’s party usually loses congressional seats in the midterms.

The president has pushed other Republican-controlled states including Indiana and Missouri to also revise their maps to add more winnable GOP seats. Ohio Republicans were also already scheduled to revise their maps to make them more partisan.

Redistricting typically occurs once a decade, immediately after a census. While some states have their own limitations, there is no national impediment to a state trying to redraw districts in the middle of the decade.

The U.S. Supreme Court has also said the Constitution does not outlaw partisan gerrymandering, only using race to redraw district lines. Texas Republicans embraced that when their House of Representatives passed its revision Wednesday.

“The underlying goal of this plan is straight forward: improve Republican political performance,” state Rep. Todd Hunter, the Republican who wrote the bill revising Texas’ maps, said.

On Thursday, California Democrats noted Hunter’s comments and said they had to take extreme steps to counter the Republican move. “What do we do, just sit back and do nothing? Or do we fight back?” Democratic state Sen. Lena Gonzalez said. “This is how we fight back and protect our democracy.”

Democrats have sought a national commission for redistricting

Republicans and some Democrats championed the 2008 ballot measure that established California’s



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nonpartisan redistricting commission, along with the 2010 one that extended its role to drawing congressional maps.

Democrats have sought a national commission that would draw lines for all states but have been unable to pass legislation creating that system.

Trump's midterm redistricting ploy has shifted Democrats.

That was clear in California, where Newsom was one of the members of his party who backed the initial redistricting commission ballot measures, and where Assemblyman Joshua Lowenthal, whose father, Rep. Alan Lowenthal, was another Democratic champion of a nonpartisan commission, presided over the state Assembly's passage of the redistricting package.

Newsom on Thursday contended his state was still setting a model.

"We'll be the first state in U.S. history, in the most democratic way, to submit to the people of our state the ability to determine their own maps," Newsom said before signing the legislation.

Former President Barack Obama, who's also backed a nationwide nonpartisan approach, has also 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 Tuesday during a fundraiser for the Democratic Party's main redistricting arm, noting that California voters will still have the final say on the map.

California's plan is temporary

The measure would have the California map last only through 2030, after which the state's commission would draw the next decade's map. Democrats are also mulling reopening Maryland's and New York's maps for mid-decade redraws.

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.

In Texas, outnumbered Democrats turned to unusual steps to try to delay passage, leaving the state to delay a vote by 15 days. Upon their return, they were assigned round-the-clock police monitoring.

California Republicans didn't take such dramatic steps but complained bitterly about Democrats muscling the package through the Statehouse and harming what GOP State Sen. Tony Strickland called the state's "gold-standard" nonpartisan approach.

"What you're striving for is predetermined elections," Strickland said. "You're taking the voice away from Californians."

## Netanyahu says he will push ahead with Gaza City takeover and renewed ceasefire talks

By WAFAA SHURAF, SALLY ABOU ALJOUD and MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Thursday he will give final approval for the takeover of Gaza City while also restarting negotiations with Hamas aimed at returning all the remaining hostages and ending the war on Israel's terms.

The wide-scale operation in Gaza City could start within days. Netanyahu's approval was expected during a meeting with senior security officials late Thursday, but no decision was announced before midnight in Jerusalem. Hamas said earlier this week that it had agreed to a ceasefire proposal from Arab mediators, which — if accepted by Israel — could forestall the offensive.

The Israeli military has begun calling medical officials and international organizations in the northern Gaza Strip to encourage them to evacuate to the south ahead of the expanded operation. The military plans to call up 60,000 reservists and extend the service of 20,000 more.

Israeli strikes, meanwhile, killed at least 36 Palestinians Thursday across Gaza, according to local hospitals. A renewed offensive could bring even more casualties and displacement to the territory, where the war has already killed tens of thousands and where experts have warned of imminent famine.

Many Israelis fear the operation could also doom the remaining 20 or so living hostages taken by Hamas-

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led militants in the Oct. 7, 2023, attack that ignited the war.

Gaza City operation could begin in days

During a visit to the military's Gaza command in southern Israel, Netanyahu said he would approve the army's plans to retake Gaza City and had instructed officials "to begin immediate negotiations" for the release of all hostages "and an end to the war on terms acceptable to Israel."

"These two things — defeating Hamas and releasing all our hostages — go hand in hand," he said.

It appeared to mark Israel's first public response to the latest ceasefire proposal drawn up by Egypt and Qatar. Egyptian and Hamas officials say it is almost identical to an earlier one that Israel accepted before the talks stalled last month.

The proposal would include the release of some of the hostages in exchange for Palestinians imprisoned by Israel, a pullback of Israeli forces and negotiations over a more lasting ceasefire.

Israeli troops have already begun more limited operations in Gaza City's Zeitoun neighborhood and the built-up Jabaliya refugee camp, areas where they have carried out several previous large-scale raids over the course of the war, only to see militants later regroup.

The military says it plans to operate in areas where ground troops have not yet entered and where it says Hamas still has military and governing capabilities.

So far, there has been little sign of Palestinians fleeing en masse, as they did when Israel carried out an earlier offensive in Gaza City in the opening weeks of the war. The military says it controls around 75% of Gaza, and residents say nowhere in the territory feels safe.

Protests in Israel and Gaza

Hundreds gathered Thursday for a rare protest in Gaza City against the war and Israel's plans to support the mass relocation of Palestinians to other countries.

Women and children held placards reading "Save Gaza" and "Stop the war, stop the savage attack, save us," against a backdrop of destroyed buildings as Palestinian music played. Unlike in previous protests, there were no expressions of opposition to Hamas.

"We want the war on Gaza to stop. We don't want to migrate. Twenty-two months ... it's enough. Enough death. Enough destruction," said Bisan Ghazal, a woman displaced from Gaza City.

In Israel, protesters marched Thursday night in Tel Aviv holding banners that read "The people will bring back the hostages" and "How much blood will be spilled?"

