

# Groton Daily Independent

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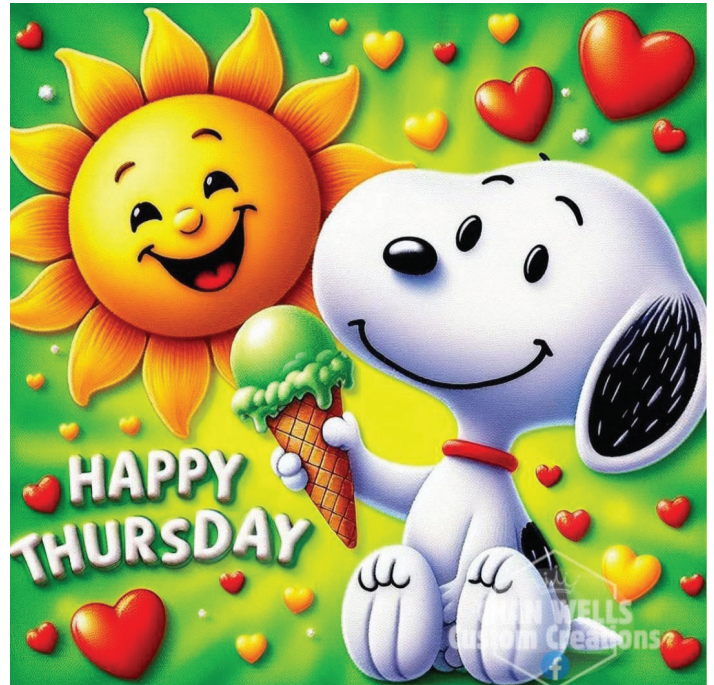
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## Thursday, Aug. 28

Senior Menu: Spaghetti with meat sauce, corn, cherry fluff, garlic bread.

School Breakfast: Biscuits.

School Lunch: Lasagna bake, corn.

Soccer in Groton: Boys vs. Freeman Academy at 4 p.m.; Girls vs. Garretson, 6 p.m.

## Friday, Aug. 29

NO SCHOOL

Senior Menu: Sloppy Joe, cucumber salad, green beans, fruit.

Football at Mobridge, 7 p.m.

## Saturday, Aug. 30

C Volleyball Tournament at Matchbox Sport Recreation Center, Aberdeen, 8 a.m.

## Sunday, Aug. 31

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

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

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.

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

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

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

**Groton Daily Independent**  
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# 1440

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

## Minneapolis School Attack

A shooter attacked a Catholic school in Minneapolis yesterday, killing two children—an 8-year-old and a 10-year-old—and wounding 17 other people, most of them children. Authorities say the attacker, 23-year-old Robin Westman, died by suicide.

Annunciation Catholic School serves children from preschool to eighth grade and had just begun its first week of school. Shortly before 8:30 am, the assailant fired dozens of rounds through the windows into the church where attendees gathered for Mass. The attack lasted roughly two minutes, according to witnesses; at least two doors were barricaded. Three weapons were discovered at the crime scene—a rifle, shotgun, and pistol—all of them legally purchased.

The shooter, who transitioned from male to female in 2019, had no prior criminal history and was reportedly a former student at the school. Officials have not publicly identified a motive; phrases including “Kill Donald Trump” were engraved on a rifle magazine. The FBI is investigating the attack as an act of domestic terrorism and a hate crime.

## Tensions over Greenland

Denmark’s foreign minister summoned the top US diplomat in Copenhagen for a meeting yesterday. The move comes after reports that at least three Americans tied to President Donald Trump were conducting covert influence operations in Greenland.

According to Danish government sources, the unnamed Americans have gathered information and pursued contacts to undermine Greenlanders’ perceptions of Denmark. The Danish foreign minister previously summoned the acting American ambassador over reports that US spy agencies were engaging in similar efforts. It’s unclear if the individuals are acting independently or under Trump’s direction. Trump has proposed annexing the semiautonomous Danish territory, strategically located in the Arctic Circle and rich in rare earth elements critical to emergent technologies.

A January opinion poll showed 85% of Greenlanders oppose joining the US, although 56% support independence from Denmark, which has exercised some control over Greenland since the early 18th century.

## ‘Portrait of a Lady’

Argentine police raided a home yesterday in search of an Italian Baroque painting looted by Nazis during World War II. After being spotted in a real estate listing this week, the painting has gone missing again.

The 17th-century painting, “Portrait of a Lady” by Giuseppe Ghislandi, belonged to Jewish Dutch art dealer Jacques Goudstikker. After Germany invaded the Netherlands, hundreds of his artworks were sold illegally to Adolf Hitler’s right-hand man, Hermann Göring. The painting was ultimately believed to have been transferred to Göring’s aide, Friedrich Kadgien, who fled to Argentina after the war.

A Dutch journalist recently spotted the portrait in a 3D tour for a seaside property owned by one of Kadgien’s daughters. The painting hung above a green sofa in the living room, but when police arrived yesterday, it appeared to have been replaced by a tapestry. Authorities are working to keep the painting in the country.

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## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Sixteen-year-old convicted for supporting the thwarted terror attack intended to target Taylor Swift's "Eras Tour" concerts in Vienna last August.

World golf No. 1 Scottie Scheffler highlights 12-man US team set to compete against Europe in next month's Ryder Cup at Bethpage Black in New York.

ESPN and global streamer DAZN reach multiyear agreement for DAZN to stream college football and basketball in markets across the UK, Europe, and MENA region.

## Science & Technology

US health regulators approve updated COVID-19 boosters for those 65 and older and those over age 5 with underlying risk factors.

CDC director Susan Monarez fired less than one month after Senate confirmation.

Historians use models predicting disease outbreaks to trace how conspiratorial rumors spread through France during the Great Fear of 1789.

Scientists create glow-in-the-dark succulents by injecting phosphorescent particles into the leaves; researchers suggest they could one day provide ambient nighttime lighting.

## Business & Markets

US stock markets close up (S&P 500 +0.2%, Dow +0.3%, Nasdaq +0.2%), with S&P 500 notching record high.

Nvidia beats Wall Street estimates as Q2 revenue rose 56% year over year to \$46.7B, breaking quarterly sales record.

Cracker Barrel shares close up 8% after restaurant chain scraps its controversial new logo.

Delta Air Lines agrees to pay \$79M to settle lawsuit over 2020 midair fuel release that drenched tens of thousands of properties across Los Angeles.

## Politics & World Affairs

Transportation Department to take control of Washington, DC's Union Station from Amtrak and nonprofit as part of larger safety and beautification push.

Federal grand jury rejects indictment against former Justice Department employee who allegedly threw a sandwich at federal officers in DC (More, w/video)

Heavy rains kill at least 34 people in Pakistan and India, displace over 200,000 in eastern Pakistan, and submerge a notable Sikh shrine in northern India.

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## This Week on GDILIVE.COM

**GT** on

Boys Soccer  
Freeman Academy at Groton  
Thurs., Aug. 28th  
4:00

Groton  
Area  
Tigers  
Groton, SD

**GDILIVE**

YouTube

A production of the  
Groton Daily Independent

For more info: GDILIVE.COM

**GT** on

Girls Soccer  
Garretson at Groton  
Thurs., Aug. 28th  
6:00

Groton  
Area  
Tigers  
Groton, SD

**GDILIVE**

YouTube

A production of the  
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For more info: GDILIVE.COM

**GT** on

Football  
Groton at Mobridge-Pollock  
Friday, Aug. 29th  
7:00

Groton  
Area  
Tigers  
Groton, SD

**GDILIVE**

YouTube

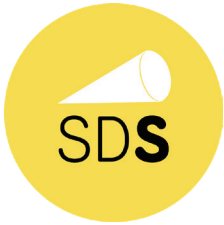
A production of the  
Groton Daily Independent

For more info: GDILIVE.COM

## Bridal Shower

Come and Go Shower for Madeline Schuelke from 2-4 on Saturday, September 6 at Olde Bank and Cafe. MK is the bride of Matthew Sterud. Please bring a Christmas ornament or decoration that Madeline can use during the holidays.





## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### Cancellation of solar energy grants is 'another broken promise' for tribes, recipient says

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER

The Trump administration's cancellation of solar energy grants benefiting low-income households is "catastrophic for Indian Country," according to a grant recipient that was working with tribes.

Projects for tribal and rural areas in and around South Dakota had been awarded about \$260 million from the Solar for All program during the Biden administration.

The Trump administration canceled nearly \$7 billion in grants from the initiative earlier this month, after the Environmental Protection Agency said the fund for the program was eliminated in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act passed by Congress and signed into law by President Trump.

Indigenized Energy was managing \$135.6 million awarded to the Northern Plains Tribal Coalition. The five-state, 14-tribe effort included the South Dakota-based Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate and the Flandreau Santee, Standing Rock, Oglala and Rosebud Sioux tribes.

Indigenized Energy Founder and Executive Director Cody Two Bears, a member of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, said the group planned to complete thousands of projects in the region — more than 1,000 in South Dakota alone. Two Bears sees solar energy as a path to job creation and skills training, as well as an opportunity to bolster tribal sovereignty and independence.

"It was just another broken promise to Native tribes," Two Bears said. "It's one of those things where we were promised opportunity and hope in these communities and for these jobs, and that was taken away by a stroke of a pen."

Two Bears said Indigenized Energy hadn't spent much of the grant award yet, since it was in the midst of planning and hiring for the projects. Indigenized Energy hired 20 people to carry out the projects in tribal communities and planned to hire another 70. Those 20 staff members were laid off earlier this month.

The company was able to complete two projects late last year, including a solar panel installation at a private home that leaders of the Oglala Sioux Tribe identified as a "great need."

The nonprofit installed a residential solar system on the property with storage batteries. The system is expected to save the homeowners about \$1,225 a year on electricity.

"Solar energy is going to be the option for Native tribes," Two Bears said, "because solar is getting cheaper more and more every day, while the cost of electricity is only getting higher every month."



**Solar panels are installed at a private residence on the Pine Ridge Reservation in southwestern South Dakota in late 2024.** (Courtesy of Indigenized Energy)

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Thirty Oglala Lakota tribal members participated in the installation and training. Six of the people were later hired by a solar panel installation company.

The nonprofit will likely incur more costs to close out the Solar For All program without federal reimbursements. Indigenized Energy is seeking alternative funding for the projects they had "teed up," Two Bears said.

"It's really our responsibility to make sure that all the work we put in up to this point was not for nothing."

The state of South Dakota didn't apply for any of the funding on the government level, making it one of a few states to have skipped the opportunity.

Aside from the tribal coalition, a Washington, D.C.-based "green bank" called Coalition for Green Capital pulled in another \$125 million for tribal and rural projects across the Dakotas, with \$62.5 million earmarked for South Dakota. The organization did not respond to South Dakota Searchlight interview requests.

Rick Bell is on the Dakota Rural Action board of directors, which helped the organization with community outreach. The group was hoping to start the project with an installation at low-income housing developments in the Rapid City area, Bell said.

"It's a sin and a shame this is being yanked out again," Bell said, referring to the administrative freeze on the funding earlier this year.

Even if there is another legal battle involving the funding and it is reauthorized, Bell worries the group won't be able to meet the grant's five-year schedule and deadline.

"We've already burned through a year and a half," he said.

*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.*

## Tribal radio stations wait on \$9M pledged in handshake deal by senator from SD

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — Tribal radio stations that are supposed to receive millions to fill the hole created when Congress eliminated funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting haven't heard anything from the Trump administration about when it will send the money or how much in grants they'll receive.

Unlike most government spending deals, the handshake agreement South Dakota Republican Sen. Mike Rounds negotiated with the White House budget director in exchange for Rounds' vote on the rescissions bill wasn't placed in the legislation, so it never became law.

Instead, Rounds is trusting the Trump administration to move \$9.4 million in funding from an undisclosed account to more than two dozen tribal radio stations in rural areas of Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Minnesota, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota and Wisconsin that receive community service grants from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

But neither Rounds' office, the Office of Management and Budget, nor the Bureau of Indian Affairs responded to emails from States Newsroom asking when the grants would be sent to those radio stations and whether the funding levels would be equal to what they currently receive.

Loris Taylor, president and CEO of Native Public Media, a network of more than 60 broadcast stations that's headquartered in Arizona, said she's written to Rounds and the Bureau of Indian Affairs about the handshake deal reached in July but hasn't heard back.

"I can't place my expectations on something that hasn't been concretely shared with the stations," Taylor said. "And so all I can say is that our expectations are to raise money for the stations to make sure that they have operational dollars for FY 2026, and that's exactly where we're placing our focus."

Taylor pointed out that Rounds' informal deal with White House budget director Russ Vought doesn't

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**U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds (center) and tribal leaders speak to the media after a public safety roundtable on Aug. 14, 2024, in Wagner, South Dakota. With Rounds, from left, are Cheyenne River Chairman Ryman LeBeau, Lower Brule Chairman Clyde Estes, Sisseton Wahpeton Secretary Curtis Bissonette, Wayne Boyd of Rosebud Sioux Tribe, Yankton Chairman Robert Flying Hawk, Oglala President Frank Star Comes out and Crow Creek Chairman Peter Lengkeek.** (Photo by Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

cover all of the tribal stations in the network and will only last for one year, leaving questions about long-term budgeting.

An Interior Department spokesperson wrote in an email after this story originally published that "Indian Affairs has received a list of 37 stations and is working to distribute about \$9.4 million in funding to support them.

"We know how important these stations are for public safety and are moving quickly to get the money out. Before we can set a timeline, we need to coordinate with the stations, tribes and other partners to ensure the funds are delivered efficiently and meet the needs of Indian Country. We will share updates when we have more to share publicly."

The spokesperson did not provide a list of those stations or information on how the department plans to divvy up the funding.

## 'The little stations like us'

Dave Patty, general manager at KIYU-FM in Galena, Alaska, said he isn't planning to receive any federal funding during the upcoming fiscal year, in part because he hasn't heard anything from the administration. The 2026 federal fiscal year begins on Oct. 1.

"Well, I certainly can't budget anything that I don't know is coming, so I'm definitely not planning for it now," he said.

President Donald Trump and Republican lawmakers' decision to eliminate all funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting because of their belief of left-leaning bias at National Public Radio wasn't the right way to address those frustrations, Patty said.

"The narrative was definitely centered around NPR and that was definitely wrong because NPR aren't the ones in trouble," he said. "NPR is well funded from philanthropists all over the country, and as a mother ship, NPR is not going anywhere. It's the little stations like us that are going to go away because, for instance, about 60% of our budget came from the CPB grant."

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting announced in early August it will shutter most of its operations by the end of September, with some staff working through January.

NPR and the Public Broadcasting Service have made no such announcements, but local stations throughout the country have announced budget cuts since Congress approved the bill rescinding \$1.1 billion in funding it previously approved for CPB. That money was supposed to cover costs during fiscal 2026 and 2027.



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## Lawsuit feared

Karl Habeck, general manager at WOJB in Hayward, Wisconsin, said he's only heard "gossip" and "rumors" about how exactly the handshake agreement will work in practice but is concerned that someone may challenge the Trump administration's authority to move money around since it wasn't in the bill and never became law.

"What gives them the right to take these funds that were allocated for environmental projects and send them towards Native American radio stations?" Habeck said.

Typically, the administration would need sign-off from appropriators in Congress before moving large sums of money from one account to another.

Officials haven't said publicly where exactly they plan on taking the money from and it's unclear if the Trump administration is trying to create a new account for grants to rural tribal radio stations out of thin air, without an actual appropriation from Congress.

Alaska Republican Sen. Lisa Murkowski, chairwoman of the Interior-Environment Appropriations Subcommittee, and Oregon Democratic Sen. Jeff Merkley, ranking member on the panel, didn't immediately respond to a request for details.

Habeck said he expects WOJB will be okay financially for the next year, but that he and many others don't know what the future will hold after that.

"It's going to be hard," Habeck said. "I guess people don't understand. You know, they try to compare us to commercial radio and it's two different things."

Local broadcasting stations, he said, have fewer employees and are often a nexus for their communities, providing information about everything from lost dogs to emergency alerts to high school sports updates.

"That doesn't happen everywhere. It'd be a shame to lose that," Habeck said. "I think we're an integral part of the community and people have come to rely on us and appreciate that. And I'm talking everybody. I don't care what their political stance is."

## A different mission for tribal radio stations

Sue Matter, station manager at KWSO in Warm Springs, Oregon, said she reached out to one of her home-state senators, Ron Wyden, who contacted Rounds' office to ask how the funding would be allocated and when. But Wyden was unable to share any concrete information.

Matter also spoke with someone she knows at the Bureau of Indian Affairs, who was similarly unable to provide information about how the agreement will actually work.

"I'm just assuming there's not anything," Matter said, adding she's now focusing on securing a grant from the bridge fund that's supposed to help the more at-risk public broadcasting stations.

Tribal stations, she said, often have substantially different missions than commercial stations, focusing on language and cultural programs as well as preserving their traditional life.

"That's endangered," Matter said. "We won't let anything stop us. But it's sad that for whatever reason this funding has been taken away."

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



## COMMENTARY

### Republican leader's call to civil war shows extent of South Dakota's conspiracy infection

by Dana Hess

In recent years it felt like the rest of the world was going crazy. There were conspiracy theories about the weirdest things: Barack Obama's birth certificate, the existence of a deep state that secretly controls the federal government, Donald Trump's supposed fight against a Satanic group of child molesters.

Surely, these theories sprang from the cities where the friction of daily life in such confined quarters led people to believe the oddest things. Out here on the prairie, where there's plenty of room to roam, we seemed immune to those ideas. We seemed safe from conspiracy theories.

Those days are over, if they ever existed.

For me, the first hint that South Dakotans could be just as addled as the rest of the nation came in 2022. In one of the first commentaries ever published by South Dakota Searchlight, the writer described how he tried and tried to get secretary of state candidate Monae Johnson to admit that she believed the 2020 election was stolen from Donald Trump. He likened her artful dodging of his questions to trying to nail Jell-O to a tree.

As a story, an election denier running for an office that oversees elections had a certain man bites dog quality to it. As an indication of what was to come, having a Republican candidate for statewide office embrace a conspiracy theory was just the tip of the iceberg.

In 2023 the Legislature considered House Concurrent Resolution 6006 that called for the fair treatment of the Jan. 6, 2021, defendants who besieged the United States Capitol. Sponsored by Rep. Phil Jensen, a Rapid City Republican, the resolution was based on the conspiracy theory that those prisoners endured inhumane conditions; were subjected to cruel and unusual punishment; and were deprived of adequate food, medical care and access to religious services and attorneys.

Concurrent resolutions don't have the weight of law, but are a reflection of the mood of the Legislature. The House State Affairs Committee wasn't in the mood, defeating the resolution 12-0. That doesn't change the fact that an elected representative sought to give a conspiracy theory legislative legitimacy. Since President Trump pardoned the insurrectionists, don't be surprised if a new resolution comes along, asking for reparations for the Jan. 6 "patriots."



**State Rep. Brandei Schaeffbauer, R-Aberdeen, speaks on the South Dakota House floor on Jan. 17, 2024.** (Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

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Meanwhile, the conspiracy theory that the 2020 election was somehow stolen from President Trump caused a flurry of activity in South Dakota as "election integrity" backers made life miserable for county commissions across the state and pressured lawmakers to do more to make sure that the state's already squeaky clean elections were beyond reproach. In effect, a conspiracy theory has led to an unneeded movement that still has momentum.

The level to which conspiracy theories have been accepted among elected leaders in this state can be found in an episode of the Ken Matthews podcast, which was called out for criticism on the South Dakota War College website. In that episode, Matthews interviewed Aberdeen Rep. Brandei Schaefbauer, a Republican majority whip in the House. In the last legislative session, Schaefbauer sponsored House Concurrent Resolution 6009, which sought to have the attorney general file a lawsuit against China to seek damages related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

China, however, isn't the only pandemic culprit, as Schaefbauer told Matthews. Referencing the former director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, Anthony Fauci, Schaefbauer said, "He should be on death row for killing millions and millions of people."

She also had something to say about the way the Trump administration is handling the Jeffrey Epstein files, which have been the topic of conspiracy theories about underage girls provided to high-ranking officials. Schaefbauer said "if something doesn't happen" to satisfy people calling for the Epstein files, "there is going to be, I believe, a revolt of the American people. Because they have, I mean, we have all been promised that something is going to happen, and we get this little, you know, give us this little nugget, and then it's a pacifier for us. Well, no, I think the way things are going — people are so upset and they have nothing else to lose — so why not let's just start, you know, a civil war again."

There you have it, a call to civil war by a leader in South Dakota's Republican Party. That almost makes Johnson's refusal to answer questions about who won the 2020 election seem quaint and harmless.

*Dana Hess spent more than 25 years in South Dakota journalism, editing newspapers in Redfield, Milbank and Pierre. He's retired and lives in Brookings, working occasionally as a freelance writer.*

## Trump administration says CDC chief ousted, but her lawyer says she hasn't resigned or been fired

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — The director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention doesn't appear inclined to leave her post, despite the Trump administration announcing Wednesday that she's no longer running one of the country's top public health agencies.

Attorneys for Susan Monarez, who received Senate confirmation in late July, posted that she hasn't been fired or resigned, but didn't announce whether they plan to sue the administration.

"When CDC Director Susan Monarez refused to rubber-stamp unscientific, reckless directives and fire dedicated health experts she chose protecting the public over serving a political agenda," wrote Mark S. Zaid and Abbe David Lowell. "For that, she has been targeted. Dr. Monarez has neither resigned nor received notification from the White House that she has been fired, and as a person of integrity and devoted to science, she will not resign."

The statement from Monarez's attorneys came just hours after the Department of Health and Human Services, which oversees the CDC, wrote on social media that she was no longer running the agency.

"Susan Monarez is no longer director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention," the post stated. "We thank her for her dedicated service to the American people. @SecKennedy has full confidence in his team at@CDCgov who will continue to be vigilant in protecting Americans against infectious diseases at home and abroad."

The Washington Post first reported the news.

The U.S. Senate voted along party lines to confirm Monarez as CDC director in late July, giving her just

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weeks in one of the nation's top public health roles.

Monarez's last post on social media from her official account was on Aug. 22, marking the death of a police officer after a gunman opened fire at the CDC's headquarters in Atlanta.

"A large group of CDC employees and I attended today's memorial for Officer David Rose, whose Tour of Duty ended on August 8 when he responded to shots fired," Monarez wrote. "He leaves behind a legacy of love, courage, and service to the community that will never be forgotten."

The dispute over Monarez's position as CDC director appeared to potentially mark the beginning of a wave of resignations from other public health officials, including Director of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases Demetre C. Daskalakis.

"I am unable to serve in an environment that treats CDC as a tool to generate policies and materials that do not reflect scientific reality and are designed to hurt rather than to improve the public's health," Daskalakis wrote in a lengthy social media post. "The recent change in the adult and children's immunization schedule threaten the lives of the youngest Americans and pregnant people."

## Monarez second choice after Weldon

Monarez was President Donald Trump's second choice for CDC director. He originally selected former Florida U.S. Rep. Dave Weldon to run the CDC shortly after he secured election to the Oval Office in November. But the White House pulled Weldon's nomination in March, after it appeared he couldn't secure the votes needed for confirmation.

Later that month, Trump announced his plans to nominate Monarez in a social media post.

"Dr. Monarez brings decades of experience championing Innovation, Transparency, and strong Public Health Systems," Trump wrote. "She has a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin, and PostDoctoral training in Microbiology and Immunology at Stanford University School of Medicine.

"As an incredible mother and dedicated public servant, Dr. Monarez understands the importance of protecting our children, our communities, and our future. Americans have lost confidence in the CDC due to political bias and disastrous mismanagement. Dr. Monarez will work closely with our GREAT Secretary of Health and Human Services, Robert Kennedy Jr. Together, they will prioritize Accountability, High Standards, and Disease Prevention to finally address the Chronic Disease Epidemic and, MAKE AMERICA HEALTHY AGAIN!"



**Susan Monarez, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, testifies during her confirmation hearing before the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions in the Dirksen Senate Office Building on June 25, 2025 in Washington, D.C..** (Photo by Kayla Bartkowski/Getty Images)



## Restoring trust in CDC

Monarez testified in front of the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions in June as part of her confirmation process. The committee voted 12-11 in July to send her nomination to the Senate floor, where Republicans approved her to the post later that month.

Chairman Bill Cassidy, R-La., said during the committee's markup that he believed Monarez would put science first and help to restore public trust in the agency.

"The United States needs a CDC director who makes decisions rooted in science, a leader who will reform the agency and work to restore public trust in health institutions," Cassidy said at the time. "With decades of proven experience as a public health official, Dr. Monarez is ready to take on this challenge."

*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.*

## Two children dead in shooting at Minneapolis church

BY: MAX NESTERAK AND MICHELLE GRIFFITH

Two children, ages 8 and 10, were killed by a shooter who opened fire outside Annunciation Church in south Minneapolis, where students at the Catholic school were gathered Wednesday for Mass to celebrate the beginning of the school year.

Another 17 people were injured — 14 children and three parishioners in their 80s — and are being treated at area hospitals. One adult and six children were in critical condition Wednesday afternoon, according to Hennepin Healthcare.

Annunciation Principal Matt DeBoer said teachers acted within seconds of gunfire erupting to shelter children under pews.

"It could have been significantly worse without their heroic action," DeBoer said at a news conference Wednesday afternoon. "We lost two angels today. Please continue to pray for those still receiving care. We can't change the past, but we can do something about the future."

The shooter, identified as 23-year-old Robin Westman, barricaded the door of the church with a wood board and shot dozens of rounds through the window using a rifle, a shotgun and a pistol, according to Minneapolis Police Chief Brian O'Hara.

"The coward that shot these victims took his own life in the rear of the church," O'Hara said.

Outside the school after the shooting, parents were picking up their children, who wore the green polos



**Police respond at Annunciation School after a man killed two children and injured several others Wednesday, Aug. 27, 2025, in Minneapolis.** (Photo by Nicole Neri/Minnesota Reformer)



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that are the school uniform.

Susan Ruff, a neighbor whose children attended the school at Annunciation and has a grandson currently enrolled, said she saw the shooting from her window.

She witnessed a man dressed in black, wearing a helmet, with a long gun, shooting at the church from the outside. She heard 25 or 30 gun shots. "It sounded like someone was dropping a dumpster. That loud bang. But I kept hearing it, so I thought, that's not a dumpster." Her grandson was unhurt in the shooting.

Westman purchased the weapons legally and did not have a criminal record, O'Hara said. He said law enforcement were not seeking other suspects.

Court records show a Mary Westman, who retired from Annunciation Catholic School in 2021 according to a now-deleted Facebook post, requested a name change for her child from Robert to Robin in 2019 saying "minor identifies as female." O'Hara said he could not confirm the suspect's connection to the school or that the suspect changed their name.

O'Hara said investigators believe Westman is behind videos scheduled to post on YouTube on Wednesday morning, which have since been taken down. One video opens with a four-page handwritten screed that begins, "I don't expect forgiveness ... I do apologize for the effects my actions will have on your lives."

It also showed an arsenal of guns and ammunition with writing on them reading "Where Is Your God?" and "Suck On This!" Other writings, some in Russian, target President Donald Trump and wish death upon Jewish people.

Numerous law enforcement agencies were on the scene including the FBI, ATF and the Hennepin County Sheriff's Office.

O'Hara said law enforcement are executing four search warrants, one at the church and three others at residences in the metro area connected to the suspect where firearms are being recovered.

"We are all working tirelessly to uncover the full scope of what happened, to try and identify a motive, why it happened, and whether there are any other further details," O'Hara said.

Neighbors and former students said they were shaken by the shooting in the typically quiet southwestern Minneapolis neighborhood.

Jack Friedman, 25, went to the school and lives in the area. He said, "You never think that it's going to happen at the school you went to, but then you start thinking how naïve to believe that. Because it happens everywhere."

Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey, speaking at a news conference outside the school, called for action — not just thoughts and prayers, which has become a rote response to mass shootings.

"Don't just say, this is about thoughts and prayers right now," he said. "These kids were literally praying. It was the first week of school. They were in a church."

Vigils are planned Wednesday night for the victims. Annunciation Church announced a prayer vigil at 7 p.m. in the Holy Angels Gym. Anti-gun violence group Moms Demand Action announced a candlelight vigil at 8 p.m. at Minneapolis Lynnhurst Park.

*Max Nesterak is the deputy editor of the Minnesota Reformer and reports on labor and housing. Most recently he was an associate producer for Minnesota Public Radio after a stint at NPR. He also co-founded the Behavioral Scientist and was a Fulbright Scholar to Berlin, Germany.*

*Michelle Griffith covers Minnesota politics and policy for the Minnesota Reformer, with a focus on marginalized communities. Most recently she was a reporter with The Forum of Fargo-Moorhead in North Dakota where she covered state and local government and Indigenous issues. For two years she was also a corps member with Report for America, a national nonprofit that places journalists in local newsrooms and news deserts. She lives in St. Paul and likes to knit and watch documentaries in her free time.*

## New FAFSA form to be ready by Oct. 1, Education secretary says

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA

WASHINGTON — The updated form to apply for federal student aid will launch for all students by Oct. 1, U.S. Education Secretary Linda McMahon told congressional leaders in a letter this week.

The department began testing in early August for the 2026-27 Free Application for Federal Student Aid — better known as FAFSA — to address any bugs or technical issues before opening it up to everyone in the fall.

The agency signaled earlier this year that the form would open up to the general public by Oct. 1, the typical opening date for the annual form that's now congressionally mandated.

The department noted that for the 2026-27 FAFSA, 2,435 forms were started, 1,372 were submitted and 1,347 had been processed, as of Monday.

McMahon's letter to lawmakers on Tuesday followed the botched rollout of the 2024-25 FAFSA, which faced several highly publicized hiccups during then-President Joe Biden's administration's attempts to implement a makeover after Congress passed the FAFSA Simplification Act in 2020.

The rollout of the following 2025-26 form, still under the Biden administration, took a staggered approach that included several rounds of testing and gradually increased the number of people able to complete the form.

Though that form debuted earlier than the 2024-25 application, the full rollout still came nearly two months later than the usual Oct. 1 date.

"Under President Trump's leadership, our team has prioritized technical competence and expertise, which has led to the earliest testing launch of the FAFSA form in history," McMahon said in a statement Wednesday.

"The Biden Administration failed the FAFSA rollout two years ago, leaving millions of American students and families without clear answers or a path forward in their educational journey," she said. "Congress gave us a mandate to improve the form and deliver it on time for students, families, and institutions of higher education — and I am proud to certify that the form will launch on time this fall."

McMahon's letter to the chairs and ranking members of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions and the House Committee on Education and Workforce follows a law signed by Biden last December that ensures the FAFSA rolls out by Oct. 1 each year.

The law also requires the Education secretary to notify Congress by Sept. 1 annually on whether the department will meet that Oct. 1 deadline.

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



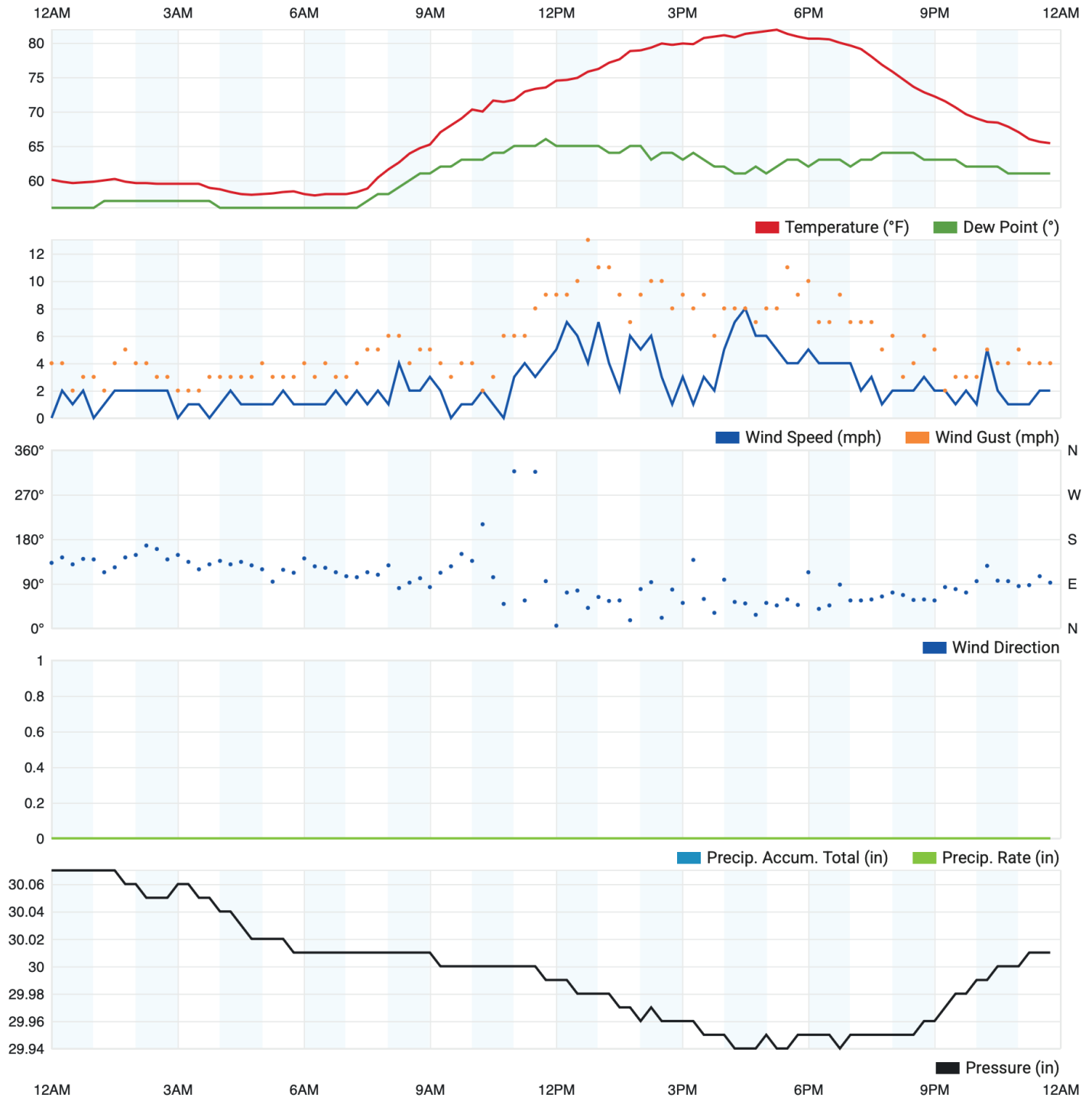
**The updated Free Application for Federal Student Aid for the 2026-2027 school year will launch for all students by Oct. 1, U.S. Education Secretary Linda McMahon said.** (Getty Images)

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

August 27, 2025





# Broton Daily Independent

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Today



High: 83 °F

Patchy Fog  
then Sunny

Tonight



Low: 59 °F

Partly Cloudy

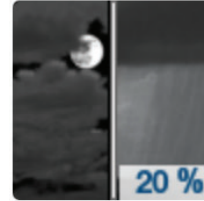
Friday



High: 81 °F

Partly Sunny  
then Slight  
Chance  
Showers

Friday Night



Low: 59 °F

Mostly Cloudy  
then Slight  
Chance  
Showers

Saturday



High: 78 °F

Chance  
Showers then  
Chance  
T-storms



## Precipitation Returns Friday

August 28, 2025  
3:56 AM

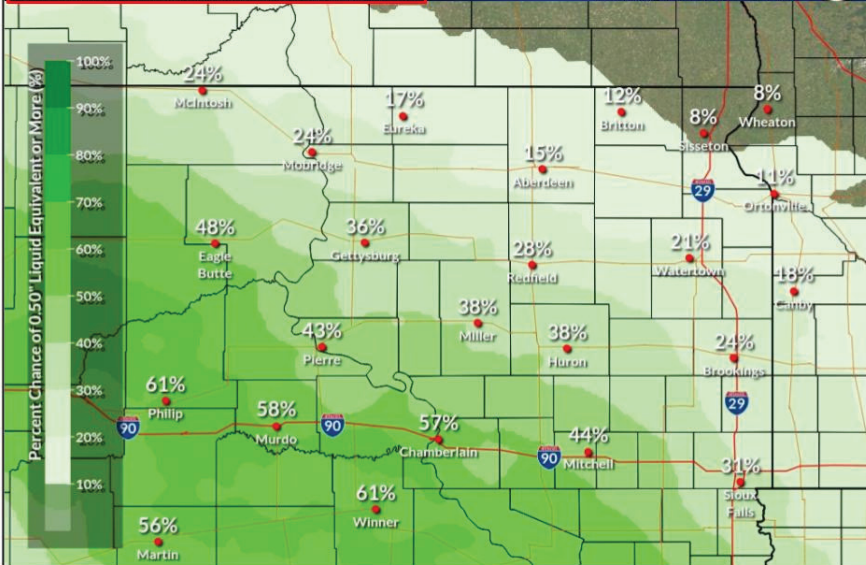
Mainly Over Portions of Central South Dakota

### Percent Chance of 0.50" of Rain or More

For the 48 hours ending on Sun Aug 31, 2025 at 7:00AM CDT

Weather Forecast Office  
Aberdeen, SD

Issued Aug 28, 2025 2:53 AM CDT



- Showers are expected to move in over central SD Friday morning
  - ◆ Highest chances (50-75%) over south central SD through Friday night
  - ◆ A weak thunderstorm is possible
    - No severe weather anticipated
- Precipitation is forecasted to spread eastward through Saturday night
  - ◆ Highest chances (50-70%) continue over central SD
  - ◆ Less rain chances over far northeastern SD (20-30%)
- Highest probability (40-60%) of rainfall of 0.50" or more Friday morning through Sunday morning is over south central SD



National Oceanic and  
Atmospheric Administration  
U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

A system will bring the return of rain (and a few weak thunderstorms possible) Friday and Saturday with the higher moisture potential over western through south central SD. For a detailed forecast for your location through the holiday weekend, visit [weather.gov/abr](https://weather.gov/abr)



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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 82 °F at 5:06 PM