Among the demonstrators was Dudu Dotan, who said Netanyahu is endangering the remaining hostages by moving forward with the planned Gaza City offensive. Of the 50 still being held in Gaza, Israel believes about 20 hostages are still alive.

"This way will not bring the hostages back," Dotan said. "Every hostage he brought back, he brought back through deals. And every time he tried to bring them back with military force, he caused the hostages to be killed."

Plans for widening the offensive have also sparked international outrage, with many of Israel's closest Western allies — but not the United States — calling on it to end the war.

Dozens killed across Gaza

At least 36 Palestinians were killed Thursday by Israeli fire across the Gaza Strip, including 14 who were seeking humanitarian aid, according to local hospitals. The military says it only targets militants and blames civilian deaths on Hamas because it operates in densely populated areas.

The Israeli military said it killed several armed militants in the Morag Corridor, a military zone where people seeking aid have repeatedly come under fire in recent weeks, according to witnesses and health officials. Nasser Hospital in southern Gaza had earlier reported that six people were killed in that area while seeking aid on Thursday. It was not possible to reconcile the two accounts.

The Media Freedom Coalition, which promotes press freedoms worldwide, called Thursday for Israel to allow independent foreign news organizations access to Gaza. Aside from rare guided tours, Israel has barred international media during the war, in which at least 184 Palestinian journalists and media workers have been killed.

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"Journalists and media workers play an essential role in putting the spotlight on the devastating reality of war," said a statement signed by 27 of the coalition's member countries.

Israeli strikes destroy evacuated tent camp

Israeli airstrikes also destroyed a tent camp in Deir al-Balah, the only city in Gaza that has been relatively unscathed in the war and where many have sought refuge. Residents said the Israeli military warned them to flee shortly before the strikes set the camp ablaze, and there were no reports of casualties.

Families, many with children, could later be seen sifting through the ashes for the belongings they had managed to take with them during earlier evacuations.

Mohammad Kahlout, who had been displaced from northern Gaza, said they were given just five minutes to gather what they could and evacuate. "We are civilians, not terrorists. What did we do, and what did our children do, to be displaced again?"

The Gaza Health Ministry said Thursday that at least 62,192 Palestinians have been killed in the war. Another two people have died from malnutrition-related causes, bringing the total number of such deaths to 271, including 112 children, the Health Ministry said.

The ministry is part of the Hamas-run government and staffed by medical professionals. It does not say whether those killed by Israeli fire are civilians or combatants, but it says around half were women and children. The U.N. and many independent experts consider its figures to be the most reliable estimate of wartime casualties. Israel disputes its toll but has not provided its own.

Hamas-led militants started the war when they attacked Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing some 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.

## Russian attack on western Ukraine hits an American factory during the US-led push for peace

By SAMYA KULLAB and ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia launched a rare drone and missile attack on western Ukraine overnight, officials said Thursday, striking targets including an American-owned electronics plant and injecting further uncertainty into the U.S.-led efforts to end the 3-year-old war.

The aerial assault on a part of Ukraine that has largely not experienced such focused attacks was one of Russia's biggest this year and came as Moscow objects to key aspects of proposals that could end the fighting.

U.S. President Donald Trump discussed the war with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Alaska last week before hosting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and European leaders at the White House on Monday.

Russia's Defense Ministry said the strikes targeted "enterprises of the Ukrainian military-industrial complex," including drone factories, storage depots, missile launch sites and areas where Ukrainian troops were gathered. Russia has repeatedly denied targeting civilian areas of Ukraine.

But in a post on X, Zelenskyy wrote that "the Russians practically burned down an American company producing electronics — home appliances, nothing military."

"The Russians knew exactly where they lobbed the missiles. We believe this was a deliberate attack against American property and investments in Ukraine," Zelenskyy wrote, adding: "Telling attack, right as the world awaits a clear answer from Russia on negotiations to end the war."

Trump last month questioned Putin's commitment to ending the war, saying the Russian leader "talks nice and then he bombs everybody."

In a social media post Thursday, Trump criticized his predecessor, Joe Biden, for not providing Ukraine with more weaponry it needs to "fight back."

"It is very hard, if not impossible, to win a war without attacking an invaders country," Trump said. "It's like a great team in sports that has a fantastic defense, but is not allowed to play offensive. There is no chance of winning! It is like that with Ukraine and Russia."

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The White House didn't immediately respond to a request for comment on whether Trump is considering changes to the types of weapons the U.S. will provide to Kyiv.

The push for peace

Russia has fired nearly 1,000 long-range drones and missiles at Ukraine since Monday's White House talks, according to Ukrainian tallies.

European countries are discussing how they can deploy military assets to deter any postwar Russian assault on Ukraine. But the Kremlin won't accept the deployment of any troops from NATO countries, and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Wednesday that making security arrangements for Ukraine without Moscow's involvement was pointless.

Putin is ready to meet with Zelenskyy to discuss peace terms, Lavrov said Thursday, but only after key issues have been worked out by senior officials in what could be a protracted negotiating process because the two sides remain far apart.

Ukrainian and European leaders have accused Putin of stalling in the peace efforts in the hopes that his bigger army, which has been making slow advances, can capture more Ukrainian land.

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio held a conference call Thursday with the national security advisers of European countries expected to play a role in future security guarantees for Ukraine, a senior U.S. official said. In addition to the national security advisers from Britain, Finland, France, Germany and Italy, officials from the European Commission and NATO also joined the call. The U.S. official spoke on condition of anonymity to outline a discussion that had not been publicly announced.

Military leaders from the U.S., Ukraine and these five European countries met Tuesday and Wednesday in Washington to work out military options, said Joseph Holstead, a spokesperson for the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. His statement gave no details about what specifically was discussed at the meeting, which also included NATO's supreme allied commander in Europe.

But an official who spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to speak publicly about the discussions said, "Everything is being considered and nothing is being ruled out," regarding security guarantees for Ukraine, apart from U.S. boots on the ground.