Heat Index: 83 °F at 5:00 PM

Low Temp: 58 °F at 4:49 AM

Wind: 13 mph at 12:39 PM

Precip: : 0.00

## Today's Info

Record High: 104 in 1937

Record Low: 31 in 1893

Average High: 81

Average Low: 54

Average Precip in August.: 2.03

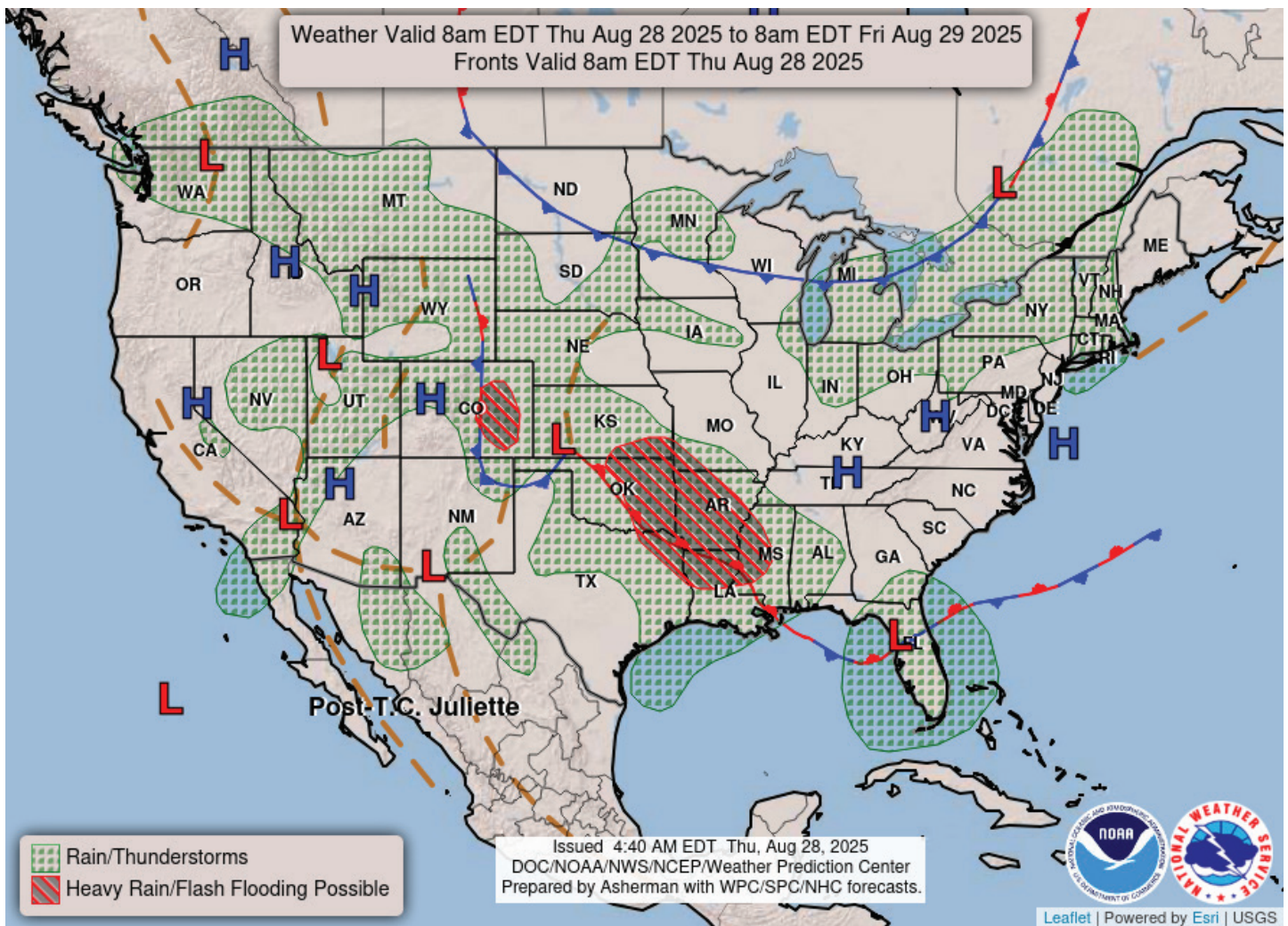
Precip to date in August: 4.42

Average Precip to date: 16.13

Precip Year to Date: 20.30

Sunset Tonight: 8:18 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:50 am



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## Today in Weather History

August 28, 2011: Several thunderstorms tracking southeast across the region brought large hail along with damaging winds to parts of the area. Golf ball hail broke some windows on several homes and the church in Herried in Campbell County. Colossal hail up to three inches in diameter caused some vehicle and siding damage in Tolstoy, in Potter County. In Redfield, seventy mph winds downed a tree along with many large tree branches. Also, the metal on a roof was peeled back.

1898 - Torrents of rain accompanied by a furious wind upset the rain gage at Fort Mohave AZ. However, water in a wash tub set out on the mesa, clear of everything, measured eight inches after the 45 minute storm. (The Weather Channel)

1911 - Saint George, GA, was deluged with 18.00 inches of rain in 24 hours to establish a state record. (The Weather Channel)

1959 - Lieutenant Colonel William Rankin bailed out of his plane at a height of 46,000 feet into a violent thunderstorm, and lived to write about the 45 minute journey (which normally would have been a thirteen minute descent). He described it as one of the most bizarre and painful experiences imaginable. (The Weather Channel)

1971 - Heavy rains from Tropical Storm Doria caused devastating floods in central and northeast New Jersey resulting in 138 million dollars damage. In southeastern Pennsylvania, high winds downed trees and power lines, and in New York City, heavy rains flooded streets and subways. (David Ludlum)

1973 - An F4 tornado touched down near Canaan, New York, and moved to western Massachusetts. Three people were killed in West Stockbridge, Massachusetts when a truck stop was destroyed, and another person died in a ruined house nearby.

1986 - The temperature at Apalachicola, FL, dipped to 62 degrees to shatter their previous August record by four degrees, having tied their August record high of 99 degrees on the 2nd of the month. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Severe thunderstorms broke the heat in the southeastern U.S. and the Gulf Coast Region, but not before seven cities reported record high temperatures for the date. The severe thunderstorms produced wind gusts to 80 mph downing large trees around Horse Shoe NC, and pelted southeastern Meridian MS with hail two inches in diameter. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Tropical Storm Chris spawned a tornado near Manning, SC, which killed one person, and spawned three tornadoes in North Carolina. Chris produced one to two foot tides, and three to six inch rains, over coastal South Carolina. Severe thunderstorms in New York State and Vermont, developing ahead of a cold front, spawned a tornado which killed one person at Hector NY, produced tennis ball size hail at Brandon VT, and produced wind gusts to 80 mph at Lyndonville VT. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Early morning thunderstorms in Nebraska produced 4.50 inches of rain around McCook, and 4.65 inches near Auburn and Brownville. Showers in Montana pushed the rainfall total for the month at Havre past the previous August record of 3.90 inches. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Between 3:15 p.m. and 3:45 p.m. a devastating F5 tornado ripped a 16.4 mile-long path through portions of Kendall and Will counties in northern Illinois. A total of 29 people were killed, and 350 more were injured. An estimated \$160 million in damages occurred. The tornado's path width ranged from 200 yards to half a mile. A total of 470 homes were destroyed, and another 1000 homes were damaged. Sixty-five thousand customers lost power.

2005 - Hurricane Katrina attained Category 5 status on the morning of August 28 and reached its peak strength at 1800 UTC that day, with maximum sustained winds of 175 mph and a minimum central pressure of 902 mbars (26.6 inHg).



## NEW BEGINNINGS

"There's nothing left for me. I've made such a mess out of my life that I have nothing to look forward to. And the tragedy of it all is that things looked great for so many years. Now, when I look into the future all I see is gloom and darkness. Where can I find anything to look forward to?" he asked.

"There is an answer - I can assure you of that," I said. Turning to Psalm 112:4, I read, "Even in darkness light dawns for the upright."

God will always provide His Light for those who seek it. No matter how far we have fallen or how little hope we may have, God can take the bitterness of defeat and despair and turn them into stepping-stones of success. When we willingly face and acknowledge our faults and shortcomings, ask for and accept His forgiveness and surrender our lives to Him, He will bring victory out of defeat.

Consider the story of Peter. When someone asked if He was a follower of Jesus, he lied, saying, "I am not!" A few moments before His denial he attempted to protect Jesus with his sword. And there was Mark - the author of the second book of the New Testament. He started as a strong believer completely trusting the message of Jesus. Suddenly, things grew boring, and the excitement evaporated. So, he gave up the "call" and quit.

But despite their failures, He did not give up on them. And neither will He give up on us. He forgave them, as He will us, and bring His light back into our lives.

Prayer: Help us, Father, to understand that "failure is not final" because Your grace provides a new beginning. Teach us to begin again and rise when we fall. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: – Even in darkness light dawns for the upright, for those who are gracious and compassionate and righteous. Psalm 112:4

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



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Pay with Venmo: @paperpaul    Phone Number to Confirm: 7460



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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 08.26.25

7 12 30 40 69 17

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$277,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 31 Mins  
0 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 08.27.25

12 13 25 40 52 9

All Star Bonus: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$2,450,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 46  
Mins 0 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 08.27.25

6 15 26 38 48 8

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 1 Mins 0  
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 08.27.25

2 6 7 29 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$20,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 1 Mins  
0 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 08.27.25

12 19 26 51 62 18

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 30  
Mins 0 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 08.27.25

9 12 22 41 61 25

Power Play: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$950,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 30  
Mins 0 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

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

### **NTSB says B-52 bomber nearly hit two different planes in North Dakota last month**

By JOSH FUNK AP Transportation Writer

Shortly after an airliner made an aggressive maneuver to avoid colliding with a B-52 last month over North Dakota, the bomber nearly collided with a small private plane as it flew past the Minot airport, according to the National Transportation Safety Board.

Investigators released their preliminary report Wednesday on the July 19 incident that happened after the bomber completed a flyover at the North Dakota State Fair in Minot. The close call with Delta Flight 3788 is well known because of a video a passenger shot of the pilot's announcement after making an abrupt turn to avoid the bomber. But the fact that the B-52 subsequently came within one-third of a mile of a small Piper airplane hadn't been previously reported.

The SkyWest pilot told his passengers that day that he was surprised to see the bomber looming to the right, and the U.S. Air Force also said that air traffic controllers never warned the B-52 crew about the nearby airliner. Officials said at the time that the flyover had been cleared with the FAA and the private controllers who oversee the Minot airport ahead of time.

These close calls were just the latest incidents to raise questions about aviation safety in the wake of January's midair collision over Washington, D.C., that killed 67 people.

The NTSB report doesn't identify the cause of the incidents, but the transcript of the conversation between the three planes, the air traffic controller on duty in Minot and a regional FAA controller at a radar center in Rapid City, South Dakota, show several confusing commands were issued by the tower that day. Investigators won't release their final report on the cause until sometime next year.

With the B-52 and Delta planes converging on the airport from different directions, the controller told the Delta plane that was carrying 80 people to fly in a circle to the right until the pilot told the controller he didn't want to do that because the bomber was off to his right, so he broke off his approach.

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

At one point, the controller intended to give the Delta plane directions but mistakenly called out the bomber's call sign and had to cancel that order.

Less than a minute after the B-52 crossed the path of the airliner, it nearly struck the small plane that was also circling while the bomber flew past the airport on its way back to Minot Air Force Base where 26 of the bombers are based.

Aviation safety consultant Jeff Guzzetti, who used to investigate plane crashes for both the NTSB and FAA, said the controller didn't give the commands for the Delta and Piper planes to circle soon enough for them to stay a safe distance away from the bomber.

The transcript shows the local controller calling the regional FAA controller to get permission every time before he issued a command to the planes. Guzzetti said it is not clear whether taking that extra step to consult with the other controller delayed the commands or whether the Minot controller simply didn't anticipate how close the planes would come.

"It all just kind of came together at the same time very quickly, and this controller was not on top of it," Guzzetti said.

The Minot airport typically handles between 18 and 24 flights a day. But at this moment, three planes were all arriving at the same time.

After the close calls, all the planes landed safely.

These North Dakota close calls put the spotlight on small airports like Minot that are run without their own radar systems, but it is not clear whether that contract tower program that includes 265 airport tow-

ers nationwide had anything to do with the incident. There was one controller staffing the tower in Minot at the time of incident, and a controller at a regional radar center in Rapid City was helping direct planes in the area.

## Mass Russian drone and missile attack kills 14 and injures 48 in Ukraine's capital

By HANNA ARHIROVA and SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia bombarded the Ukrainian capital with drones and missiles early Thursday, including a rare strike in the city center, killing at least 14 people and wounding 48, local authorities said.

It was the first major Russian attack on Kyiv in weeks as U.S.-led peace efforts to end the three-year war struggled to gain traction. Russia launched 598 strike drones and decoys and 31 missiles of different types across the country, according to Ukraine's Air Force, making it one of the war's biggest air attacks.

Among the dead were three children ages 2, 14 and 17, said Tymur Tkachenko, the head of Kyiv's city administration. The numbers are expected to rise. Rescue teams were on site to pull people trapped underneath the rubble.

"Russia chooses ballistics instead of the negotiating table," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in a post on X following the attack. "We expect a response from everyone in the world who has called for peace but now more often stays silent rather than taking principled positions."

Russia's Ministry of Defense said Thursday it shot down 102 Ukrainian drones overnight, mostly in the country's southwest. A drone attack sparked a blaze at the Afipsky oil refinery in the Krasnodar region, local officials said, while a second fire was reported at the Novokuibyshevsk refinery in the Samara region.

Ukrainian drones have repeatedly struck refineries and other oil infrastructure in recent weeks in an attempt to weaken Russia's war economy, causing gas stations in some Russian regions to run dry and prices to spike.

Russia strikes central Kyiv in a rare attack

Russia launched decoy drones, cruise missiles and ballistic missiles, said Tkachenko.

At least 20 locations across seven districts of Kyiv had impacts. Nearly 100 buildings were damaged, including a shopping mall in the city center, and thousands of windows were shattered, he said.

Ukrainian forces shot down and neutralized 563 drones and decoys and 26 missiles across the country, its Air Force said.

Russian strikes hit the central part of Kyiv, one of the few times Russian attacks have reached the heart of the Ukrainian capital since the start of the full-scale invasion. Residents cleared shattered glass and debris from damaged buildings.

Sophia Akylina said her home was damaged.

"It's never happened before that they attacked so close," the 21-year old said. "Negotiations haven't yielded anything yet, unfortunately people are suffering."

Also damaged was the European Union delegation building in Kyiv and the British Council building. Staff were not harmed, EU President Ursula von der Leyen said.

"Russia must stop its indiscriminatory attacks on civilian infrastructure immediately and join negotiations for a just and lasting peace," she said in a post on X.

Bodies pulled from the rubble

Smoke billowed from the crumbled column of a five-story residential building in the Darnytskyi district, which suffered a direct hit. An acrid stench of burning material wafted in the air as firefighters worked to contain the blaze.

Emergency responders searched for survivors and pulled bodies from the destruction. Crowds of residents stood nearby waiting for relatives to be retrieved from the rubble, including a man who was waiting for information about his wife and son. Bodies in black bags were placed to the side of the building.

At least 10 people were known to be missing by the afternoon, according to Ukraine's Emergency Service. It was not the first time the district was targeted, neighborhood residents said.



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Oleksandr Khilko arrived at the scene after a missile hit the residential building where his sister lives. He heard screams from people who were trapped under the rubble and pulled out three survivors, including a boy.

"It's inhuman, striking civilians," he said, his clothes covered in dust and the tips of his fingers black with soot. "With every cell of my body I want this war to end as soon as possible. I wait, but every time the air raid alarm sounds, I am afraid."

Ukraine's national railway operator, Ukrzaliznytsia, reported damage to its infrastructure in the Vinnytsia and Kyiv regions, causing delays and requiring trains to use alternative routes.

Diplomatic efforts to reach peace have stalled

Thursday's attack is the first major combined Russian mass drone and missile attack to strike Kyiv since U.S. President Donald Trump met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Alaska earlier this month to discuss ending the war in Ukraine.

While a diplomatic push to end the war appeared to gain momentum shortly after that meeting, few details have emerged about the next steps.

Western leaders have accused Putin of dragging his feet in peace efforts and avoiding serious negotiations while Russian troops move deeper into Ukraine. This week, Ukrainian military leaders conceded Russian forces have broken into an eighth region of Ukraine seeking to capture more ground.

Zelenskyy hopes for harsher U.S. sanctions to cripple the Russian economy if Putin does not demonstrate seriousness about ending the war. He reiterated those demands following Thursday's attack.

"All deadlines have already been broken, dozens of opportunities for diplomacy ruined," Zelenskyy said.

Trump bristled this week at Putin's stalling on an American proposal for direct peace talks with Zelenskyy. Trump said Friday he expects to decide on next steps in two weeks if direct talks aren't scheduled.

## North Korean leader Kim Jong Un will attend a military parade in Beijing next week

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un will make his first visit to China in six years to attend a military parade next week, the two countries said Thursday, in an event that would bring him together with a group of world leaders for the first time since taking office in late 2011.

Kim and Russian President Vladimir Putin will be among 26 foreign leaders who attend next Wednesday's parade in Beijing to mark the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II and China's resistance against Japan's wartime aggressions, according to the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

"We warmly welcome General Secretary Kim Jong Un to China to attend the commemorative events," Hong Lei, China's assistant minister of foreign affairs, told a press conference. "Upholding, consolidating and developing the traditional friendship between China and the DPRK is a firm position of the Communist Party of China and the Chinese government."

DPRK refers to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, North Korea's official name.

North Korea's state news agency, KCNA, said Kim will visit China at the invitation of Chinese President Xi Jinping to attend celebrations of the 80th anniversary of the war's end. It gave no further details, including how long he will stay in China and whether he will hold an official meeting with Xi, Putin or other leaders visiting China.

Others coming for the parade include the leaders of Iran, Belarus, Serbia, Cuba, Indonesia, Myanmar, Pakistan and Malaysia. No leaders from the United States or other major Western European countries are expected to attend, in part because of their differences with Putin over the war in Ukraine. The parade is expected to feature some of China's newest weaponry and a speech by Xi.

If Kim's trip is realized, it would be his first trip to China since 2019. Since inheriting power upon his father's death in December 2011, Kim has met Xi, Putin, U.S. President Donald Trump, former South Korean President Moon Jae-in and others, but all those summits were bilateral meetings and Kim hasn't attended any multilateral events involving foreign leaders.

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In all, Kim traveled to China four times from 2018 to 2019 to meet Xi.

China has long been North Korea's biggest trading partner and main aid provider, but there have been questions about their relations in recent years. North Korea has been focusing on expanding cooperation with Russia by supplying troops and ammunition to support its war against Ukraine in exchange for economic and military assistance.

But many observers say North Korea is expected to take steps to improve ties with China to revive its troubled economy, because there is a limit to what it can get from Russia and it's also unclear if North Korea and Russia would maintain the same level of cooperation after the Ukraine war ends. In 2023, about 97% of North Korea's external trade was with China, while 1.2% was with Russia, according to Chinese data.

Kim's visit to China could also be related to efforts to restart diplomacy with Trump, who has repeatedly highlighted his relationship with Kim and expressed his hopes to resume talks. North Korea has so far dismissed Trump's outreach, but many analysts say North Korea would return to talks if it believes the U.S. would make greater concessions.

"Pyongyang's illicit cooperation with Moscow has strained ties with Beijing, even as China's political and economic support remains vital for the North Korean regime," said Leif-Eric Easley, professor of international studies at Ewha Womans University in Seoul.

"To re-engage Trump from a position of strength, Kim seeks to repair relations with Xi, and attending the parade in Beijing is a highly visible way of doing that," Easley said.

During a meeting with Lee in Washington this week, Trump spoke of his past summits with Kim, including one at the Korean Demilitarized Zone. Responding to a question over whether he would return to the Demilitarized Zone, Trump told reporters, "I loved it. Remember when I walked across the line and everyone went crazy."

During Trump's first term, he met Kim three times from 2018-19, but their high-stakes summit eventually collapsed due to wrangling over U.S.-led sanctions on North Korea. Kim has since conducted weapons tests to modernize and expand his nuclear arsenal.

## **Hundreds honor 2 children killed and 17 people wounded in shooting at a Minneapolis Catholic school**

By GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO, STEVE KARNOWSKI, MARK VANCLEAVE and HALLIE GOLDEN Associated Press RICHFIELD, Minn. (AP) — Just hours after a shooter opened fire through the windows of a Catholic church in Minneapolis, killing two children and wounding 17 people, hundreds crowded inside a nearby school's gym, clutching one another and wiping away tears during a vigil alongside Gov. Tim Walz and clergy members.

Speaking to a silent crowd crammed shoulder-to-shoulder Wednesday night, while hundreds more waited outside, Archbishop Bernard Hebda described the students trying to shield their classmates as the gunfire erupted.