Military chiefs and their staffs are looking at a variety of options including "how big" the security guarantee is and what happens if it is implemented with or without a ceasefire, the official said, noting that European defense chiefs acknowledged its their "responsibility to secure Europe."

The Pentagon's policy chief, Undersecretary of Defense Elbridge Colby, attended meetings with European military leaders this week to personally convey that the U.S. military plans to play only a minimal role in any security guarantee for Ukraine, Pentagon press secretary Kingsley Wilson said in a statement.

Western Ukraine is struck

Russia launched 574 drones and 40 ballistic and cruise missiles overnight, the Ukrainian air force said. The attack mostly targeted western regions of the country 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.

A U.S. electronics plant near the Hungarian border was struck, according to Andy Hunder, president of the American Chamber of Commerce in Ukraine. The Flex factory is one of the biggest American investments in Ukraine, Hunder told The Associated Press.

At the moment of impact, 600 night shift workers were on the premises, and six were injured, Hunder said. Russian attacks on Ukraine since it launched its invasion have damaged property belonging to more than half of the chamber's roughly 600 members, he added.

"The message is clear: Russia is not looking for peace. Russia is attacking American business in Ukraine, humiliating American business," Hunder said.

In the western city of Lviv, one person was killed and three were injured as the attack damaged 26 residential buildings, a kindergarten and administrative buildings, regional head Maksym Kozytskyi wrote on Telegram. The regional prosecutor's office said three Russian cruise missiles with cluster munitions struck the city.



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Ukraine's leader responds

Zelenskyy condemned the attack amid the push for peace and accused Moscow of "trying to wriggle out of holding a meeting" between Putin and himself.

"They don't want to end this war. They continue their massive attacks on Ukraine and their ferocious assaults along the frontline," Zelenskyy wrote on X. "They even lob missiles at an American enterprise, alongside many other purely civilian targets."

He also urged the international community to respond with stronger pressure on Moscow, including tougher sanctions and tariffs.

In prepared comments released Thursday, Zelenskyy said plans for security guarantees would become clearer by the end of next week. He 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.

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

Meanwhile, Ukrainian drones on Thursday wounded four civilians in Russia's Belgorod region, which borders Ukraine, according to Telegram posts by regional Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov. He said the drones damaged apartment blocks, a commercial site and a car.

## Trump's crackdown in DC leaves residents on edge as federal agents set up checkpoints

By CHRIS MEGERIAN and JACQUELYN MARTIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal authorities have set up checkpoints around the nation's capital, sometimes asking people for their immigration status and detaining them, as President Donald Trump's crackdown ensnares more residents each day.

Trump claimed that a crime crisis required his Republican administration's intervention in the Democratic-led city this month, brushing aside statistics that showed the problem was already waning. However, immigration enforcement appears to be a priority, as more than a third of people arrested in the last two weeks were in the country illegally, according to the White House.

Hundreds of federal agents and National Guard soldiers have surged into Washington, leaving some residents on edge and creating tense confrontations in the streets.

A day care center was partially closed Thursday when staff became afraid to go to work because they heard about federal agents nearby. An administrator asked parents to keep their children at home if possible.

Other day cares have stopped taking kids on daily walks because of fears about encountering law enforcement.

Trump visits cops and troops

The White House said there have been 630 arrests, including 251 people who are in the country illegally, since Aug. 7, when Trump began surging federal agents into the city. Trump has been ratcheting up the pressure since then, seizing control of the D.C. police department on Aug. 11 and deploying more National Guard troops, mostly from Republican-led states.

On Thursday evening, Trump visited with officers and troops at a U.S. Park Police facility in the latest show of force from the White House.

"We're not playing games," he said.

Trump suggested that operations in the city could be drawn out and serve as a model for others around the country.

"We're going to make it safe, and we're going to go on to other places, but we're going to stay here for a while," he said.

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Soldiers have been largely stationed in downtown areas, such as monuments on the National Mall and transit stations. However, federal agents are operating more widely through the city. D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser acknowledged the proliferation of traffic checkpoints Thursday.

"The surge of federal officers is allowing for different types of deployments, more frequent types of deployments, like checkpoints," Bowser said.

A crowd of people gathered outside a municipal office building to protest Trump's crackdown, waving signs and cheering speakers who denounced the president's plans. Their numbers swelled into the hundreds until police closed off nearby streets. When the rally ended, many remained to dance and listen to music.

In other neighborhoods Thursday evening, residents banged pots and pans on rooftops, front steps and street corners.

Not a normal traffic stop

On Thursday morning, as Martin Romero rode through Washington's Rock Creek Park on his way to a construction job in Virginia, he saw police on the road up ahead. He figured it was a normal traffic stop, but it wasn't.

Romero, 41, said U.S. Park Police were telling pickup trucks with company logos to pull over, reminding them that commercial vehicles weren't allowed on park roads. They checked for licenses and insurance information, and then U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents came over.

Romero said there were two agents on one side of his truck and three on the other. He started to get nervous as the agents asked where they were from and whether they were in the country illegally.

"We just came here to work," Romero said afterwards. "We aren't doing anything bad."

Two people in his truck were detained and the agents didn't give a reason, he said. He also saw three other people taken from other vehicles.

"I feel really worried because they took two of our guys," he said. "They wouldn't say where they're taking them or if they'll be able to come back."

Romero said he called his boss, who told him to just head home. They wouldn't be working today.

Enrique Martinez, a supervisor at the construction company, came to the scene afterwards. He pondered whether to call families of the detained men.

"This has never happened to our company before," Martinez said. "I'm not really sure what to do."

Checkpoints are legal, to a point

The Supreme Court has upheld the use of law enforcement and government checkpoints for specific purposes, such as policing the border and identifying suspected drunk drivers.

But there are restrictions on that authority, especially when it comes to general crime control. Jeffrey Bellin, a former prosecutor in Washington and professor at Vanderbilt Law School who specializes in criminal law and procedures, said the Constitution doesn't allow "the government to be constantly checking us and stopping to see if we're up to any criminal activity."