"In the midst of that there was courage, there was bravery, but most especially there was love," he said at the Academy of Holy Angels, about 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) south of the shooting, in the suburb of Richfield.

Armed with a rifle, shotgun and pistol, 23-year-old Robin Westman shot dozens of rounds Wednesday morning toward the children sitting in the pews during Mass at the Annunciation Catholic School, Minneapolis Police Chief Brian O'Hara said at news conferences. The shooter then died by suicide, he said.

The children who died were 8 and 10. Fourteen other kids and three octogenarian parishioners were wounded but expected to survive, the chief said.

Rev. Dennis Zehren, who was inside the church with the nearly 200 children, said they were almost to the end of the Responsorial Psalm, which speaks about light in the darkness. That's when he heard someone yell, "Down down, everybody down," and the gunshots started.

Fifth-grader Weston Halsne told reporters he ducked for the pews, covering his head, shielded by a friend who was lying on top of him. His friend was hit, he said.

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"I was super scared for him, but I think now he's OK," the 10-year-old said.

Police investigate motive for the shooting

FBI Director Kash Patel said on X that the shooting is being investigated as an act of domestic terrorism and a hate crime targeting Catholics.

O'Hara said police hadn't yet found any relationship between the shooter and the church, nor determined a motive for the bloodshed. The chief said, however, that investigators were examining a social media post that appeared to show the shooter at the scene.

O'Hara, who gave the wounded youngsters' ages as 6 to 15, said a wooden plank was placed to barricade some of the side doors, and that authorities found a smoke bomb at the scene.

On a YouTube channel titled Robin W, the alleged shooter released at least two videos before the channel was taken down Wednesday. In one, the alleged shooter shows a cache of weapons and ammunition, some with such phrases as "kill Donald Trump" and "Where is your God?" written on them.

A second video shows the alleged shooter pointing to two outside windows in what appears to be a drawing of the church, and then stabbing it with a long knife.

Westman's uncle, former Kentucky state lawmaker Bob Heleringer, said he did not know the accused shooter well and was confounded by the "unspeakable tragedy."

The police chief said Westman did not have an extensive known criminal history and is believed to have acted alone.

Federal officials referred to Westman as transgender, and Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey decried hatred being directed at "our transgender community." Westman's gender identity wasn't clear. In 2020, a judge approved a petition, signed by Westman's mother, asking for a name change from Robert to Robin, saying the petitioner "identifies as a female and wants her name to reflect that identification."

Police chief says officers rescued children who hid

The police chief said officers immediately responded to reports of the shooting, entered the church, rendered first aid and rescued some of the children.

Annunciation's principal Matt DeBoer said teachers and children, too, responded heroically.

"Children were ducked down. Adults were protecting children. Older children were protecting younger children," he said.

Vincent Francoual said his 11-year-old daughter, Chloe, survived the shooting by running downstairs to hide in a room with a table pressed against the door. But he still isn't sure exactly how she escaped because she is struggling to communicate clearly about the traumatizing scene.

"She told us today that she thought she was going to die," he said.

Walz lamented that children just starting the school year "were met with evil and horror and death." He and President Donald Trump ordered flags to be lowered to half-staff on state and federal buildings, respectively, and the White House said the two men spoke. The governor was the Democratic vice presidential nominee in last year's election against Trump's running mate, now Vice President JD Vance, a Republican.

From the Vatican, Pope Leo XIV sent a telegram of condolences. The Chicago-born Leo, history's first American pope, said he was praying for relatives of the dead.

Monday had been the first day of the school year at Annunciation, a 102-year-old school in a leafy residential and commercial neighborhood about 5 miles (8 kilometers) south of downtown Minneapolis.

Karin Cebulla, who said she had worked as a learning specialist at Annunciation and sent her two now-college-aged daughters there, described the school as an accepting, caring community.

## Robot rabbits the latest tool in Florida battle to control invasive Burmese pythons in Everglades

By CURT ANDERSON and CODY JACKSON Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — They look, move and even smell like the kind of furry Everglades marsh rabbit a Burmese python would love to eat. But these bunnies are robots meant to lure the giant invasive



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snakes out of their hiding spots.

It's the latest effort by the South Florida Water Management District to eliminate as many pythons as possible from the Everglades, where they are decimating native species with their voracious appetites. In Everglades National Park, officials say the snakes have eliminated 95% of small mammals as well as thousands of birds.

"Removing them is fairly simple. It's detection. We're having a really hard time finding them," said Mike Kirkland, lead invasive animal biologist for the water district. "They're so well camouflaged in the field."

The water district and University of Florida researchers deployed 120 robot rabbits this summer as an experiment. Previously, there was an effort to use live rabbits as snake lures but that became too expensive and time-consuming, Kirkland said.

The robots are simple toy rabbits, but retrofitted to emit heat, a smell and to make natural movements to appear like any other regular rabbit. "They look like a real rabbit," Kirkland said.. They are solar powered and can be switched on and off remotely. They are placed in small pens monitored by a video camera that sends out a signal when a python is nearby.

"Then I can deploy one of our many contractors to go out and remove the python," Kirkland said.

The total cost per robot rabbit is about \$4,000, financed by the water district, he added.

Pythons are not native to Florida, but have become established in the swampy, subtropical Everglades by escaping from homes or by people releasing them when they become overgrown pets. A female python can lay between 50 and 100 eggs at a time with a gestation period of 60-90 days, according to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

It's not easy to find definite estimates of the number of pythons in Florida. The U.S. Geological Survey recently reported a ballpark number of "tens of thousands," while other official estimates run as high as 300,000 snakes. They have few natural enemies, although there are occasional confrontations with alligators, and other predators, such as bobcats and coyotes, will eat their eggs.

Since 2000, more than 23,000 of the snakes have been removed from the wild, the wildlife commission says. The robot rabbits are the latest attempt to tackle snakes that average between 10 and 16 feet (3 to 5 meters) in length when fully grown.

"Every invasive python that is removed makes a difference for Florida's environment and its native wildlife," said Ron Bergeron, a member of the water district governing board.

Pythons can be humanely killed year-round on private lands and on lands managed by the wildlife commission across the state.

Each year the commission holds a "Florida Python Challenge" that carries cash prizes for most pythons caught, the longest snake and so forth. This year, 934 people from 30 states took part in the effort in July, capturing 294 pythons with a top prize of \$10,000 to a participant who bagged 60 of the reptiles.

It's too early to determine how successful the robot rabbit project will be, but officials say initial results are a cause for optimism.

"This part of the project is in its infancy," Kirkland said. "We are confident, though, that this will work once we are given enough time to work out some of these details."

## **Minneapolis Catholic schoolchildren listened to a prayer, then ducked for cover from gunfire**

By JESSE BEDAYN and GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — In the vaulted church of a Catholic school in Minneapolis, the pews were packed with teachers, parents and schoolchildren listening to a psalm on the third day of the new school year.

"For you darkness itself is not dark, and night shines as the day," a church member read to some 200 students Wednesday morning as sun streamed through stained glass windows.

Just before the congregants were to proclaim "Alleluia," bullets blasted through the windows.

"Down! Everybody down!" someone shouted as children ducked for cover behind wooden pews from a barrage of gunfire. One student threw himself on top of a friend and was shot in the back. A youth minister

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called her husband to say goodbye as bullets flew.

People used a wood plank to barricade a door and fled to a gymnasium. Sixth grader Chloe Francoual raced down a set of stairs and left behind a classmate in the rush before hiding in a room with a table barricading the door. She'd later tell her father that she thought she was going to die.

The shooting went on for several minutes, according to a man living near the church, who said he heard as many as 50 shots.

Two children, 8 and 10, were killed in the latest horrific school shooting in the United States, this time inside a church emblazoned with the words "This is the house of God and the Gate of Heaven." Seventeen others were wounded, including kids as young as 6 and parishioners in their 80s.

Dozens of law enforcement officers soon arrived to the school. Police said the suspect, Robin Westman, 23, was found dead by suicide behind the church. Westman's mother once worked there, but the shooter had no other known connection to the church. No motive has not been revealed.

Saved by a friend

The student whose friend had shielded him, fifth grader Weston Halsne, told reporters in the aftermath outside the church that he sat just a few feet from the windows shattered by the blasts.

"My friend Victor, like, saved me, though, because he laid on top of me," the 10-year-old said. "He's really brave, and I hope he's good in the hospital."

His mother met him outside, wrapping him in a hug.

Fourteen of the wounded victims were kids, ranging in age from 6 to 15. Police said all are expected to survive.

Vincent Francoual said his daughter still struggles to communicate clearly about the traumatizing scene, her father said.

"It's too much to process," he said.

Outside the church and school was a milling of emotion. Parents embraced children and other parents. Heavily armored law enforcement officers walked around as police cordoned off the crime scene.

A close community shaken by violence

Many knew each other well. It's a tight-knit community built around the century-old Catholic school and parish, a city suburb better described as a small town. It's towering belfry rings over the neighborhood of tidy homes and grass lawns, as it did after the shooting Wednesday.

God wasn't far from people's minds. Some had questions, others sought peace and healing.

"I'm just asking (God), 'Why right now?' It's little kids," said Aubrey Pannhoff, 16, a student at a nearby Catholic school who stood at the edge of the police cordon.

History's first American Pope, Leo XIV, said he was praying for the families of those dead and injured in the "terrible tragedy."

The Rev. Dennis Zehren was to give a sermon to the congregation that Wednesday. At the vigil held later that night, his face and eyes were red against his white vestments.

When asked what he planned to tell the students on their first week of school, emotion choked his voice.

At the vigil, Archbishop Bernard Hebda addressed some 2,000 people, where psalms were sung and the silences burrowed deep in the wide room.

"I can understand why someone could resonate with the Psalmist's question: 'Why, oh God, have you forgotten me?' Hebda said. "The example of Mary, a mother and a disciple who knew great suffering in her own life, should give each of us courage and hope."

## Pope demands end to 'collective punishment' and forced displacement of Palestinians in Gaza

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Leo XIV demanded Wednesday that Israel stop the "collective punishment" and forced displacement of Palestinians in Gaza as he pleaded for an immediate and permanent ceasefire in the besieged territory amid preparations by Israel for a new military offensive.

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Leo was interrupted twice by applause as he read aloud his latest appeal for an end to the 22-month war during his weekly general audience attended by thousands of people in the Vatican's auditorium.

History's first American pope also called for the release of hostages taken by Hamas in southern Israel — 50 of them remain in Gaza — and for both sides and international powers to end the war "which has caused so much terror, destruction and death."

"I beg for a permanent ceasefire to be reached, the safe entry of humanitarian aid to be facilitated and humanitarian law to be fully respected," Leo said. He cited international law requiring the obligation to protect civilians and "the prohibition of collective punishment, indiscriminate use of force and the forced displacement of the population."

Palestinians in Gaza are bracing for an expanded offensive promised by Israel in some of the territory's most populated areas including Gaza City, where famine has been documented and declared.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said Israel will launch its Gaza City offensive while simultaneously pursuing a ceasefire, though Israel has yet to send a negotiating team to discuss a proposal on the table. He has said the offensive is the best way to weaken Hamas and return hostages, but hostages' families and their supporters have pushed back, saying it will further endanger them.

Hamas took 251 hostages on Oct. 7, 2023, in the attack that also killed about 1,200 people and triggered the war. Most hostages have been released during previous ceasefires or other deals. Israel has rescued eight hostages alive. Of the 50 still in Gaza, Israeli officials believe around 20 are still alive.

Leo drew attention to a joint statement by the Latin and Greek Orthodox patriarchs of Jerusalem, who announced that the priests and nuns in the two Christian churches in Gaza City would stay put, despite Israeli evacuation orders ahead of the Gaza City offensive. They said the people sheltering in the churches were too weak and malnourished to move and that doing so would be a "death sentence."

The Holy Family Catholic church and the Saint Porphyrius Orthodox church have sheltered hundreds of Palestinian civilians during the war, including elderly people, women and children as well as people with disabilities. Pope Francis, even during his final days in the hospital, stayed in daily touch with the parish priest of Holy Family to offer his solidarity and support to the people there, cared for by the nuns of Mother Teresa's Sisters of Charity religious order.

In their joint statement, Catholic Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa and Orthodox Patriarch Theophilos III noted that just last weekend, Leo issued a strong statement about the rights of people to remain in their homelands and not be forced to move.

"All peoples, even the smallest and weakest, must be respected by the powerful in their identity and rights, especially the right to live in their own lands; and no one can force them into exile," Leo said in comments Saturday to a group of forced refugees from the Indian Ocean archipelago Chagos that were clearly destined for a broader audience.

Netanyahu has said Gaza's population should be relocated to other countries through what his government has described as voluntary emigration. Rights groups have objected, and Palestinians fear that even if they leave temporarily to escape the war, Israel will never allow them to return.

## **Al Sharpton to lead pro-DEI march through Wall Street on anniversary of the 1963 March on Washington**

NEW YORK (AP) — The Rev. Al Sharpton will lead a protest march on Wall Street to urge corporate America to resist the Trump administration's campaign to roll back diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives.

The New York civil rights leader will join clergy, labor and community leaders Thursday in a demonstration through Manhattan's Financial District that's timed with the anniversary of the Civil Rights-era March on Washington in 1963.

Sharpton, in a statement, called DEI the "civil rights fight of our generation."

Since returning to the White House in January, President Donald Trump has moved to end DEI programs within the federal government and warned schools to do the same, or risk losing federal money.

In response, Sharpton's civil rights group, the National Action Network, has encouraged consumers to



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avoid U.S. retailers that scaled back policies and programs aimed at bolstering diversity among their employees and reducing discrimination against members of minority groups, women and LGBTQ+ people.

Earlier this year, Sharpton met with Target's CEO as groups called for a boycott of the retail giant, which joined Amazon, Walmart and other major retailers in foregoing DEI initiatives.

The civil rights leader has also called for "buy-cotts" in support of companies such as Costco that have stuck by their DEI principles despite the conservative backlash.

"Corporate America wants to walk away from Black communities, so we are marching to them to bring this fight to their doorstep," Sharpton said in a statement ahead of Thursday's march.

The march is expected to start around 10 a.m. in Foley Square, located in downtown Manhattan near the African Burial Ground that's the largest known resting place of enslaved and freed Africans in the country.

The square is also near 26 Federal Plaza, the federal government building that's become a symbol of Trump's nationwide immigration crackdown.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents have been detaining migrants during their routine appearances at the immigration court located there. A federal judge earlier this month also ordered the Trump administration to improve conditions for migrants jailed there.

Marchers are expected to make their way past Wall Street's famous Charging Bull statue before the event ends with a speaking program.

New York City mayoral candidates, including incumbent Mayor Eric Adams, state Assembly Member Zohran Mamdani, and former Gov. Andrew Cuomo, are among those expected to join the demonstration.

## US hosts talks on post-war Gaza as Israel calls Gaza City evacuation 'inevitable'

By WAFAA SHURAF, SAM METZ and SALLY ABOU ALJOUD Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli and U.S. officials met Wednesday in Washington to discuss post-war Gaza, even as Israel's military called the evacuation of Gaza City "inevitable" ahead of a new offensive and no sign of a ceasefire was in sight.

The meeting took place amid mounting outrage over this week's double Israeli strike on a southern Gaza hospital that killed journalists, emergency responders and others. The toll from the attack on Nasser Hospital rose to 22 after two more people died Wednesday, Gaza health officials said.

The Israeli military, which has said it will investigate, offered no immediate explanation for striking twice and no evidence for an assertion that six of the dead were militants.

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio met with Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar at the State Department, with both countries saying they discussed cooperation on Iran, ending the war in Gaza, the situations in Lebanon and Syria, and next month's session of the U.N. General Assembly, at which the Israel-Hamas conflict is likely to be a hot topic.

The State Department said Rubio reaffirmed America's "unwavering commitment to Israel's security."

"The secretary and Foreign Minister Saar agreed that continued close cooperation between their countries is vital to the security and prosperity of the region," the department said in statement.

A similar statement from the Israeli Embassy in Washington said they had discussed "the different challenges and opportunities in the Middle East," including the potential nuclear threat from Iran, the war in Gaza and the importance of "repelling anti-Israel initiatives in the international arena."

Neither man spoke as they posed for photos before their meeting and neither responded to shouted questions from reporters about the killings of Palestinian journalists in Gaza.

U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff told Fox News on Tuesday that President Donald Trump would chair a separate meeting, which would feature "a very comprehensive plan" for post-war Gaza.

He did not offer details about that meeting, which did not appear on Trump's public schedule for Wednesday. Witkoff also said the official U.S. position was that hostages — Hamas' main source of leverage — should no longer be part of negotiations. He told Fox News the talks should focus on issues such

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as Gaza's future and how to define Hamas in that context.

Israel prepares Gaza City for an evacuation

Aid groups warn that an expanded Israeli military offensive could worsen the humanitarian crisis in the besieged territory, where most of the over 2 million residents have been displaced, neighborhoods lie in ruins and a famine has been declared in Gaza City.

The Israeli military on Wednesday told residents of Gaza City to prepare to leave.

"The evacuation of Gaza City is inevitable," spokesperson Avichay Adraee wrote in Arabic on X. He said Israeli forces have surveyed vast empty areas south of the city "to assist the evacuating residents as much as possible." He said the displaced would receive space for tents, and infrastructure would be set up to distribute aid and water.

As a growing chorus of international leaders urges Israel to reconsider its offensive and commit to talks, Pope Leo XIV called for Israel to halt the "collective punishment" and forced displacement of Palestinians in Gaza.

More than 80% of Gaza is designated as an Israeli military zone or subject to displacement orders, the U.N. humanitarian agency said in June.

Israel has pressed ahead with plans to mobilize tens of thousands of reservists. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said the military will launch its offensive while simultaneously pursuing a ceasefire.

Hamas said last week that it accepted a ceasefire plan from Arab mediators.

Qatar, which has rarely assigned blame through more than a year of mediation, said Tuesday that Israel has yet to officially respond and "does not want to reach an agreement." Last week, an official from Qatar said the proposal under discussion was "almost identical" to an earlier draft that Witkoff put forth and Israel accepted.

The deal said to be under discussion would include a 60-day truce, the release of some of the 50 remaining hostages held by Hamas in return for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, a surge of humanitarian aid into Gaza and a road map toward talks on a lasting ceasefire.

Many in Netanyahu's coalition oppose such a phased deal. Meanwhile, protests have swelled in Israel as hostages' families and their supporters press for a ceasefire. The government argues that a widened offensive is the best way to bring them home and cripple Hamas' capacity to launch future attacks.

Hospitals report strikes near aid sites

At least 39 Palestinians were killed and dozens wounded Wednesday across the Gaza Strip, the majority of whom died in Israeli strikes and gunfire, according to Gaza health officials.

In northern Gaza, officials from the area's main hospital, Al-Shifa, as well as two field hospitals, told the AP that some 20 Palestinians were killed by Israeli gunfire and strikes, including at least five people seeking aid near the Zikim crossing in northwestern Gaza. U.N aid convoys that routinely enter the area through the crossing are repeatedly overwhelmed by thieves and desperate people seeking aid.

Mahmoud Balousha, 36, went to the crossing but returned Wednesday with only lentils.

"It's the same every day. We go to get some food for our families, but looters climb onto the trucks to get the aid, and there is little left for us to take back home," Balousha told the AP through text messages. "When chaos breaks out," Israeli troops "open fire toward the crowd, and people scatter everywhere."

The strikes Monday at Nasser Hospital killed 22 people, including Mariam Dagga, a freelance visual journalist who worked for The Associated Press and other publications. Her final photos show a damaged stairwell moments before she died.

Israel's military did not immediately respond to questions about the strikes. Its offensive has killed nearly 63,000 Palestinians during the war, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which says around half were women and children. The agency does not distinguish between fighters and civilians in its count.

The ministry said Wednesday that 10 more people died of malnutrition-related causes over the past 24 hours, bringing the total number to 313 people during the war, including 119 children.

The ministry is part of the Hamas-run government and staffed by medical professionals. The U.N. and independent experts consider it the most reliable source on war casualties. Israel disputes its figures but has not provided its own.

Hamas-led militants abducted 251 people and killed around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, in the Oct. 7, 2023, attack that triggered the war. Most of the hostages have been released in ceasefires or other deals. Of the 50 remaining in Gaza, Israel believes around 20 are alive.

## **A shooting at a Minneapolis Catholic school kills 2 children, injures 17 people**

By STEVE KARNOWSKI, MARK VANCLEAVE and GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — A shooter opened fire with a rifle Wednesday through the windows of a Catholic church in Minneapolis and struck some of the nearly 200 children celebrating Mass during the first week of school, killing two and wounding 17 people in an act of violence the police chief called “absolutely incomprehensible.”

Armed with a rifle, shotgun and pistol, 23-year-old Robin Westman approached the side of the church and shot dozens of rounds through the windows toward the children sitting in the pews during Mass at the Annunciation Catholic School just before 8:30 a.m., Minneapolis Police Chief Brian O'Hara said at news conferences. He said the shooter then died by suicide.

The children who died were 8 and 10. Fourteen other kids and three octogenarian parishioners were wounded but expected to survive, the chief said.

On Wednesday evening, hundreds prayed, wiped away tears and held each other during a packed vigil at a nearby school's gym where Gov. Tim Walz and U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar, along with Catholic clergy, joined the mourners.

Archbishop Bernard Hebda talked about the inscription at the front of the Annunciation Church that reads: “House of God and the gate of heaven.”

“How is it that such a terrible tragedy could take place in a place that's the house of God and the gate of heaven?” he asked. “It's unthinkable.”

Fifth-grader Weston Halsne told reporters he ducked for the pews, covering his head, shielded by a friend who was lying on top of him. His friend was hit, he said.

“I was super scared for him, but I think now he's okay,” the 10-year-old said, adding that he was praying for the other hospitalized children and adults.

Halsne's grandfather, Michael Simpson, said the violence during Mass on the third day of school left him wondering whether God was watching over.

“I don't know where He is,” Simpson said.

Police investigate motive for the shooting

FBI Director Kash Patel said on X that the shooting is being investigated as an act of domestic terrorism and a hate crime targeting Catholics.

O'Hara said police hadn't yet found any relationship between the shooter and the church, nor determined a motive for the bloodshed. The chief said, however, that investigators were examining a social media post that appeared to show the shooter at the scene.

“The sheer cruelty and cowardice of firing into a church full of children is absolutely incomprehensible,” said O'Hara, who gave the wounded youngsters' ages as 6 to 15. He said a wooden plank was placed to barricade some of the side doors, and that authorities found a smoke bomb at the scene.

On a YouTube channel titled Robin W, the alleged shooter released at least two videos before the channel was taken down by site administrators Wednesday.

In one, the alleged shooter shows a cache of weapons and ammunition, some with such phrases as “kill Donald Trump” and “Where is your God?” written on them.

A second video shows the alleged shooter pointing to two outside windows in what appears to be a drawing of the church, and then stabbing it with a long knife. It was unclear when that video was uploaded to the channel.

Westman's uncle, former Kentucky state lawmaker Bob Heleringer, said he did not know the accused



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shooter well and was confounded by the "unspeakable tragedy."

The police chief said Westman did not have an extensive known criminal history and is believed to have acted alone.

Federal officials referred to Westman as transgender, and Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey decried hatred being directed at "our transgender community." Westman's gender identity wasn't clear. In 2020, a judge approved a petition, signed by Westman's mother, asking for a name change from Robert to Robin, saying the petitioner "identifies as a female and wants her name to reflect that identification."

Bill Bienemann, who lives a couple of blocks away and has long attended Mass at Annunciation Church, said he heard as many as 50 shots over as long as four minutes.

"I was shocked. I said, 'There's no way that could be gunfire,'" he said.

Police chief says officers rescued children who hid

The police chief said officers immediately responded to reports of the shooting, entered the church, rendered first aid and rescued some of the children hiding throughout the building.

Frey and Annunciation's principal said teachers and children, too, responded heroically.

"Children were ducked down. Adults were protecting children. Older children were protecting younger children," said the principal, Matt DeBoer.

Danielle Gunter, the mother of an eighth-grade boy who was shot, in a statement said her son told her a Minneapolis police officer "really helped him" by giving aid and a hug before her son got into an ambulance.

Amid a heavy uniformed law enforcement presence later Wednesday morning, children in dark green uniforms trickled out of the school with adults, giving lingering hugs and wiping away tears.

Vincent Francoal said his 11-year-old daughter, Chloe, survived the shooting by running downstairs to hide in a room with a table pressed against the door. But he still isn't sure exactly how she escaped because she is struggling to communicate clearly about the traumatizing scene.

"She told us today that she thought she was going to die," he said.

Gov. Walz lamented that children just starting the school year "were met with evil and horror and death." He and President Donald Trump ordered flags to be lowered to half-staff on state and federal buildings, respectively, and the White House said the two men spoke. The governor was the Democratic vice presidential nominee in last year's election against Trump's running mate, now Vice President JD Vance, a Republican.

From the Vatican, Pope Leo XIV sent a telegram of condolences. The Chicago-born Leo, history's first American pope, said he was praying for relatives of the dead.

News of the shooting rippled through a national Democratic officials' meeting nearby in Minneapolis. U.S. Rep. Ilhan Omar, a Democrat who represents the area around the school, visited the scene.

Atlanta Archbishop Gregory Hartmeyer, who chairs the board of the National Catholic Education Association, said in a statement that reasonable firearms legislation must be passed.

"The murder of children worshipping at Mass is unspeakable," Hartmeyer said. "We must take action to protect all children and families from violence."

A string of fatal shootings in Minneapolis

Monday had been the first day of the school year at Annunciation, a 102-year-old school in a leafy residential and commercial neighborhood about 5 miles (8 kilometers) south of downtown Minneapolis.

Karin Cebulla, who said she had worked as a learning specialist at Annunciation and sent her two now-college-aged daughters there, described the school as an accepting, caring community.

"Everyone felt safe here, and I just pray that it continues to be a place where people feel safe," she said.

The gunfire was the latest in a series of fatal shootings in Minnesota's most populous city in less than 24 hours. One person was killed and six others were hurt in a shooting Tuesday afternoon. Hours later, two people died in two other shootings in the city.

O'Hara, the police chief, said the Annunciation shooting does not appear to be related to other recent violence.

Alongside many major U.S. cities, violent crime in Minneapolis has decreased since the COVID-19 pandemic, based on data from AH DataLytics and its Real-Time Crime Index, which tracks crimes across the country using law enforcement data.

## Denmark summons US envoy over claims of interference in Greenland

COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) — Denmark's foreign minister summoned the top U.S. diplomat in the country for talks after the main national broadcaster reported Wednesday that at least three people with connections to President Donald Trump have been carrying out covert influence operations in Greenland.

In a lengthy written statement, the U.S. State Department confirmed that the deputy chief of mission in Copenhagen, Mark Stroh, had met with Danish foreign ministry officials. It declined to comment "on the actions of private U.S. citizens in Greenland."

"The U.S. government does not control or direct the actions of private citizens," it said.

The department said Stroh had "a productive conversation and reaffirmed the strong ties among the Government of Greenland, the United States, and Denmark." It said the U.S. values its relationships with both Denmark, a NATO ally, and Greenland and noted that Trump and his top aides had all said they respect "the right of the people of Greenland to determine their own future."

"We continue to foster engagement and cooperation with Denmark and Greenland to support increased security and prosperity for our nations," it said.

Stroh is the second American diplomat to be summoned by a European NATO ally this week as the Trump administration shakes up its approach to foreign policy. France had called U.S. Ambassador Charles Kushner to its foreign ministry after he sent a letter to French President Emmanuel Macron alleging the country did not do enough to combat antisemitism.

Trump has repeatedly said he seeks U.S. jurisdiction over Greenland, a vast, semiautonomous territory of Denmark. He has not ruled out military force to take control of the mineral-rich, strategically located Arctic island.

Denmark and Greenland have said the island is not for sale and condemned reports of the U.S. gathering intelligence there.

Public broadcaster DR said Danish government and security sources that it didn't name, as well as unidentified sources in Greenland and the U.S., believe that at least three American nationals with connections to Trump have been carrying out covert influence operations in the territory.

One of those people allegedly compiled a list of U.S.-friendly Greenlanders, collected names of people opposed to Trump and got locals to point out cases that could be used to cast Denmark in a bad light in American media, the broadcaster reported. Two others have tried to nurture contacts with politicians, businesspeople and locals, according to the report.

DR said its story was based on information from a total of eight sources, who believe the goal is to weaken relations with Denmark from within Greenlandic society. It said it had been unable to clarify whether the Americans were working at their own initiative or on orders from someone else. It said it knows their names but chose not to publish them to protect its sources.

The Associated Press could not independently confirm the report.

"We are aware that foreign actors continue to show an interest in Greenland and its position in the Kingdom of Denmark," Danish Foreign Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen said in a statement. "It is therefore not surprising if we experience outside attempts to influence the future of the Kingdom in the time ahead."

"Any attempt to interfere in the internal affairs of the Kingdom will of course be unacceptable," Rasmussen said.

Cooperation between the governments of Denmark and Greenland "is close and based on mutual trust," he added.

The White House, like the U.S. Embassy in Copenhagen, would not comment on the substance of DR's reporting that Americans with connections to Trump have been carrying out covert influence operations in Greenland. But a White House official, who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke only on the condition of anonymity, downplayed Denmark's concerns and suggested "the Danes need to calm down."

The Danish Security and Intelligence Service said it believes that "particularly in the current situation, Greenland is a target for influence campaigns of various kinds" that could aim to create divisions in the

relationship between Denmark and Greenland.

It said it "assesses that this could be done by exploiting existing or fabricated disagreements, for example in connection with well-known individual cases, or by promoting or amplifying certain viewpoints in Greenland regarding the Kingdom, the United States, or other countries with a particular interest in Greenland."

The service, known by its Danish acronym PET, said that in recent years, it has "continuously strengthened" its efforts and presence in Greenland in cooperation with authorities there, and will continue to do so.

## Flash floods leave 34 dead in Indian-controlled Kashmir as over 210,000 in Pakistan are displaced

By MUNIR AHMED and SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Intense rains have left at least 34 people dead after lashing parts of Pakistan and India and triggering flash floods and landslides in Indian-controlled Kashmir, officials said Wednesday.

Over 210,000 people in Pakistan have been displaced, and the shrine of the founder of the Sikh religion has been submerged.

Heavy downpours and flash floods in the Himalayan region have killed nearly 100 people in August, with forecasters warning rain will continue across the region this week.

Part of a mountainside in Indian-controlled Kashmir's Jammu region collapsed onto a popular Hindu pilgrimage route following heavy rains in the Katra area late Tuesday. Devotees had been trekking to reach the hilltop temple, which is one of the most visited shrines in northern India, officials said.

The bodies of pilgrims were recovered from under the debris, according to disaster management official Mohammed Irshad, who said at least 18 other people were injured and transported to hospitals.

Rescue teams scoured the area Wednesday for the missing, while pilgrimages to the shrine have been suspended, Irshad said.

Authorities in Pakistan's eastern Punjab province on Wednesday called for army assistance in rescue and relief efforts after torrential rains caused major rivers to swell, inundating villages and displacing over 210,000 people, according to Lt. Gen. Inam Haider, chairman of the National Disaster Management Authority.

Haider said rescue operations were continuing, with relief supplies being rushed to flood-hit areas.

Army spokesman Lt. Gen. Ahmed Sharif said two soldiers were killed while helping flood victims. He gave no further details.

Floods also submerged the shrine of Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion, which is located near the Indian border in Narowal district.

Late Wednesday, authorities carried out a controlled breach of a protective embankment on the Chenab river in Punjab to protect a barrage from collapse under extreme flood pressure. Local officials said explosives were used to open the right marginal dyke, diverting water into nearby villages, where hundreds of people sitting on higher grounds under the open sky and watching floodwaters submerge their homes.

Rescuers evacuated more than 20,000 people overnight from the outskirts of Lahore, Pakistan's second-largest city, which faced the risk of flooding, as the Ravi river continued to rise. Those evacuated were living along the bed of the river, said Irfan Ali Kathia, director-general of the Punjab Disaster Management Authority.

Mass evacuations began earlier this week in six districts of Punjab after heavier-than-normal monsoon rains and the release of water from overflowing dams in neighboring India triggered flash floods in low-lying border regions, Kathia said.

Kathia warned floodwaters in the Ravi, Chenab and Sutlej rivers were rising dangerously and many villages were inundated in Kasur, Okara, Bahawalnagar, Bahawalpur, Vehari and Sialkot districts.

Rescuers with sniffer dogs continue to search for more than 150 people who have been reported missing this month after flooding killed over 300 residents in three villages in Pakistan's northwestern Buner district.

Floods have killed more than 800 people in Pakistan since late June.

Scientists say climate change is fueling heavier monsoon rains in South Asia, raising fears of a repeat



of a 2022 weather disaster that struck a third of Pakistan and killed 1,739 people. Haider said next year's monsoon could be 22% more intense due to climate change.

India alerted Pakistan on Monday about possible cross-border flooding due to the heavy monsoon rains, in what marked the first public official contact between the two nuclear-armed rivals in months.

## **CDC director Susan Monarez is fired and other agency leaders resign**

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The director of the nation's top public health agency has been fired after less than one month in the job, and several top agency leaders have resigned.

Susan Monarez isn't "aligned with" President Donald Trump's agenda and refused to resign, so the White House terminated her, spokesman Kush Desai said Wednesday night.

Her lawyers said she was targeted for standing up for science.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services had announced her departure in a brief social media post late Wednesday afternoon. Her lawyers responded with a statement saying Monarez had neither resigned nor been told she was fired.

"When CDC Director Susan Monarez refused to rubber-stamp unscientific, reckless directives and fire dedicated health experts, she chose protecting the public over serving a political agenda. For that, she has been targeted," attorneys Mark Zaid and Abbe David Lowell wrote in a statement.

"This is not about one official. It is about the systematic dismantling of public health institutions, the silencing of experts, and the dangerous politicization of science. The attack on Dr. Monarez is a warning to every American: our evidence-based systems are being undermined from within," they said.

Her departure coincided with the resignations this week of at least four top CDC officials. The list includes Dr. Debra Houry, the agency's deputy director; Dr. Daniel Jernigan, head of the agency's National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases; Dr. Demetre Daskalakis, head of its National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases; and Dr. Jennifer Layden, director of the Office of Public Health Data, Surveillance, and Technology.

In an email seen by The Associated Press, Houry lamented the crippling effects on the agency from planned budget cuts, reorganization and firings.

"I am committed to protecting the public's health, but the ongoing changes prevent me from continuing in my job as a leader of the agency," she wrote.

She also noted the rise of misinformation about vaccines during the current Trump administration, and alluded to new limits on CDC communications.

"For the good of the nation and the world, the science at CDC should never be censored or subject to political pauses or interpretations," she wrote.

Daskalakis worked closely with the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices. Kennedy remade the committee by firing everyone and replacing them with a group that included several vaccine skeptics — one of whom was put in charge of a COVID-19 vaccines workgroup.

In his resignation letter, Daskalakis lamented that the changes put "people of dubious intent and more dubious scientific rigor in charge of recommending vaccine policy." He described Monarez as "hamstrung and sidelined by an authoritarian leader." He added: "Their desire to please a political base will result in death and disability of vulnerable children and adults."

He also wrote: "I am unable to serve in an environment that treats CDC as a tool to generate policies and materials that do not reflect scientific reality."

HHS officials did not immediately respond to questions about the resignations.

Some public health experts decried the loss of so many of CDC's scientific leaders.

"The CDC is being decapitated. This is an absolute disaster for public health," said Public Citizen's Dr. Robert Steinbrook.

Michael Osterholm, a University of Minnesota infectious disease researcher, said the departures were

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"a serious loss for America."

"The loss of experienced, world-class infectious disease experts at CDC is directly related to the failed leadership of extremists currently in charge of the Department of Health and Human Services," he said. "They make our country less safe and less prepared for public health emergencies."

Monarez, 50, was the agency's 21st director and the first to pass through Senate confirmation following a 2023 law. She was named acting director in January and then tapped as the nominee in March after Trump abruptly withdrew his first choice, David Weldon.

She was sworn in on July 31 — less than a month ago, making her the shortest-serving CDC director in the history of the 79-year-old agency.

Her short time at CDC was tumultuous. On Aug. 8, at the end of her first full week on the job, a Georgia man opened fire from a spot at a pharmacy across the street from CDC's main entrance. The 30-year-old man blamed the COVID-19 vaccine for making him depressed and suicidal. He killed a police officer and fired more than 180 shots into CDC buildings before killing himself.

No one at CDC was injured, but it shell-shocked a staff that already had low morale from other recent changes.

Monarez had scheduled an "all hands meeting" meeting for the CDC staff — seen as an important step in addressing concerns among staff since the shooting — for Monday this week. But HHS officials meddled with that, too, canceling it and calling Monarez to Washington, D.C., said a CDC official who was not authorized to talk about it and spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity.

The Atlanta-based federal agency was initially founded to prevent the spread of malaria in the U.S. Its mission was later expanded, and it gradually became a global leader on infectious and chronic diseases and a go-to source of health information.

This year it's been hit by widespread staff cuts, resignations of key officials and heated controversy over long-standing CDC vaccine policies upended by Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

During her Senate confirmation process, Monarez told senators that she values vaccines, public health interventions and rigorous scientific evidence. But she largely dodged questions about whether those positions put her at odds with Kennedy, a longtime vaccine skeptic who has criticized and sought to dismantle some of the agency's previous protocols and decisions.

Sen. Patty Murray, a Washington Democrat, praised Monarez for standing up to Kennedy and called for him to be fired.

"We cannot let RFK Jr. burn what's left of the CDC and our other critical health agencies to the ground," she said in a statement Wednesday night.

The Washington Post first reported Monarez was ousted.

## Top Florida official says 'Alligator Alcatraz' will likely be empty within days, email shows

By KATE PAYNE and MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press/Report for America

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — A top Florida official says the controversial state-run immigration detention facility in the Everglades will likely be empty in a matter of days, even as Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis' administration and the federal government fight a judge's order to shutter the facility dubbed "Alligator Alcatraz" by late October. That's according to an email exchange shared with The Associated Press.

In a message sent to South Florida Rabbi Mario Rojzman on Aug. 22 related to providing chaplaincy services at the facility, Florida Division of Emergency Management Executive Director Kevin Guthrie said "we are probably going to be down to 0 individuals within a few days," implying there would soon be no need for the services.

Rojzman, and an executive assistant for the rabbi who sent an original email to Guthrie, confirmed to the AP on Wednesday Guthrie's emailed response to both of them and the veracity of the messages.

A spokesperson for Guthrie, whose agency has overseen the construction and operation of the site, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

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DeSantis suggests deportations are behind declining population

Questioned about the email exchange by a reporter at an event in Orlando, DeSantis framed the declining population as the result of an uptick in deportations by the Department of Homeland Security.

"Ultimately it's DHS's decision where they want to process and stage detainees and it's their decision about when they want to bring them out," DeSantis said. He acknowledged the ongoing litigation may be "an influence" on the pace of deportations.

While DeSantis sought to minimize the state's role in removals, attorneys for the federal government have said in legal filings that "any decision" to detain unauthorized immigrants at the center "would be Florida's decision, not DHS's," adding that the facility operates using "state funds on state lands under state emergency authority."