He said checkpoints for a legally justifiable purpose — like checking for driver's licenses and registrations — cannot be used as "subterfuge" or a pretext for stops that would otherwise not be allowed. And though the court has affirmed the use of checkpoints at the border, and even some distance away from it, to ask drivers about immigration status, Bellin said it was unlikely the authority would extend to Washington.

Anthony Michael Kreis, a professor at Georgia State College of Law, said the seemingly "arbitrary" and intrusive nature of the checkpoints in the capital could leave residents feeling aggrieved.

"Some of the things could be entirely constitutional and fine, but at the same time, the way that things are unfolding, people are suspicious — and I think for good reason," he said.

Lilly Burchfield, 25, said she's seen people in her neighborhood come out of their homes to yell at federal agents.

"It feels like we're all coming together as a community and everyone that I've talked to has been outraged by what's happening," she said.

From Los Angeles to D.C.

There are few places in the country that have been unaffected by Trump's deportation drive, but his push into D.C. is shaping into something more sustained, similar to what has unfolded in the Los Angeles

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area since early June.

In Los Angeles, immigration officers — working with the Border Patrol and other federal agencies — have been a near-daily presence at Home Depots, car washes and other highly visible locations.

In a demonstration of how enforcement has affected routines, the bishop of San Bernardino, California, formally excused parishioners of their weekly obligation to attend Mass after immigration agents detained people on two parish properties.

Immigration officials have been an unusually public presence, sending horse patrols to the city's famed MacArthur Park and appearing outside California Gov. Gavin Newsom's news conference last week on congressional redistricting. Authorities said an agent fired at a moving vehicle last week after the driver refused to roll down his window during an immigration stop.

The National Guard and Marines were previously in the city for weeks on an assignment to maintain order amid protests.

A federal judge blocked the administration from conducting indiscriminate immigration stops in Southern California but authorities have vowed to keep the pressure on.

## Hurricane Erin still stirring up dangerous waves while it moves away from the East Coast

By ALLEN G. BREED and JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

RODANTHE, N.C. (AP) — Hurricane Erin kicked up big waves Thursday along the mid-Atlantic coast and began a slow march out to sea after pelting North Carolina's Outer Banks with strong winds and swells that flooded a few places on the barrier islands.

The storm will continue to bring the threat of dangerous rip currents and coastal flooding into the week-end from the Carolinas to New England even as forecasters predict it will gradually weaken. Despite being twice the size of an average hurricane, Erin so far has managed to thread the needle through the Atlantic between the East Coast and several island nations, limiting its destructiveness.

Damage assessments were still underway on the Outer Banks and more flooding could come during high tide Thursday evening. But it appeared the low-lying islands dodged widespread trouble during its initial brush with Erin on Wednesday.

A tropical storm warning remained active on the island of Bermuda, where residents and tourists were told to stay out of the water through Friday. The tropical storm warning along the coast of North Carolina was changed to a storm surge warning to reflect the threat of rising water, while the one along Virginia's coast had been discontinued.

New York and New England feel Erin's impact

Coastal communities along the mid-Atlantic and southern New England coast may see tropical-storm-force wind gusts through early Friday, according to the National Hurricane Center in Miami.

Beaches were closed to swimming Thursday in New York City, but that didn't stop more than a dozen surfers from taking on the waves at Rockaway Beach in Queens. Scott Klossner, who lives nearby, said conditions were great for experienced surfers.

"You wait all year round for these kinds of waves. It's challenging, really hard to stay in one place because there's a heavy, heavy, heavy rip," he said. "But this is what surfers want — a hurricane that comes but doesn't destroy my house? I'll take that."

Waves as high as 15 feet (4.5 meters) were expected to roll into the coasts of Nantucket Island and Martha's Vineyard from deeper waters Thursday night. High winds were forecast to stick around into Friday morning.

Erin brings new threat of coastal erosion

Coastal erosion was a big worry in many beachfront communities. In North Carolina, waves were estimated as high as 18 feet (5.5 meters) Thursday morning, according to local weather reports.

The Outer Banks — essentially sand dunes sticking out of the ocean a few feet above sea level — are

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especially vulnerable. Storm surges can cut through the dunes, washing tons of sand and debris onto the road and sometimes breaking up pavement and creating new inlets.

The dunes and beach have taken a beating over the last 24 hours, and the next tide will wash over areas already weakened by the storm, said Reide Corbett, executive director of the Coastal Studies Institute.

But Dare County Manager Bobby Outten said one of their worst fears — new inlets — had not happened so far with Erin, and there was no significant structural damage to any homes or businesses.

"All in all, it's not as bad as it could have been," Outten said. "Hopefully the worst of it is behind us."

The Hatteras Island Rescue Squad, a volunteer group based in Buxton, said it received no calls for rescues Wednesday night through Thursday morning.

Waves did break through dunes on Hatteras and Ocracoke islands, closing parts of Highway 12, the area's main route. Ocracoke's connection to its ferry terminal was cut off.

Fishing and sightseeing after the storm

On Jannette's Pier in Nags Head, where sustained winds reached 45 mph (72 kph) early Thursday, dozens who rode out the storm were taking photos of the huge waves crashing into the structure amid the driving rain.

"This is nature at her best," David Alan Harvey of Nags Head said Thursday morning. "I love this. I love these storms."

A few feet away, Sebastian Kettner was casting a line for red fish.

"Where there's water, there's fish," he said as the wind howled. "And there's a lot of water here."

Erin remains a large hurricane as it heads out to sea

The storm has fluctuated in intensity since first forming nearly a week ago, but it is still unusually large, stretching across more than 600 miles (965 kilometers).

It remained a Category 2 storm Thursday afternoon with maximum sustained winds around 100 mph (160 kph), the hurricane center said. Erin was about 420 miles (676 kilometers) east-northeast of Cape Hatteras.

The hurricane center was also watching three tropical disturbances far out in the Atlantic. With thousands of miles of warm ocean water, hurricanes known as Cape Verde storms are some of the most dangerous to North America.

## Appeals court throws out massive civil fraud penalty against President Donald Trump

By JENNIFER PELTZ and MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A New York appeals court on Thursday threw out President Donald Trump's massive financial penalty while narrowly upholding a judge's finding that he engaged in fraud by exaggerating his wealth for decades. The ruling spares Trump from a potential half-billion-dollar fine but bans him and his two eldest sons from serving in corporate leadership for a few years.

Trump claimed "TOTAL VICTORY" in the case, which stemmed from a civil lawsuit brought by New York Attorney General Letitia James.

"They stole \$550 million from me with a fake case and it was overturned," Trump said, echoing his earlier social media post as he addressed police in Washington, D.C. "They said this was a fake case. It was a terrible thing."

James, a Democrat, focused on the parts of the decision that went her way, saying in a statement that it "affirmed the well-supported finding of the trial court: Donald Trump, his company, and two of his children are liable for fraud."

The ruling came seven months after Trump returned to the White House, his political fortunes unimpeded by the civil fraud judgment, a criminal conviction and other legal blows. A sharply divided panel of five judges in the state's mid-level Appellate Division couldn't agree on many issues raised in Trump's appeal, but a majority said the monetary penalty was "excessive."

A lower-court judge, Arthur Engoron, had ordered Trump last year to pay \$355 million in penalties after



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finding that he flagrantly padded financial statements provided to lenders and insurers. With interest, the sum has topped \$515 million. Additional penalties for executives at his company, the Trump Organization, including sons Eric and Donald Trump Jr., have brought the total to \$527 million with interest.

## An 'excessive' fine

"While harm certainly occurred, it was not the cataclysmic harm that can justify a nearly half billion-dollar award" to the state, Judges Dianne Renwick and Peter Moulton wrote in one of three opinions shaping the appeals court's ruling. They called the penalty "an excessive fine that violates the Eighth Amendment of the United States Constitution." Both were appointed by Democratic governors.

Engoron's other punishments, upheld by the appeals court, have been on pause during Trump's appeal, and the president was able to hold off collection of the money by posting a \$175 million bond.

Donald Trump Jr. celebrated the decision by mocking James, who had periodically posted a running tally of the fraud penalty, with interest. Over a post from James in February 2024, when the tally was nearly \$465 million, Trump Jr. wrote: "I believe you mean \$0.00. Thank you for your attention to this matter."

The five-judge panel, which split on the merits of the lawsuit and Engoron's fraud finding, dismissed the monetary penalty in its entirety while also leaving a pathway for an appeal to the state's highest court, the Court of Appeals. In the meantime, Trump and his co-defendants, the judges wrote, can seek to extend the pause to prevent any punishments from taking effect.

While the Appellate Division dispatches most appeals in a few pages in a matter of weeks, the judges weighing Trump's case took nearly 11 months to rule after oral arguments last fall and issued 323 pages of concurring and dissenting opinions with no majority. Rather, some judges endorsed parts of their colleagues' findings while denouncing others, enabling the court to rule.

Two judges wrote that they felt James' lawsuit was justifiable and that she had proven her case but the penalty was too severe. One wrote that James exceeded her legal authority in bringing the suit, saying that if any lenders felt cheated, they could have sued Trump themselves, and none did. Another wrote that Engoron erred by ruling before the trial that James had proven Trump engaged in fraud.

In his portion of the ruling, Judge David Friedman, appointed by a Republican governor, was scathing in his criticism of James for bringing the lawsuit.

"Plainly, her ultimate goal was not 'market hygiene' ... but political hygiene, ending with the derailment of President Trump's political career and the destruction of his real estate business," Friedman wrote. "The voters have obviously rendered a verdict on his political career. This bench today unanimously derails the effort to destroy his business."

## Claims of politics at play

Trump and his co-defendants denied wrongdoing. At the conclusion of the civil trial in January 2024, Trump said he was "an innocent man" and the case was a "fraud on me." The Republican has repeatedly maintained the case and the verdict were political moves by James and Engoron, both Democrats.

Trump's Justice Department has subpoenaed James for records related to the lawsuit, among other documents, as part of an investigation into whether she violated the president's civil rights. James' personal attorney Abbe D. Lowell has said investigating the fraud case is "the most blatant and desperate example of this administration carrying out the president's political retribution campaign."

Trump and his lawyers said his financial statements weren't deceptive, since they came with disclaimers noting they weren't audited. The defense also noted bankers and insurers independently evaluated the numbers, and the loans were repaid.

Despite such discrepancies as tripling the size of his Trump Tower penthouse, he said the financial statements were, if anything, lowball estimates of his fortune.

During an appellate court hearing last September, Trump's lawyers argued that many of the case's allegations were too old and that James had misused a consumer protection law to sue Trump over private business transactions that were satisfactory to those involved.

State attorneys said that while Trump insists no one was harmed by the financial statements, his exaggerations led lenders to make riskier loans and that honest borrowers lose out when others game their net worth numbers.

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Legal obstacles

The civil fraud case was just one of several legal obstacles for Trump as he campaigned, won and segued to a second term as president.

On Jan. 10, he was sentenced in his criminal hush money case to what's known as an unconditional discharge, leaving his conviction on the books but sparing him jail, probation, a fine or other punishment. He is appealing the conviction.

And in December, a federal appeals court upheld a jury's finding that Trump sexually abused writer E. Jean Carroll in the mid-1990s and later defamed her, affirming a \$5 million judgment against him. The appeals court declined in June to reconsider. Trump still can try to get the Supreme Court to hear his appeal.

Trump also is appealing a subsequent verdict that requires him to pay Carroll \$83.3 million for additional defamation claims.

## Walmart helps pull Wall Street to its 5th straight loss

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Wall Street fell to a fifth straight loss on Thursday, hurt by a drop for Walmart and dampened hopes for coming cuts to interest rates.