Peak detainee population neared 1,000

The facility was rapidly constructed two months ago with the goal of holding up to 3,000 detainees as part of President Donald Trump's push to deport people who are in the U.S. illegally. At one point, it held almost 1,000 detainees, but U.S. Rep. Maxwell Frost, D-Fla., said that he was told during a tour last week that only 300 to 350 detainees remained. Three lawsuits challenging practices at the detention center have been filed, including one that estimated at least 100 detainees who had been at the facility have been deported. Others have been transferred to other immigration detention centers.

News that the last detainee at "Alligator Alcatraz" could leave the facility within days came less than a week after a federal judge in Miami ordered the detention center to wind down operations, with the last detainee needing to be out within 60 days. The state of Florida appealed the decision, and the federal government asked U.S. District Judge Kathleen Williams to put her order on hold pending the appeal, saying that the Everglades facility's thousands of beds were badly needed since other detention facilities in Florida were overcrowded.

Environmental groups and the Miccosukee Tribe, whose lawsuit led to the judge's ruling, opposed the request. They disputed that the Everglades facility was needed, especially as Florida plans to open a second immigration detention facility in north Florida that DeSantis has dubbed "Deportation Depot."

Williams had not ruled on the stay request as of Wednesday.

Lawsuits claim 'severe problems' at facility

The judge said in her order that she expected the population of the facility to decline within 60 days by transferring detainees to other facilities, and once that happened, fencing, lighting and generators should be removed.

Environmental groups and the Miccosukee Tribe had argued in their lawsuit that further construction and operations should be stopped until federal and state officials complied with federal environmental laws. Their lawsuit claimed the facility threatened environmentally sensitive wetlands that are home to protected plants and animals and would undermine billions of dollars spent over decades on environmental restoration.

By late July, state officials had already signed more than \$245 million in contracts for building and operating the facility at a lightly used, single-runway training airport in the middle of the rugged and remote Everglades. The center officially opened July 1.

In their lawsuits, civil rights attorneys described "severe problems" at the facility which were "previously unheard-of in the immigration system." Detainees were being held for weeks without any charges, they had disappeared from ICE's online detainee locator and no one at the facility was making initial custody or bond determinations, they said.

Detainees also had described worms turning up in the food, toilets that didn't flush, flooding floors with fecal waste, and mosquitoes and other insects everywhere.



## What we know about the shooter who killed 2 and wounded 17 in Minneapolis

By CLAUDIA LAUER, BRUCE SCHREINER and HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

Authorities are working to learn the motive of the shooter who fired into a Minneapolis Catholic school's church during Wednesday's Mass, killing two children and injuring 17 worshippers.

Officials identified the shooter as Robin Westman, 23, and said Westman was found dead in the parking lot from what they believe was a self-inflicted gunshot. Minneapolis Police Chief Brian O'Hara said authorities were searching a vehicle in the parking lot believed to be the shooter's and three associated residences in the area. They also were scouring content that Westman allegedly scheduled to be released on YouTube and has since been removed from the platform.

The FBI is investigating this shooting as an act of domestic terrorism and hate crime targeting Catholics, officials said.

### What authorities said

The shooter — armed with a rifle, shotgun and pistol — approached the side of the church at Annunciation Catholic School and shot through the windows toward the children sitting in the pews during Mass just before 8:30 a.m.

O'Hara said Westman used all three weapons and fired dozens of rounds. Westman tried to barricade the doors with a wooden plank on the side of the church where he was shooting.

Westman legally purchased the weapons, had no known criminal history and acted alone, the chief said.

The shooter's mother worked at Annunciation

An August 2021 post on the Facebook page for the Church of the Annunciation celebrated the retirement of Mary Grace Westman after five years working there. A church newsletter from 2016 announced her hiring as a new administrative assistant in the business office and said she was a member of Saint Agnes Church in St. Paul.

It is not clear if Robin Westman ever attended church, visited the grounds or was enrolled in school at Annunciation. A phone call and text message to a cellphone number listed as belonging to Mary Grace Westman was not answered Wednesday afternoon.

Associated Press reporters attempted to reach the shooter's father at an address listed as his residence, but nobody answered the door. Phone calls and text messages to numbers associated with Robin Westman's siblings also were not answered.

A spokesperson for the Archdiocese declined to answer questions when approached at the church Wednesday.

### What else is known about the shooter

Federal officials referred to Westman as transgender. Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey condemned anyone who would use the shooting to villainize the transgender community.

In 2020, a judge approved a petition, signed by Westman's mother, asking for a name change from Robert to Robin, saying the petitioner "identifies as a female and wants her name to reflect that identification."

Westman's uncle, former Kentucky state lawmaker Bob Heleringer, told The Associated Press that he barely knew Robin Westman but was watching coverage of Wednesday's tragedy.

When reached by phone, after a long pause, Heleringer initially said, "I don't know what to say."

"I wish he had shot me instead of innocent schoolchildren," Heleringer added.

Heleringer said Robin is the youngest child of one of his sisters. He said he last saw Robin at a family wedding several years ago but has not had contact with Robin since then.

### What was posted online

Police said they were aware of time-released video and writings that may have come from the shooter. On a YouTube channel titled "Robin W" there were at least two videos posted before the channel was taken down by site administrators. The videos never show the face of the person speaking.

In one video that was about 10 minutes long, a cellphone camera pans to show a cache of weapons, ammunition and loaded magazines with sayings written on them including "kill Donald Trump" and "Where

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is your God?" Some were written in Cyrillic.

During the video, the person filming sings the word "tomorrow" and says, "I'm sorry to my family... that's the only people I'm sorry to." Also, "I regret everything. I didn't ask for life. You didn't ask for death."

At one point, the person holds up a smaller firearm from the cache and says, "This one is for me. In case I need it."

The video also shows a letter written to the person's family, apologizing for what the shooting will mean for them, expressing love for them, and saying to change their name and "move on."

A second, almost 20-minute-long video shows two different journals. The first is more than 150 pages, all written in what appears to be the Cyrillic alphabet. The second journal had a last entry dated 8-21-25 and was more than 60 pages and also written entirely in Cyrillic.

The second notebook had a sticker on the inside cover depicting a semiautomatic AK-style rifle on top of a trans equality pride flag. Next to it was a sticker for the band KMFDM. One of the shooters in the 1999 Columbine School shooting posted the band's lyrics on his website prior to the rampage.

The German industrial band has issued statements repeatedly condemning violence and school shootings. But in several high profile shootings since Columbine, shooters have had shirts, stickers or other references to the band as a reference to the Columbine shooting.

During the video, the person can be heard mumbling and breathing heavily. "I'll probably just upload a video on the day," the person says before flipping to what appears to be a drawing of the layout of a church, pointing to two outside windows and then stabbing the illustration with a long knife.

## Dispatcher shakes it off after announcing Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce's engagement over scanner

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — Police dispatcher Julia Jordan accidentally added a dash of celebrity gossip to her public service this week when she shared "Taylor Swift is engaged" over a hot microphone.

That appears to be how officers in the Lansing, Michigan, area learned about the superstar singer's betrothal to Kansas City Chiefs star tight end Travis Kelce.

The official announcement, made in a five-photo joint post on Instagram, marks the fairytale culmination of a courtship that for two years and has thrilled and fascinated millions around the world.

Joyful chaos ensued nationwide, with oddsmakers taking bets on when and where the celebrity couple will wed. Swifties, the pop star's enormous and ardent fan base, can even wager on the flavor of the wedding cake.

Kansas City-based tax preparer H&R Block sent out a light-hearted email to staff, telling them they could head home early to check social media feeds and debate potential wedding playlists.

"Celebrate love. Speculate about the dress. Argue whether the reception will be held in KC or a castle in Europe," the email said.

Matthew Pittman, an associate professor at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, hastily organized a skit before his social media class began Tuesday, pretending to cancel a test because of the engagement.

"I can't focus. You all can't focus. Class is canceled, get outta here," Pittman told the students.

Video shows the students grabbing backpacks and rushing for the door. By the end of class, the video had around 50,000 views and by dinner around 1 million. It was so convincing that some news outlets mistakenly reported that Pittman actually did call off class because of the engagement. He had to reassure a higher up at the university that he hadn't.

"This is going to be like a royal wedding," said Pittman, who has dozens of Swift's songs on his running and workout playlist. "We don't have a real king or queen or prince or princess, but we have this now. This is the joyous, happy love story. A lot of people need it."

Jordan, the Ingham County, Michigan, dispatcher, said the last big event that she watched with coworkers was Prince Harry and Meghan Markle's 2018 nuptials. Now she thinks they might watch Swift and Kelce's wedding together, especially after what happened.

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After the first scanner flub, an officer informed her, "You had an open mic there," and then deadpanned, "That's great news about Taylor Swift."

Jordan tried to fix the problem, but laughter erupted when she continued: "Dispatch. I'm clear. Yeah. Aren't you happy about Taylor Swift?"

Jordan had been eagerly awaiting the news from the singer, whose hit song "Shake It Off" spoke to her. "We do a hard job, lots of dark things, so it's kind of nice to be able to laugh a little," she said.

Officers played along with the scanner mishap, one asking, "Well, give us some more gossip, at least."

"It's a big ring," Jordan said.

"Best hot mic ever," an officer declared.

Jordan has been ribbed ever since. "I had one ask me when I was planning to retire, and I said not soon enough."

## What to know about the shooting at a Minneapolis Catholic school

By R.J. RICO Associated Press

A shooter opened fire Wednesday morning during Mass at a Minneapolis Catholic school, killing two children and injuring 17 other people before dying by suicide, officials said.

The shooting happened at Annunciation Catholic School, just days after the first day of school there on Monday.

Of the 17 injured, police said 14 were children, with their ages ranging from 6 to 15. Authorities said they are all expected to survive.

The shooting comes as school years are starting across the U.S., and some universities have dealt with false alarms about school shootings. At least a dozen college campuses faced hoax active shooter calls — some featuring gunshots sounding in the background.

Here are some of the things to know about the shooting at Annunciation Catholic School.

What do we know about the victims?

The two children who were killed were 8 and 10 years old, officials said. Authorities have not released the identities of the victims, but they said the children who were killed were fatally shot while they were sitting in the church pews.

The three adults who were injured are parishioners in their 80s, officials said. All of the victims have varying injuries but are expected to survive, authorities said.

It is unclear how many people were inside the church at the time. Officials said the shooting occurred near the beginning of Mass, when some children were seated and others were still entering.

What do we know about the shooter?

Minneapolis Police Chief Brian O'Hara said the shooter — armed with a rifle, shotgun and pistol — approached the side of the church and shot through the windows toward the children inside before dying by suicide.

He said the shooter, 23-year-old Robin Westman, did not have an extensive known criminal history, acted alone and had legally purchased the weapons recently.

O'Hara said authorities are aware of video material that the alleged shooter had timed to be released on YouTube. The content has been removed and is under review as investigators try to determine a motive, the police chief said.

In one video that lasts about 10 minutes, the alleged shooter shows weapons and ammunition, many with sayings written on them including the phrases "kill Donald Trump" and "Where is your God?" Some are in Cyrillic.

The person holds up a letter to relatives, sings the word "tomorrow" and says, "I'm sorry to my family ... that's the only people I'm sorry to."

A second, almost 20-minute video shows two journals with stickers, some depicting weapons. The alleged shooter flips to what looks to be a drawing of the layout of the church, points to two outside windows and then stabs the illustration with a long knife.

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Federal officials referred to Westman as transgender, and the mayor decried hatred being directed at "our transgender community." Westman's gender identity wasn't clear. In 2020, a judge approved a petition, signed by Westman's mother, asking for a name change from Robert to Robin, saying the petitioner "identifies as a female and wants her name to reflect that identification."

Former Kentucky state lawmaker Bob Heleringer told The Associated Press he is Westman's uncle, but had not seen Westman in a few years.

"He was my nephew, and I wish he had shot me instead of innocent schoolchildren," Heleringer said during a phone interview. "I barely knew him. They (Robin's family) never lived in Louisville. They lived in Minnesota."

What do we know about the school?

The school, which goes from pre-K to eighth grade, had 391 students enrolled for the 2023-2024 school year, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. Each grade level has two classes, with about 20 students in each class.

It is in the city's Windom neighborhood, about 5 miles (8 kilometers) south of downtown Minneapolis.

The school's website says teachers "focus on Christian values and civic-mindedness." Principal Matt DeBoer said that, during the shooting, adults protected the children, with older children protecting younger ones.

President Trump's comments

President Donald Trump said in a Truth Social post that he was briefed on the "tragic shooting" and that the White House would continue to monitor the situation.

"The FBI quickly responded and they are on the scene," Trump said in a statement on social media.

"The White House will continue to monitor this terrible situation. Please join me in praying for everyone involved!"

A nearby shooting

A shooter killed one person and injured six others at nearby Cristo Rey Jesuit High School on Tuesday afternoon, in what authorities believe was a targeted shooting.

Annunciation Catholic School is about 4 miles (6 kilometers) south of Cristo Rey, and officials do not believe the shootings are linked.

The police chief said Tuesday that a group of adults hanging out near the school were shot, and at least one of them was targeted. There was no mention of anyone from the school being involved in the shooting.

## FDA approves updated COVID-19 shots with limits for some kids and adults

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. regulators approved updated COVID-19 shots Wednesday but limited their use for many Americans — and removed one of the two vaccines available for young children.

The new shots from Pfizer, Moderna and Novavax are approved for all seniors. But the Food and Drug Administration narrowed their use for younger adults and children to those with at least one high-risk health condition, such as asthma or obesity. That presents new barriers to access for millions of Americans who would have to prove their risk — and millions more who may want to get vaccinated and suddenly no longer qualify.

Additionally, Pfizer's vaccine will no longer be available for any child under 5, because the FDA said it was revoking the shot's emergency authorization for that age group.

Parents will still be able to seek out shots from rival drugmaker Moderna, the other maker of mRNA vaccines, which has full FDA approval for children as young as 6 months. But the company's Spikevax vaccine is only approved for children with at least one serious health problem.

The revamped vaccines target a newer version of the continuously evolving virus and are set to begin shipping soon. But it could be days or weeks before many Americans know if they'll be able to get one, with access dependent on decisions by federal health advisers, health insurers, pharmacies and state authorities.



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The new restrictions — previewed by FDA officials in May — are a break from the previous U.S. policy, which recommended an annual COVID-19 shot for all Americans 6 months and up.

The approach reflects heightened skepticism about the ongoing risks of COVID-19 and the need for yearly booster shots from Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and FDA Commissioner Marty Makary, both outspoken critics of wide-scale vaccinations.

"The American people demanded science, safety, and common sense. This framework delivers all three," Kennedy wrote on social media.

Novavax's shot is only open to people 12 or older, not younger children, and carries the same risk-based restrictions that are now in place for Moderna and Pfizer. It's the nation's only traditional, protein-based COVID-19 vaccine.

Coverage questions and access issues are unresolved

The new limits "can't help but create barriers to vaccinations" and cause confusion for patients, doctors and pharmacists, said Dr. William Schaffner, a Vanderbilt University vaccines expert.

Some medical groups, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, have objected to the restrictions, saying they may block vaccine access for families who want to protect their children. Last week, the group offered its own recommendations for kids, saying annual shots are strongly recommended for children ages 6 months to 2 years and advised for older children.

In his post Wednesday, Kennedy said the shots will be "available for all patients who choose them after consulting with their doctors."

But Americans are likely to confront a number of logistical hurdles.

Insurers typically base their vaccine coverage decisions on the recommendations of a panel of advisers to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, but some say they will also look to medical professional groups, including the American Medical Association.

Earlier this year, Kennedy replaced the entire CDC panel, naming several doctors and researchers who have repeatedly questioned the safety of commonly used vaccines and ingredients. The panel is expected to meet in September, but no agenda has been released.

Depending on the panel's advice, Americans under age 65 could be expected to provide documentation of a serious medical problem before they can get a shot. Also complicating the rollout is the fact that pharmacists — who administer most COVID-19 shots — typically aren't expected to collect that kind of information. And laws governing their ability to administer routine vaccinations vary by state.

Access could also be complicated for healthy adults and children who are interested in getting a shot for extra protection.

If the latest vaccines aren't covered by their insurance, those patients could be required to pay \$150 or more out of pocket if they want one. If they aren't considered high-risk, they might also have to find a doctor or other health professional willing to give the shot "off label." Many pharmacists might be reluctant to give the shots outside of FDA's instructions.

"This makes things much more complicated, and when things get complicated we see vaccine uptake go down," said Andy Pekosz, a virologist at Johns Hopkins University.

Shots target a recently dominant coronavirus version

The updated shots target coronavirus subtypes that are closely related to some newly emerging cousins. Pfizer and Moderna said they expect their shots to be available within days. Novavax's vaccine is expected in the early fall, a spokesman said.

Shots from all three companies were initially made available under the FDA's emergency use authorization, an expedited process to quickly review vaccines, drugs and other countermeasures during the pandemic. Pfizer had not yet sought full approval for its doses designed for children under 5, which is the reason that Moderna will be the only provider of shots for that age group this year.

In addition to revoking emergency use of Pfizer's vaccine in young children, Kennedy said Wednesday the government also pulled remaining authorizations for all other COVID-19 vaccines and another therapy from the pandemic years, convalescent plasma, which was used to treat hospitalized patients before the

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first antiviral drugs became available.

COVID-19 vaccines do a good job preventing severe disease, hospitalization and death, which remain a bigger risk for seniors, young children and people with underlying health risks.

Preliminary data from the CDC estimates 47,500 Americans died from COVID-related causes last year.

Some experts worried that fewer vaccinations could increase the strain on hospitals over the winter, when cases tend to accelerated.

"Down the line, this will really stress our health workforce," said Amanda Jezek, of the Infectious Diseases Society of America. "The public health impacts here are very worrisome."

## Wall Street edges higher and pushes S&P 500 to another record

By ALEX VEIGA AP Business Writer

Modest gains on Wall Street lifted the stock market to an all-time high Wednesday ahead of a highly anticipated earnings update from computer chip giant Nvidia.

The S&P 500 rose 0.2%, good enough to nudge the benchmark index past the record high it set two weeks ago. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 0.3% and the Nasdaq composite closed 0.2% higher.

Technology companies led the way higher, outweighing declines in communication services and other sectors.

After the market closed, Nvidia reported quarterly earnings and revenue that topped Wall Street analysts' forecasts, though the company noted that sales of its artificial intelligence chipsets rose at a slower pace than analysts anticipated. The stock fell 3.2% in after-hours trading after having slipped 0.1% during the regular session.

Investors consider Nvidia a barometer for the strength of the boom in artificial intelligence because the company makes most of the chips that power the technology. Its heavy weighting also gives Nvidia outsized influence as a bellwether for the broader market.

"Saying this is the most important stock in the world is an understatement," said Jay Woods, chief global strategist at Freedom Capital Markets. "The stock's average move after an earnings release is plus or minus 7.4%, so just an average move will make an impact on the entire market."

Several big software companies -- CrowdStrike Holdings, ServiceNow, Palo Alto Networks, Intuit and Salesforce -- rose ahead of the Nvidia results.

The stocks have been mostly in the red so far this quarter amid worries that AI is going to make software creation much easier at the expense of big software companies' competitive edge.

Cracker Barrel shares climbed 8% after the restaurant company scrapped plans to change its logo following an uproar on social media that even drew a comment from President Donald Trump.

Shares in several companies rose after they reported quarterly results that topped analysts' forecasts. Department store chain Kohl's vaulted 24% and database platform company MongoDB surged 38%. Both companies also raised their full-year guidance.

J.M. Smucker slid 4.4% after the jelly and jam maker's latest quarterly snapshot fell short of analysts' estimates.

Among other stocks that lost ground: doughnut shop chain Krispy Kreme, which fell 3.5%, and Paramount Skydance, which dropped 6.5% for the biggest decline among S&P 500 companies.

Treasury yields mostly fell in the bond market. The yield on the 10-year Treasury slipped to 4.24% from 4.26% late Tuesday.