The S&P 500 slipped 0.4%. All its losses have been relatively modest, but it has not risen since setting an all-time high last Thursday. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 152 points, or 0.3%, and the Nasdaq composite fell 0.3%.

Walmart was one of the market's heaviest weights and dropped 4.5% after reporting a profit for the spring that came up short of analysts' expectations, while Nvidia and other Big Tech stocks held a bit steadier following two days of sharp swings.

The moves were stronger in the bond market, where Treasury yields rose after a report forced Wall Street to scale back hopes that the Federal Reserve may soon deliver relief by cutting interest rates.

The report suggested growth in U.S. business activity is accelerating and hit its fastest rate so far this year. That's good news for the economy, but the preliminary data from S&P Global also said tariffs helped push up average selling prices at the fastest rate in three years. That's a discouraging sign for inflation.

Taken all together, such data has historically aligned more with the Federal Reserve considering a hike in interest rates, rather than a cut, according to Chris Williamson, chief business economist at S&P Global Market Intelligence.

No one expects a rate hike to happen, but the overwhelming expectation on Wall Street has been for coming cuts. Traders are betting on a nearly three-in-four chance that the Fed will lower its main interest rate at its next meeting in September, according to data from CME Group. The hope on Wall Street has been that Fed Chair Jerome Powell may give hints on Friday that easier rates may be coming.

He will be speaking in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, at an annual conference of central bankers that's been home to big policy announcements in the past.

A cut in interest rates would be the first of the year, and it would give investment prices and the economy a boost by potentially making it cheaper to borrow to buy cars or equipment. But it could also risk worsening inflation.

The Fed has been hesitant to cut interest rates this year out of fear that President Donald Trump's tariffs could push inflation higher, but a surprisingly weak report on job growth earlier this month suddenly made the job market a bigger worry. Trump, meanwhile, has angrily pushed for cuts to interest rates, often insulting Powell while doing so.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury, which helps set rates for mortgages, rose to 4.32% from 4.29%. The two-year Treasury, which moves more on expectations for what the Federal Reserve will do with short-term interest rates, climbed to 3.78% from 3.74%.

On Wall Street, Walmart dropped even though it reported encouraging growth in revenue during the latest quarter and raised its forecast for profit over its full fiscal year.

Analysts said the market's expectations were high coming into the report. The Bentonville, Arkansas, com-

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pany's stock came into the day with a gain of 13.5% for the year so far, more than the rest of the market. Big Tech stocks are under even more pressure to deliver bigger profits amid criticism that their stock prices ran too high, too fast and have become too expensive because of the frenzy around artificial-intelligence technology.

Several AI superstar stocks have swung sharply this week, taking some shine off their skyscraping surges for the year, because of such criticism. But they held a bit steadier on Thursday.

Palantir Technologies, which at one point on Wednesday was on track to fall more than 9% for a second straight day before paring its loss, rose 0.1%. Nvidia, the chip company that's become the poster child of the AI boom, edged down 0.2%.

Coty tumbled 21.6% after the beauty products company reported a loss for the latest quarter, when analysts expected a slight profit. The company, whose brands include CoverGirl and Joop!, said uncertainty about tariffs and the economy are making retailers cautious in their orders.

On the winning side of Wall Street was Nordson, which makes products and systems used for precision dispensing and other things. It delivered profit and revenue for the latest quarter that topped analysts' expectations, and its stock rose 3%.

All told, the S&P 500 slipped 25.61 points to 6,370.17. The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 152.81 to 44,785.50, and the Nasdaq composite sank 72.55 to 21,100.31.

In stock markets abroad, indexes were mixed across much of Europe and Asia.

Germany, Europe's largest economy, saw its DAX return 0.1% after U.S. and European Union officials offered a framework for their trade deal.

Japan's Nikkei 225 fell 0.6% after a survey showed Japan's factory activity contracted again in August.

## **James Dobson, Focus on the Family founder and key leader on the Christian right, dies at 89**

By MIKE CATALINI and HOLLY MEYER Associated Press

James Dobson, who founded the conservative Christian ministry Focus on the Family and was a politically influential campaigner against abortion and LGBTQ+ rights, died on Thursday. He was 89.

Born in 1936 in Shreveport, Louisiana, Dobson was a child psychologist who launched a radio show to counsel Christians on parenting and started Focus on the Family in 1977. Alongside fundamentalist giants like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, he became a force in the 1980s for pushing conservative Christian ideals in mainstream American politics.

At its peak, Focus on the Family had more than 1,000 employees and gave Dobson a platform to weigh in on legislation and serve as an adviser to five presidents. His broad reach includes authoring more than 70 books, being translated into 27 languages, and airing on 4,000 radio stations, according to the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.

His death was confirmed by his institute. He is survived by his wife of 64 years, Shirley, as well as their two children, a daughter-in-law and two grandchildren.

'Mount Rushmore' of conservatives

Dobson interviewed President Ronald Reagan in the Oval Office in 1985, and Falwell called him a rising star in 1989. Decades later, he was among the evangelical leaders tapped to advise President Donald Trump. in 2016.

In 2022, he praised Trump for appointing conservative U.S. Supreme Court justices who allowed states to ban abortion.

"Whether you like Donald Trump or not, whether you supported or voted for him or not, if you are supportive of this Dobbs decision that struck down Roe v. Wade, you have to mention in the same breath the man who made it possible," he said in a broadcast.

Dobson belongs on the "Mount Rushmore" of Christian conservatives, said Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council, another group Dobson founded. He promoted ideas from "a biblical standpoint" that pushed back against progressive parenting of the 1960s, Perkins said.

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## Weighing Dobson's legacy

In his 1970 parenting book "Dare to Discipline," updated in 1992, Dobson said parents should spank kids to discipline them and enforce boundaries. Children should not be struck in anger, but "the spanking should be of sufficient magnitude to cause genuine tears."

"I know that some of my readers could argue," he wrote, "that the deliberate premeditated application of minor pain to a small child is a harsh and unloving thing to do. To others, it will seem like pure barbarism. I obviously disagree."

John Fea, an American History professor at Messiah College in Pennsylvania, is critical of Dobson's ideas. However, he recounted how his father — a tough Marine — was a better parent after becoming an evangelical Christian and listening to Dobson's radio program.

"Even as a self-identified evangelical Christian that I am, I have no use in my own life for Dobson's politics or his child-rearing," he said. "But as a historian what do you do with these stories? About a dad who becomes a better dad?"

## Possible presidential run

After developing a following of millions, Dobson considered running for president in 2000, following in the footsteps of former television minister Pat Robertson's surprise success in 1988.

"He was not afraid to speak out," said Ralph Reed, a Christian conservative political organizer and lobbyist who founded the Faith and Freedom Coalition. "If Jim had decided to run, he would have been a major force."

Still, Reed's enduring memory is traveling through rural America as a younger political organizer, with Dobson's voice as his sole companion.

"I'd be out there somewhere, and I could go to the AM dial and there was never a time, day or night when I couldn't find that guy," Reed said. "There will probably never be another one like him."

Focus on the Family moved from California to Colorado Springs, Colorado, in the 1990s, establishing the city as a hub for evangelicals sometimes nicknamed the "Vatican of the West."

## A political juggernaut for decades

James Bopp, a lawyer who has represented Focus on the Family, said Dobson could rally public support like few other social conservatives.

Dobson helped create a constellation of allied Family Policy Councils in around 40 states that push a socially conservative agenda and lobby lawmakers, said Peter Wolfgang, executive director of one such group in Connecticut.

"If there is one man above all whom I would credit with being the builder — not just the thinker — who gave us the institutions that created the space for President Trump to help us turn the tide in the culture war, it would be Dr. James Dobson," Wolfgang wrote in an online column last month.

Records compiled by the watchdog group Open Secrets show Focus on the Family and Family Research Council together spent more than \$4 million on political ads and nearly \$2 million lobbying Congress since the late 1990s.

## Opposition to abortion and LGBTQ+ rights

Dobson left Focus on the Family in 2010 and founded the institute that bears his name. He continued with his nationally syndicated radio show Family Talk, carried by 1,500 radio outlets with more than half a million listeners weekly, according to the institute.

Guests on his show have discussed the importance of embracing religion and promoting the idea that people could change their sexuality.

"The homosexual community will tell us that transformations never occur. That you cannot change," he said in a 2021 video posted on his institute's site that touted "success stories" of people who "no longer struggle with homosexuality" after attending a ministry. He said there is typically "pain and agitation" associated with homosexuality.

Conversion therapy is the scientifically discredited practice of using therapy to "convert" LGBTQ+ people to heterosexuality or traditional gender expectations.

The practice is banned in 23 states and the District of Columbia, according to the Movement Advance-



ment Project, an LGBTQ+ rights think tank.

The U.S. Supreme Court agreed in March to hear a Colorado case about whether state and local governments can enforce laws banning conversion therapy for LGBTQ+ children.

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## Illegal immigration hit a record-high of 14 million in the US in 2023, Pew report finds

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

The number of people in the United States illegally surged to an all-time high of 14 million in 2023, a research group said Thursday, a major increase that still falls well short of estimates from President Donald Trump and some critics of immigration.

The Pew Research Center’s closely watched gauge rose from 11.8 million a year earlier and surpassed the previous high of 12.2 million in 2007. The increase was driven by some 6 million who were in the country with some form of legal protection. Trump has stripped many of those protections since taking office in January.

Pew, whose estimates date back to 1990, said that, while 2023 is its latest full analysis, preliminary findings show the number rose in 2024, though at a slower rate after then-President Joe Biden severely restricted asylum at the border in June of that year. The number dropped this year under Trump, but is

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still likely above 14 million.

The overall U.S. immigrant population, regardless of legal status, reached an all-time high of more than 53 million in January 2025, accounting for a record 15.8% of the U.S. population. The number has since dropped, which Pew said would be the first time it has shrunk since the 1960s.

While the findings are unlikely to settle debate, Pew's report is one of the most complete attempts to measure illegal immigration. Nearly all the increase came from countries other than Mexico. Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and India accounted for the largest numbers after Mexico. Totals from Venezuela, Cuba, Colombia, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Ukraine and Peru each more than doubled in two years.

Trump said in an address to Congress in March that 21 million people "poured into the United States" during the previous four years, far exceeding estimates from Pew and what figures on border arrests suggest. The Federation for American Immigration Reform, a group largely aligned with his policies, estimated 18.6 million in March.

The Center for Immigration Studies, a group that favors immigration restrictions, reported that there were 14.2 million people in the U.S. illegally last month, down from a peak of 15.8 million in January. Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem touted the reported drop of 1.6 million in six months. "This is massive," she said in a press release last week.

Noem's own department, through its Office of Homeland Security Statistics, estimates there were 11 million people in the U.S. illegally in 2022, its most recent count. The Center for Migration Studies, author of another closely watched survey, most recently pegged the number at 12.2 million in 2022, topping its previous high of 12 million in 2008.

Pew's findings, based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau survey and Department of Homeland Security, reflect an increase in people crossing the border illegally to exercise rights to seek asylum and Biden-era policies to grant temporary legal status. Those policies included a border appointment system called CBP One and permits for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans.

Trump has ended those policies and also sought to reverse Biden's expansion of Temporary Protected Status for people already in the United States whose countries are deemed unsafe to return to.

Mexicans were the largest nationality among people in the country illegally, a number that grew slightly to 4.3 million in 2023. The increase came almost entirely from other countries, totaling 9.7 million, up from 6.4 million two years earlier.