Crude oil prices rose. European markets finished mostly lower and Asian markets closed mixed overnight.

Trading on Wall Street is off to an uneven start this week following big gains last week on hopes for interest rate cuts from the Fed.

Markets have been subdued after Trump escalated his fight with the central bank by trying to fire Federal Reserve Governor Lisa Cook. Cook's lawyer said she'll sue Trump's administration to try to stop him.

Trump has been feuding with the central bank over its cautious interest rate policy. The Fed has held rates steady since late 2024 over worries that Trump's unpredictable tariff policies will reignite inflation.

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Trump has also threatened to fire Fed Chair Jerome Powell, often taunting him with name-calling. Still, he is only one of 12 votes that decides interest rate policy.

For now, the situation isn't expected to have a major impact on the Fed's near-term policy.

The two-year Treasury yield, which closely tracks expectations for Federal Reserve action, dropped to 3.62% from 3.68%.

Traders are still betting the Fed will trim its benchmark interest rate at its next meeting in September. Traders see an 90.3% chance that the central bank will cut the rate by a quarter of a percentage point, according to data from CME Group.

"It's kind of a foregone conclusion from the market that we're going to get the September interest rate cut," said Jed Ellerbroek, portfolio manager at Argent Capital Management. "The bigger question is probably 'What's after that?'"

The Federal Reserve cut its benchmark interest rate in late 2024 after spending the last several years fighting rising inflation by raising rates. It managed to mostly tame inflation and avoided having those higher rates stall economic growth, thanks largely to strong consumer spending and a resilient job market.

The Fed hit the pause button heading into 2025 over concerns that higher tariffs imposed by Trump could reignite inflation. Lower interest rates make borrowing easier, helping to spur more investment and spending, but that could also potentially fuel inflation. However, concerns are deepening over the jobs market.

Economic data is relatively light this week until Friday, which will bring another update on inflation: the U.S. personal consumption expenditures index. Economists expect it to show that inflation remained at about 2.9% in July, compared with a year ago. Businesses have been warning investors and consumers about higher costs and prices because of tariffs.

Steep tariffs placed by the Trump administration on India over Russian oil purchases took effect Wednesday, bringing the combined tariffs imposed on the U.S. ally to 50%.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 15.46 points to 6,481.40. The Dow added 147.16 points to 45,565.23, and the Nasdaq climbed 45.87 points to 21,590.14.

## Kilmar Abrego Garcia requests asylum in the US, hoping to prevent his deportation to Uganda

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN and BEN FINLEY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Kilmar Abrego Garcia, whose case has come to encapsulate much of President Donald Trump's hard-line immigration agenda, wants to seek asylum in the United States, his lawyers told a federal judge Wednesday.

The asylum request — Abrego Garcia's second, after a denial in 2019 — has been submitted in a Maryland immigration court, further complicating his complex immigration case that intensified in March when he was wrongfully deported to a notorious prison in his native El Salvador.

The Trump administration maintains that Abrego Garcia, 30, is part of the dangerous MS-13 gang — an allegation he denies — and has said it intends to deport him to the African country of Uganda.

If Abrego Garcia's new asylum request is approved, it could provide a green card and a path to citizenship. But his petition must go through the U.S. immigration court system, which is not part of the judiciary but an arm of the Department of Justice and under the Trump administration's authority.

Asylum or deportation

Immigration courts have become a key focus of Trump's renewed immigration enforcement efforts. The president has fired more than 50 immigration judges since he returned to the White House in January.

But Abrego Garcia has something that most people in his situation lack: A team of lawyers fighting for him and a federal judge who is monitoring his case.

His attorneys filed a lawsuit before U.S. District Court Judge Paula Xinis in Maryland to ensure that Abrego Garcia can exercise his constitutional right to fight against deportation in immigration court. They have also argued he has the right to express fear of persecution and torture in Uganda. Abrego Garcia has told authorities he would prefer to be sent to Costa Rica if he must be removed from the U.S.

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Xinis stated explicitly during a conference call with lawyers Wednesday that she will not — and cannot — rule on whether Abrego Garcia is granted asylum or is deported.

"We have the understanding that the asylum process is of no moment to me," Xinis said. "I don't have jurisdiction over that."

But Xinis said she can weigh in to ensure Abrego Garcia is allowed to exercise his right to due process. His attorneys say he is entitled to immigration court proceedings and appeals, including to the U.S. Court of Appeals, before he can be deported.

Xinis said she'll focus on whether Abrego Garcia goes through required immigration court process or "if there is no process."

"But there could be shades of that," she said.

The government cannot remove Abrego Garcia from the continental U.S. before an evidentiary hearing for the lawsuit on Oct. 6, Xinis ruled. She also ordered that he be kept within 200 miles (320 kilometers) of her court in Greenbelt to ensure he can access his lawyers. He's being held at a detention facility in Farmville, Virginia, which is west of Richmond, according to ICE's website.

Abrego Garcia was released Friday from a jail in Tennessee, where he has been charged with human smuggling. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents detained him in Baltimore on Monday and said he would be deported to Uganda.

During Wednesday's conference call, Justice Department attorney Drew Ensign said the government disagrees with the court's order not to remove Abrego Garcia while the lawsuit is pending but that it will comply.

Abrego Garcia's lawyers say sending him to Uganda would be punishment for successfully fighting his deportation to El Salvador, refusing to plead guilty to the smuggling charges and for seeking release from jail in Tennessee.

Abrego Garcia is facing immigration proceedings with a level of legal representation and oversight that few people get, according to Ohio State University law professor César Cuauhtémoc García Hernández.

"I wish I could tell you that I am 100% confident that they're not going to stick him on an airplane to Kampala right now," he said, naming Uganda's capital. "But I can't because the president is personally involved in his legal fight. The attorney general is personally involved in his legal fight ... Half the Cabinet officials know who he is."

An earlier request for asylum

Abrego Garcia fled El Salvador at the age of 16, around 2011, because a local gang was extorting and terrorized his family, according to court records. He arrived in the U.S. without authorization and joined his brother, who had become a U.S. citizen, and settled in Maryland.

Abrego Garcia found work in construction, eventually got married and started a family. In 2019, he was detained by local police in Maryland when he arrived outside a Home Depot in search of work as a day laborer.

Authorities had been told by a confidential informant that Abrego Garcia and other men outside the store could be identified as members of MS-13 because of their clothing and tattoos. Abrego Garcia was never charged — and has repeatedly denied the allegation. He was turned over to ICE and subsequently applied for asylum.

A U.S. immigration judge denied his request because he applied more than a year after he had entered the U.S. But the immigration judge issued an order shielding Abrego Garcia from deportation to El Salvador because he established he had a well-founded fear of gang persecution.

Abrego Garcia was released under federal supervision and continued to live with his American wife and children. He checked in with ICE each year, received a federal work permit and was working as a sheet metal apprentice earlier this year, his lawyers have said.

But in March, the Trump administration deported Abrego Garcia to a notorious El Salvador prison, alleging he was a member of MS-13.

Wrongful deportation and his return



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The deportation violated the immigration judge's 2019 order barring his removal to El Salvador. Abrego Garcia's wife sued to bring him back. Facing mounting pressure and a U.S. Supreme Court order, the Trump administration returned Abrego Garcia to the U.S. in June, where he was charged with human smuggling, a federal offense.

Abrego Garcia is accused of taking money to transport people who were in the country illegally. He has pleaded not guilty and asked the judge to dismiss the case, saying it was filed to punish him for challenging his deportation.

The charges stem from a 2022 traffic stop for speeding in Tennessee. There were nine passengers in the SUV and Abrego Garcia had \$1,400 in cash on him. While officers discussed among themselves their suspicions of smuggling, he was allowed to drive away with only a warning.

A Homeland Security agent testified that he didn't begin investigating until this April, when the government was facing mounting pressure to return Abrego Garcia to the U.S. The trial is set for January.

Federal officials argue Abrego Garcia can be deported because he came to the U.S. illegally and the immigration judge's 2019 ruling deemed him eligible for expulsion, just not to his native El Salvador.

## Nonalcoholic beer and mocktails can help people stay sober or drink less, but are not for everyone

By LAURA UNGAR AP Science Writer

Several years into her sobriety, Logan Denzer decided to try nonalcoholic beer and mocktails while others around her drank real booze.

"A lot of people feel out of place" when everyone else is imbibing, said the 27-year-old from Los Angeles, who considers these beverages "an excellent solution."

Millions of Americans agree — including others recovering from addiction, people trying to cut down on their drinking and the rising number of young adults forgoing alcohol altogether.

They've fueled a booming industry. Recent research shows that drinking less, or nothing at all, is a much healthier way to go. Alcohol has been linked to cancers, injuries and a host of other problems.

Still, health experts say nonalcoholic beverages aren't for everyone, especially if they might trigger cravings for alcohol. These so-called NA drinks are meant to mimic alcohol in many ways, such as appearance, smell and taste.

"It's important to recognize that these are probably not one-size-fits-all products," said researcher Molly Bowdring of Stanford University. "You might see peers or friends or family members use them and have no problem with them, but it really comes back to your own individual experience."

'Zebra striping' helps cut back on booze

Retail sales of nonalcoholic wine, beer and spirits surged to \$823 million last year. That's according to market research firm NielsenIQ, which says more than nine in 10 NA customers also buy alcohol.

"They're wanting to not necessarily drink during the week, or they're wanting to switch out at a particular occasion," said Marcos Salazar of the Adult Non-Alcoholic Beverage Association. "So they may have an alcoholic beverage and then an adult nonalcoholic beverage. That's called zebra striping ... and it kind of extends the night."

Retiree Ann Kopp Mitchell, who recently tasted various NA beverages at Monday Morning Bottle Shop in San Diego, does a version of this.

"If I want a glass of wine with my dinner, I don't feel guilty. I can enjoy that glass of wine. And if I wanna have a spirit because we're celebrating someone's birthday, or champagne, I will do that. But I'll only have one, and then let it go, and then maybe go to a nonalcoholic," she said. "It's a way of continuing with that social pattern of drinking that I enjoy."

While a typical beer has about 5% alcohol by volume, NA drinks are only allowed to have up to 0.5%, about the same as a ripe banana. People sometimes pick them when they don't want to be intoxicated, like before exercise or driving.

More mocktails on the menu is a positive health trend — but watch the sugar

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An online survey Bowdring conducted with colleagues found that the vast majority of people who drink both beverages say NA drinks help them reduce their alcohol use.

That makes their growing popularity a positive trend overall, said Dr. Joseph Lee, CEO of the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation, an addiction treatment and advocacy organization.

"More and more when I go to restaurants, mocktails are just offered, like they're on the menu and it's just part of the norm now," said Lee, an expert in psychiatry and addiction medicine. "Those are really healthy things to see on a broader public health level."

But there is a catch: Some drinks, like mocktails made with soda and sweet syrups, have high levels of sugar. The American Heart Association recommends limiting added sugars to no more than about six teaspoons a day for women and nine teaspoons a day for men. A 12-ounce can of soda on its own contains 10 teaspoons.

Who should be wary of NA beverages?

The picture gets murkier for people with drinking problems.

Those entering treatment for alcohol use disorder say they've had mixed success using NA beverages to reduce or stop their drinking, Bowdring said.

"They do contain a lot of the alcohol-related cues," she said. "Because they are so similar to alcohol, it could be that they actually trigger craving for full strength alcohol and may lead people to revert to alcohol use."

When Denzer first got sober seven years ago, she and her friends avoided drinking NA beverages.

"We were pretty opposed to it because we were like, 'Well, this tastes like beer and we're a year sober, and so we're going to associate that taste with actual alcohol,'" said Denzer, who was treated at Hazelden Betty Ford. "As time went on, we became more open to it."

But it's not for everyone, she said, "particularly for people who are either newer in recovery or who are on shaky ground."

Experts agreed that NA drinks are more appropriate for those further along in recovery.

"Everyone's journey is going to be a little bit different," Bowdring said. "I encourage folks to just sort of be aware of how these drinks are impacting them."

That's the bottom line, even for those who aren't dealing with alcoholism.

You should have "an honest appraisal, without judgment, about your own health risk in much the same way that most people can look at their family history and gauge their risk for everything from diabetes to breast cancer," Lee said. "What it comes down to is: You really need to know yourself."

## NFL eases restrictions on Tom Brady's role as Fox Sports analyst

By JOE REEDY AP Sports Writer

The NFL is easing some of its restrictions on Tom Brady as he prepares for his second season as Fox Sports' top analyst.

The league will allow Brady to participate in production meetings with teams, as long as they are conducted virtually or via Zoom. He still isn't allowed to watch practices or set foot in a team's training complex.

The Brady rules were put in place due to the seven-time Super Bowl winning quarterback having a 5% stake as a limited owner in the Las Vegas Raiders.

Brady was allowed to attend production meetings with Kansas City Chiefs and Philadelphia Eagles players and coaches before Super Bowl 59. He wasn't able to view practices.

"The ability to join and be able to talk to a coach, coordinators or players and help him prepare for his job was one that felt like a natural step forward," Hans Schroeder, the NFL's executive vice president of media distribution, told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

Many of the network broadcast crews have done their production meetings with teams virtually, even though some still prefer getting into a city on Friday to watch the home team and then talk to the visiting team at their hotel the next day.

Before the Super Bowl, Brady said that not being allowed in production meetings did not affect his re-

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search when preparing for games, even though there were other benefits he acknowledged he missed.

"I think the best part (of production meetings) is there are just genuine relationships that get built up over time, and it's a shared experience with people on your own crew sitting on calls and talking," he said.

"From a research standpoint, I listen to press conferences all week. To me, there's no difference in a media member asking a question on a Wednesday, Thursday or Friday press conference that would be any different from any of the questions I would ask or the crew would ask."

Fox's top crew of Brady, Kevin Burkhardt, Erin Andrews and Tom Rinaldi will call the NFC East matchup between the New York Giants and Washington Commanders on Sept. 7 before the Eagles face the Chiefs in a Super Bowl rematch the following week.

Fox Sports president of production and operations/executive producer Brad Zager said in an interview with the AP earlier this year that any inferences about a potential conflict of interest between Brady calling games and being part of the Raiders' decision-making process are unfounded.

## Trump extends control over Washington by taking management of Union Station away from Amtrak

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's administration is taking management of Union Station away from Amtrak in the latest example of the federal government exerting its power over the nation's capital.

Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy announced the takeover Wednesday alongside Amtrak President Roger Harris at Washington's main transportation hub during the launch of an updated version of the rail service's Acela train. The federal government owns Union Station, which is near the Capitol.

Duffy said the station has "fallen into disrepair" when it should be a "point of pride" for the District of Columbia. He said the Republican administration's move would help beautify the landmark in an economical way and was in line with Trump's vision.

"He wants Union Station to be beautiful again. He wants transit to be safe again. And he wants our nation's capital to be great again. And today is part of that," Duffy said.

It's Trump's latest attempt to put the city under his control. In recent weeks, Trump has increased the number of federal law enforcement and immigration agents on city streets while also taking over the Metropolitan Police Department and activating thousands of National Guard members. Last week, Trump said he wants \$2 billion from Congress to beautify Washington.

Duffy said the federal government can do a better job managing the train station and attract more shops and restaurants and generate more revenue that will be used to pay for upgrades to the station, which opened in 1907. Since then, the cavernous Roman-columned building has been through multiple management changes and numerous ups and downs regarding its cleanliness, safety and state of repair.

Mayor Muriel Bowser said upgrading the transit hub that serves various rail lines and buses would be an "amazing initiative" for the federal government to take on because the city cannot afford the cost.

"It has suffered from not being able to get the money that it needs for the renovation," the Democrat said at a separate news conference.

National Guard troops have patrolled in and around Union Station ever since Trump announced the anti-crime effort this month. Vice President JD Vance and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth were shouted down by opponents of the federal intervention when they visited with troops there last week.

Duffy had pressed Amtrak about crime at the station in a March letter to its chief operating officer and requested an updated plan on how it intended to improve public safety there.

The deputy transportation secretary, Steve Bradbury, cited a new roof and new public restrooms among \$170 million in upgrades that he said are needed at the station.

Amtrak's new high-speed train, the NextGen Acela, will start serving the Northeast Corridor on Thursday, said Harris, Amtrak's president. The trains can travel at speeds of up to 160 mph, about 10 mph faster than the Acela train it is replacing. Duffy and the officials from the Union Station event boarded one of

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the new trains afterward for an inaugural ride to New York's Penn Station.

Union Station has had a history of ups and downs during its nearly 120-year history.

In 1981, after rain started pouring through the ceiling, the National Park Service, which has jurisdiction over some of the area surrounding the station, declared the building unsafe. The station was closed for five years for renovation and President Ronald Reagan signed the Union Station Redevelopment Act to help fund and organize its comeback.

More recently, the building fell on relatively hard times during the COVID pandemic. Foot traffic plummeted after passengers shunned mass transit while multiple shops closed at the station. But the past three years have witnessed a bit of a comeback.

The station has occasionally been a magnet for homeless individuals seeking shelter inside or camping in tents on Columbus Circle in front of the building. The proliferation of tents prompted the Park Service to clear the encampment in front of the station in June 2022.

Control and management of the physical building also have shifted over the years.

## **A deadly truck crash in Florida has fueled an immigration fight. Here's what to know**

By HALLIE GOLDEN and JOSH FUNK Associated Press

A foreign truck driver's deadly U-turn on a Florida highway has become a national political flashpoint over immigration, trucking safety and millions of dollars in federal funding for several states.

Governors, high-ranking Trump administration officials and advocacy groups have all traded accusations in the aftermath of the crash, which killed three people in a minivan that slammed into the semitrailer.

Here's what to know about the crash and the political fallout:

The crash that started it all

The Florida Highway Patrol says Harjinder Singh, a 28-year-old from India, was driving a semitruck north of West Palm Beach on Aug. 12 when he tried to make a wide left U-turn across the highway median, which left his trailer blocking the northbound lane. The minivan behind Singh wasn't able to avoid the truck in time, killing the driver and two passengers. Singh and a passenger in his truck were uninjured.

Video from inside the truck's cab shows Singh making the turn and the van's impact.

Charged with three state counts of vehicular homicide and immigration violations, Singh was denied bond on Saturday. The federal government wants him transferred to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement custody after his criminal case is complete.

Diamond R. Litty, the elected public defender whose office was provisionally assigned to Singh on Saturday, said she cannot recall a case garnering more attention.

"Unfortunately, Mr. Singh has been caught in the crosshairs of politics," Litty said.

Singh's immigration and license status

Florida authorities say Singh entered the U.S. illegally from Mexico in 2018. However, California officials say the federal government told them he was in the country legally with a work permit when they issued him a driver's license.

Singh first obtained a regular full-term commercial driver's license in Washington state in July 2023, a type of license that people without legal status are not eligible for, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation. The following year, California issued him a limited-term commercial license.

Both states issue licenses regardless of immigration status, as do 17 other states and the District of Columbia, according to the National Immigration Law Center. Supporters say that lets people work, visit doctors and travel safely.

Civil rights and religious groups weigh in

The Sikh Coalition and Sikhs For Justice advocacy groups warn that the heated rhetoric risks fueling more discrimination against members of their faith.

Gurpatwant Pannun, the general counsel for Sikhs For Justice, said Singh fled India due to religious persecution. The Sikh Coalition said they hope he can get a fair trial amid the loud public debate.



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Pannun met with Singh and said he is "carrying heavy mental anguish over what has happened" and that it was clear he did not set out to harm anyone. "To portray him as a malicious killer, it would be very unfair and wrong at this time."

Sikhs for Justice promised to set up a \$100,000 fund for the crash victims, administered by the Florida governor's office.

Federal government threatens millions in state funding

Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy accused California, Washington and New Mexico of failing to enforce federal requirements that commercial drivers read and speak English proficiently.