States with the largest numbers of people in the country illegally were, in order, California, Texas, Florida, New York, New Jersey and Illinois, though Texas sharply narrowed its gap with California. Even with the increases in recent years, six states had smaller numbers in 2023 than in the previous peak in 2007: Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico, New York and Oregon.

Pew estimated that a record 9.7 million people without legal status were in the workforce, or about 5.6% of the U.S. labor force in 2023, with Nevada, Florida, New Jersey and Texas having the largest shares.

## Wyoming man indicted for allegedly hitting wolf with snowmobile, bringing it to bar and killing it

By MEAD GRUVER Associated Press

CHEYENNE, Wyo. (AP) — A Wyoming man who allegedly hit a wolf with a snowmobile, taped the wounded animal's mouth shut and showed it off in a rural bar before killing it has been indicted on an animal cruelty charge by a grand jury nearly a year and a half after the incident.

Cody Roberts last year paid a \$250 fine for illegal possession of wildlife but avoided more serious charges as investigators struggled to find cooperative witnesses. Wyoming law gives wide leeway for people to kill wolves and other predators by a variety of means in the vast majority of the state.

Even so, the 12-person grand jury found enough evidence over the past two weeks to support the charge of felony animal cruelty, Sublette County Attorney Clayton Melinkovich said in a statement Wednesday.

Melinkovich had no further comment on the case. Roberts has not commented on the case and did not have a listed working number, nor an attorney on file in state District Court who might comment on his

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behalf.

If convicted, Roberts faces up to two years in prison and a \$5,000 fine.

Widely circulated photos showed a man identified as Roberts posing with the wolf, its mouth bound with tape, on Feb. 29, 2024, in a bar near Daniel, a town of about 150 people about 50 miles (80 kilometers) south of Jackson.

Video clips showed the same animal lying on a floor, alive but barely moving.

The light punishment against Roberts led to calls for a Wyoming tourism boycott, to little apparent effect. Yellowstone National Park had its second-busiest year on record in 2024, up more than 5% from 2023.

Grand juries in Wyoming are rare. The last one to get significant attention, in 2019, found that a sheriff's deputy did not commit involuntary manslaughter by killing an unarmed man after a traffic stop.

Government-sponsored poisoning, trapping and bounty hunting all but wiped out wolves in the lower 48 states in the 19th and 20th centuries. Starting in the 1990s, a reintroduction program brought them back to Yellowstone and central Idaho, and their numbers have rebounded.

Though wolves remain listed as a federally endangered or threatened species in most of the country, they have no such protection in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming, where they can be hunted and trapped.

Exceptions include Yellowstone and neighboring Grand Teton National Park, where hunting is prohibited and the wild canines are a major attraction for millions of tourists. In 85% percent of Wyoming, wolves are classified as predators and can be freely killed by virtually any means.

The so-called predator zone includes Sublette County, where the wolf was killed. Groups including the Humane Society argued that Wyoming's animal cruelty law could nonetheless apply there.

## **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, which were on brutal display Thursday — 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.



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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.

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

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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."

## **Today in History: August 22, first America's Cup trophy**

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Friday, Aug. 22, the 234th day of 2025. There are 131 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Aug. 22, 1851, the schooner America outraced more than a dozen British vessels off the English coast to win a trophy that came to be known as the America's Cup.

Also on this date:

In 1791, the Haitian Revolution began as enslaved people of Saint-Domingue rose up against French colonizers.

In 1910, Japan annexed Korea, which remained under Japanese control until the end of World War II.

In 1922, Irish revolutionary Michael Collins was shot to death, apparently by Irish Republican Army members opposed to the Anglo-Irish Treaty that Collins had co-signed.

In 1965, a fourteen-minute brawl ensued between the San Francisco Giants and the Los Angeles Dodgers after Giants pitcher Juan Marichal struck Dodgers catcher John Roseboro in the head with a baseball bat. (Marichal and Roseboro would later reconcile and become lifelong friends.)

In 1968, Pope Paul VI arrived in Bogota, Colombia, for the start of the first papal visit to South America.

In 1972, John Wojtowicz (WAHT'-uh-witz) and Salvatore Naturile took seven employees hostage at a Chase Manhattan Bank branch in Brooklyn, New York, during a botched robbery; the siege, which ended with Wojtowicz's arrest and Naturile's killing by the FBI, inspired the 1975 movie "Dog Day Afternoon."

In 1989, Black Panthers co-founder Huey P. Newton was shot to death in Oakland, California.

In 1992, on the second day of the Ruby Ridge siege in Idaho, an FBI sharpshooter killed Vicki Weaver, the wife of white separatist Randy Weaver.

In 1996, President Bill Clinton signed welfare reform legislation that ended guaranteed cash payments to the poor and demanded work from recipients.

In 2003, Alabama's chief justice, Roy Moore, was suspended for his refusal to obey a federal court order to remove his Ten Commandments monument from the rotunda of his courthouse.

In 2007, A Black Hawk helicopter crashed in Iraq, killing all 14 U.S. soldiers aboard.

Today's Birthdays: Author Annie Proulx (proo) is 90. Baseball Hall of Famer Carl Yastrzemski is 86. Pro Football Hall of Fame coach Bill Parcells is 84. Writer-producer David Chase is 80. Retired CBS newsman Steve Kroft is 80. International Swimming Hall of Famer Diana Nyad is 76. Baseball Hall of Famer Paul Molitor is 69. Rock guitarist Vernon Reid is 67. Country singer Collin Raye is 65. Rock singer Roland Orzabal (Tears For Fears) is 64. Singer Tori Amos is 62. International Tennis Hall of Famer Mats Wilander (VEE'-luhn-dur) is 61. Rapper GZA (JIHZ'-ah)/The Genius is 59. Actor Ty Burrell is 58. Celebrity chef Giada De Laurentiis is 55. Actor Rick Yune is 54. Singer Howie Dorough (Backstreet Boys) is 52. Comedian-actor Kristen Wiig is 52. Talk show host James Corden is 47. Pop singer Dua Lipa is 30.