He threatened to withhold \$33 million from California, \$10.5 million from Washington and \$7 million from New Mexico unless the states comply within 30 days. California and New Mexico insist they follow federal rules, while officials in Washington state want to review Duffy's letter before responding.

DeSantis and Newsom trade blows

The case quickly escalated into a public feud between Florida's Gov. Ron DeSantis and California Gov. Gavin Newsom, both viewed as having national political ambitions.

DeSantis, a Republican, sent Florida's lieutenant governor to California to personally criticize its licensing policies, saying Singh should have never been behind the wheel.

Newsom, a Democrat, said the federal government not California issued Singh a work permit renewed earlier this year, although Homeland Security officials have disputed that. Newsom's office accused the Trump administration of "shifting blame" to the states for its own oversight failures.

English language debate fuels controversy

The crash came just two months after President Donald Trump's executive order increased the penalty for commercial drivers who can't show English proficiency.

Duffy said Singh failed a roadside inspection in New Mexico because he couldn't read or understand English well enough to meet federal standards.

But the New Mexico governor's office said police body-camera video shows Singh speaking in broken English, following instructions and asking about the citation for driving 10 mph (17 kph) above the speed limit.

Duffy says the English rules are about safety not politics, because drivers engaged in interstate commerce need to understand road signs and be able to communicate with law enforcement.

## **These colleges are welcoming pets in dorms to reduce students' stress and anxiety**

By CHEYANNE MUMPHREY AP Education Writer

Crossing paths with dogs, cats and other animals is part of campus life for students at Eckerd College, a liberal arts school in Florida that allows pets to live in dormitories.

Sophie Nocera, an Eckerd senior, said she probably knows the names of pets better than her fellow students.

"That's the case for a lot of the students," said Nocera, who lives on the campus in St. Petersburg with her Border collie, Zuko. "When I'm walking my dog, I often hear, 'Oh my god, hi, Zuko!' It's like I'm not even there."

Some colleges and universities around the country welcome pets in campus residences, from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to Stephens College in Missouri.

For students, the companionship can help reduce stress, anxiety and homesickness. The colleges also see benefits for student engagement and helping them build connections with one another.

Federal law requires public and private colleges to allow service animals and emotional support animals in student housing. But growing numbers of schools are allowing pets, with various restrictions.

Not all animals are welcome on pet-friendly campuses

MIT allows only cats, in limited numbers and in preapproved spaces. At Eckerd, students can bring their family pets to live with them on campus after their first semester. The college requires pets to have been

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part of students' home life at least six months before coming to campus and must not be venomous or aggressive.

At the University of Northern Colorado, students in three of the more than dozen residence halls on campus are allowed to have dogs and cats. The animals must be at least 6 months old and no more than 40 pounds (18 kilograms). Students are limited to one pet. This fall, the school will have the most registered pets on campus since it began allowing them over a decade ago, said Jediah Cummins, executive director of housing.

"One of the markers of adulthood is, 'Can I not just take care of myself, but can I take care of another living being?' That's an important part of this," Cummins said.

Molly Cheer, a senior nursing major, said she chose Northern Colorado in part because of its pet-friendly policy. When she is stressed about school, she said, it helps coming home to Louie, the cat she adopted during her first year.

"Whenever I'm feeling stressed or overwhelmed, I pick him up and cuddle him, and he just deals with it for as long as I need it," she said.

Eckerd has had pet-friendly dorms since 1973. Jack Layden, assistant dean for residential life and student engagement, said the college has hosted hundreds of animals, including rabbits, ferrets, chinchillas, birds, guinea pigs, bearded dragons, geckos, turtles, snakes, frogs, fish, and even a tarantula.

Pets change the college experience for their owners

Nocera said Zuko has helped her meet other people on campus, as well as emotionally, when she struggled with a decision to change her major.

"I remember coming back to my dorm and just melting to the floor, and Zuko was right there. And I remember thinking, whatever happens tomorrow, I'm going to wake up, and I'm going to take him to the dog park. And, we're going to go play fetch regardless of what my major is," said Nocera, who is the staff director of Pet Life, a student-led department on campus tasked with administering the pet policy.

At Washington & Jefferson College in Pennsylvania, Eva Chatterjee-Sutton saw the difference a pet can make when a first-year student was struggling to make connections before her mother suggested a puppy. After the dog's arrival, the student became more involved in campus life, said Chatterjee-Sutton, vice president of student life.

"I think it's absolutely changed her college trajectory and her connection with others on campus," Chatterjee-Sutton said.

Residence halls set boundaries, get creative to support pet owners

Pet-friendly dorms require colleges to consider things like safety concerns, noise complaints, how to avoid agitating animals during fire alarm tests, as well as additional costs for cleaning, Layden said. Some schools charge a pet fee, which varies by school, type of pet and is often included in housing expenses. For example, at Stephens College, the annual fee for a dog or cat is \$220, for a cage- or aquarium-dwelling pet is \$50 and free for fish. Others require students to have liability insurance and roommate agreements. Pets are required to be restrained when in public, and most colleges require students to ensure their pets are healthy and vaccinated.

Eckerd and other colleges recognize pets' role in their students' lives at graduation ceremonies, allowing them to cross the commencement stage together in some cases.

"Having pets obviously isn't for everyone, and that is totally OK," Nocera said. "But for the people that it is a good fit for, it is so worth it. This upcoming year, I'll be graduating, and Zuko will be in his little pet graduation ceremony, walking across the stage with me."

## Takeaways from AP's reporting on Venezuelans' daily struggles to access food

By REGINA GARCIA CANO Associated Press

CORO, Venezuela (AP) — Venezuelans are familiar with hardship — they have lived under a complex social, economic and political crisis for more than a decade. Now, across the South American country, they

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are finding themselves hungry and unable to buy food.

The Associated Press over the summer set out to understand how Venezuelans feed — or struggle to feed — themselves and their families. It found that the latest unraveling of Venezuela's economy, changes to foreign aid, sanctions from the United States, and cuts to state subsidies and programs have made many necessities simply unaffordable to the 80% of residents estimated to live in poverty.

In the western state of Falcon, where state-owned oil refineries offered plenty of well-paying jobs before the country came undone in 2013, more than two dozen residents shared with AP how their woes center on food and how they dwell on the issue — how to buy it, how much and where — every day.

Experts say that while a famine-level crisis is not imminent in Venezuela, the severe food insecurity is a disaster that will mark the population with lifelong physical and mental health challenges.

Here are some takeaways from AP's report.

## Economic unraveling

President Nicolás Maduro — sworn in this year despite credible evidence he lost reelection — has created economic conditions that largely limited people's access to food nationwide, with the value of wages and local currency plummeting.

Venezuela's monthly minimum wage of 130 bolivars, or \$0.90, has not increased since 2022, putting it well below the United Nations' measure of extreme poverty of \$2.15 a day. But the price of a basic basket of food has topped \$500, according to the independent Venezuelan Observatory of Finances.

Parents, educators, doctors, humanitarian workers and religious leaders say food is simply out of reach to many, with children suffering the most. They go to bed early to avoid hunger pangs, skip school and snatch food from each other at aid sites.

Alnilys Chirino's family is among those who increasingly fear the return of the malnutrition and starvation that gripped the country from 2016 to 2018. She worries constantly for her teenagers: Juan, José and Angerlis Colina.

"They ask me, 'What are we going to do tomorrow?'" Chirino said. "'What are we going to eat?'"

Chirino's only income sources are the \$70 a month she earns from selling clothing, accessories and linens, and a monthly government stipend of about \$4. She said she spends it all on food.

## Meals are not nutritious

Health care experts say animal protein is the first thing families reduce or eliminate from their diet when prices increase, and they tend to substitute cheaper, less nutritious foods. Poor nutrition can lead to stunting, headaches, fatigue and other health issues in children.

Chirino knows that all too well. Her children suffer from frequent headaches, but the last time she could afford to purchase meat — enough ground beef for perhaps two servings — was May.

"It's becoming more difficult every day for people to access food of a certain quality," said the Rev. Gilberto García, whose Catholic church runs a soup kitchen in Falcon. "People eat, but they usually eat carbohydrates. And that's how people survive."

The law guarantees all students in the country a daily free lunch, but that hasn't happened for ages, families and teachers across Venezuela told AP. In fact, teachers and administrators across the country are renewing pleas for parents to keep children home if they've not had at least one meal and if they have no food to bring to eat during breaks. But not all abide by the request, and students cannot always hide their hunger from classmates and others.

Venezuelans said they buy food almost exclusively at corner stores, where they can run up an account and walk over one, two, even three times a day. City residents also buy from public markets, but grocery store trips are rare.

## Aid is disappearing

Soup kitchens that fed thousands, mostly children, have been forced to close as Maduro's government targets real and perceived opponents through a new law that has restricted the work of nongovernmental organizations.

Families who sign up for the ruling party-run subsidy program can receive small cash stipends that they

can use to buy food. The program also offers families the option to purchase a combination of food — arepa flour, rice, pasta, beans, sardines and canned lunch meat — every month. However, most of the two dozen people in Falcon who spoke to AP said they had not received the food since the spring.

Yamelis Ruiz said her family's challenges are compounded by the loss of critical help from the World Food Program, which distributed food, refurbished school cafeterias and served meals after reaching an agreement with Maduro's government in 2021 to support the most vulnerable. WFP prioritized Falcon, with its massive sand dunes and mountain ranges that reach the Caribbean Sea, due to the population's particular problems with food insecurity.

But citing funding challenges, the WFP this year has deeply cut its aid in Venezuela — Falcon included — and beyond. Ruiz said she had already stopped receiving monthly shelf-stable food rations from WFP when the organization further reduced the number of days it would feed kids at schools, to eight from 20.

"Food or medicines. Either I buy one thing or the other," said Ruiz, whose daughter has a congenital brain condition that requires costly treatment.

## Trump foes like Fed Governor Lisa Cook find themselves targeted by top housing regulator

By CHRIS MEGERIAN, BRIAN SLODYSKO and FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When Bill Pulte was nominated as the country's top housing regulator, he told senators that his "number one mission will be to strengthen and safeguard the housing finance system."

But since he started the job, he's distinguished himself by targeting President Donald Trump's political enemies. He's using property records to make accusations of mortgage fraud and encourage criminal investigations, wielding an obscure position to serve as a presidential enforcer.

This week, Trump used allegations publicized by Pulte in an attempt to fire Lisa Cook, a member of the Federal Reserve board, as he tries to exert more control over the traditionally independent central bank.

Pulte claims that Cook designated two homes as her primary residence to get more favorable mortgage rates. Cook plans to fight her removal, laying the groundwork for a legal battle that could reshape a cornerstone institution in the American economy.

Trump said Tuesday that Cook "seems to have had an infraction, and you can't have an infraction," adding that he has "some very good people" in mind to replace her.

Pulte has cheered on the president's campaign with a Trumpian flourish.

"Fraud will not be tolerated in President Trump's housing market," he wrote on social media. "Thank you for your attention to this matter."

Pulte targets Democrats but not Republicans

Pulte, 37, is a housing industry scion whose official job is director of the Federal Housing Finance Agency. He oversees mortgage buyers Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, which were placed in conservatorship during the Great Recession almost two decades ago.

Like other political appointees, he routinely lavishes praise on his boss.

"President Trump is the greatest," he posted over the weekend.

Pulte has made additional allegations of mortgage fraud against Sen. Adam Schiff, one of Trump's top antagonists on Capitol Hill, and New York Attorney General Letitia James, who filed lawsuits against Trump. Those cases are being pursued by Ed Martin, a Justice Department official.

"In a world where housing is too expensive, we do not need to subsidize housing for fraudsters by letting them get better rates than they deserve," Pulte wrote on social media.

Pulte has ignored a similar case involving Ken Paxton, the Texas attorney general who is friendly with Trump and is running for Senate in his state's Republican primary. Paxton took out mortgages on three properties that were all identified as his primary residence.

He also has mortgages on two other properties that explicitly prohibit him from renting the properties out, but both have been repeatedly listed for rent, according to real estate listings and posts on short-



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term rental sites.

Asked about Pulte's investigations and Trump's role in them, the White House said that anyone who violates the law should be held accountable.

"President Trump's only retribution is success and historic achievements for the American people," said Davis Ingle, White House spokesman.

It's unclear whether Pulte is using government resources to develop the allegations he has made. Mortgage documents are generally public records, but they are typically maintained at the county level across most of the U.S., making them difficult to comprehensively review. However, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, which are both government-sponsored entities, purchase large tranches of mortgages from lenders, which could centralize much of that information, real estate and legal experts say.

FHFA did not respond to a detailed list of questions from the AP, including whether Pulte or his aides used government resources to conduct his research.

It's not just mortgages

Pulte's broadsides go beyond mortgages. He's been backing Trump's criticism of Jerome Powell, chair of the Federal Reserve, over expensive renovations at the central bank's headquarters. Trump is pressuring Powell to cut interest rates in hopes of lowering borrowing costs, and his allies have highlighted cost overruns to suggest that Powell is untrustworthy or should be removed from his position.

"This guy is supposed to be the money manager for the world's biggest economy, and it doesn't even look like he can run a construction site," Pulte said while wearing a neon safety vest outside the building. "So something doesn't smell right here."

Since returning to the White House, Trump has reached deep into the government to advance his agenda. He's overhauled the federal workforce with the Office of Personnel Management, pushed ideological changes at the Smithsonian network of museums and fired the commissioner of the Bureau of Labor Statistics when he didn't like a recent report on job numbers.

With Pulte in charge, the Federal Housing Finance Agency is becoming another instrument of Trump's mission to exert control and retaliate against enemies.

It's a contrast to the Internal Revenue Service, where Trump has unsuccessfully discussed ways to use tax policies as a pressure point. For example, during battles over higher education, Trump threatened to take away Harvard's long-standing tax-exempt status by saying, "It's what they deserve."

However, there are more restrictions there, dating back to the Watergate scandal under President Richard Nixon.

"It's been hard for the administration to use the inroads it wants to use to pursue its enemies," said Vanessa Williamson, a senior fellow at the Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center.

She said, "The law is very clear about taxpayer privacy and the criminal penalties at play are not small."

Before going on the attack, Pulte played nice online

Pulte is heir to a home-building fortune amassed by his grandfather, also named William Pulte, who founded a construction company in Detroit in the 1950s that grew into the publicly traded national housing giant now known as the Pulte Group.

He spent four years on the company's board, and he's the owner of heating and air conditioning businesses across the U.S. He had never served in government before being nominated by Trump to lead the Federal Housing Finance Agency.

"While many children spent their weekends at sporting events, I spent mine on homebuilding jobsites with my father and grandfather," Pulte said in written testimony for his nomination hearing. "From the ground up, I learned every aspect of housing — whether it was cleaning job sites, assisting in construction, or helping sell homes."

He once tried to make a name for himself with good deeds, describing himself as the "Inventor of Twitter Philanthropy" and offering money to needy people online. He was working in private equity at the time, and he told the Detroit Free Press that he funded his donations with some "very good liquidity events" to power his donations.

Even six years ago, he appeared focused on getting attention from Trump.

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"If @realDonaldTrump retweets this, my team and I will give Two Beautiful Cars to Two Beautiful Veterans on Twitter."

Trump replied, "Thank you, Bill, say hello to our GREAT VETERANS!"

Pulte, whose most recent financial disclosure shows a net worth of at least \$180 million, was also ramping up his political donations.

Over the past six years, he and his wife have donated over \$1 million to the political efforts of Trump and his allies, including a \$500,000 contribution to a super PAC affiliated with Trump that was the subject of a campaign finance complaint made with the Federal Election Commission.

The Pultes' \$500,000 contribution was made through a company they control named ML Organization LLC, records show. While such contributions are typically allowed from corporations, the same is not always true for some limited liability companies that have a limited business footprint and could be set up to obscure the donor.

The FEC ultimately exonerated the Pultes, but found in April that the Trump super PAC, Make America Great Again, Again! Inc., did not properly disclose that the Pultes were the source of the donation, said Saurav Ghosh, the Campaign Legal Center's director of federal campaign finance reform.

Ghosh said the donation raises serious questions about Pulte's appointment to lead FHFA.

"Why is Bill Pulte even in a government position?" he said. "Maybe he's qualified, maybe he isn't. But he did pour hundreds of thousands of dollars into a pro-Trump super PAC. And I think it's clear there are these types of rewards for big donors across the Trump administration."

## US Open tennis champs Alcaraz, Federer and Nadal love golf. Golfers say the tennis stars have game

By BRIAN MAHONEY AP Sports Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Carlos Alcaraz is among the tennis stars getting into the swing of things at the U.S. Open.

A golf swing, that is.

After his first-round victory at Flushing Meadows this week, the five-time Grand Slam champion used his racket to pantomime using a club on the course — perhaps a nod to one of the spectators in the stands at Arthur Ashe Stadium that night, golf star Rory McIlroy.

Plenty of athletes eyeing a trophy on the hard courts of New York, including the person Alcaraz beat in the 2022 men's final, Casper Ruud, and 2024 women's runner-up Jessica Pegula, are swapping fuzzy yellow tennis balls for dimpled white golf balls as a way to relax. So are past tennis greats such as Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal.

Alcaraz and Ruud sometimes travel on tour with their clubs. Even during Wimbledon last month — when he famously went golfing with Andy Murray on off days — and while preparing to go to the U.S. Open, Alcaraz made sure to find opportunities to put the rackets in the bag and tees in the ground.

"Every time that I can," Alcaraz said with a smile.

Tennis stars take to Instagram looking for a game of golf

Ruud, one of tennis' best golfers, went on social media to post a photo with Alcaraz on a course recently and captioned it: "Who should we challenge to a match??"

Similarly, Federer asked "Anyone ready to take on the two of us??" with a picture showing him and Nadal when they hit the links in Mallorca in July.

The serve-and-volleyers can also chip and putt

Golfers say their counterparts have got game.

"Tennis players are good golfers, I'll tell you that," 2017 Masters champion Sergio Garcia said. "I've played with a lot of them."

His report on fellow Spaniard Nadal?

"He's a fighter, just like he was as a tennis player," Garcia said.

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Federer, like many in retirement, has thrown himself into a game he didn't have as much time for when he was working.

"He has a lot of potential. Great technique, as you can imagine," said McIlroy, who teed it up with Federer a few months ago. "He didn't play a ton when he was playing tennis because it always (bothered) his lower back a little bit. But he's really getting into it. He's super keen. He went and got fitted for clubs. His wife, Mirka, is playing, his kids are playing. It's turned from a tennis family to a golf family."

Sebastian Korda comes from a family that's both. His parents were professional tennis players — Mom, Regina, was ranked in the top 30; Dad, Petr, won the 1998 Australian Open and was the runner-up at the 1992 French Open — and his sisters, Nelly (ranked No. 1 until recently) and Jessica, are pro golfers.

"They're both individual sports and, as an athlete, you want to be competitive at anything you do," Korda said. "There's a lot of challenges in golf, and as tennis players, we kind of love problem-solving. That's a big part of our sport: figuring things out."

That's what lured Pegula back to the course. She's been playing since she was young, but had one of those rounds last year that makes even passionate golfers put away the clubs.

"I had a meltdown and I was like, 'This isn't helping me,'" Pegula said.

She stayed away until just a few weeks ago. Her swing and enjoyment of the game came right back.

"I think it is relaxing, but it's also mentally a challenge. I like to kind of problem-solve and think through it and try to be smart with how I'm playing," Pegula said. "I feel like it kind of sharpens me a little bit mentally. I finally was like, 'OK, I'll play for the first time.' I actually played pretty well, considering I hadn't played all year."

When the tours were in Madrid this year, she outdid Ruud in a closest-to-the-pin challenge posted on YouTube. Neither golfs during the European clay-court season; Ruud explained that courses are too far from major cities that host tournaments.

The U.S. hard-court tennis swing offers chances to tee it up

There are more options in the New York area, which will host golf's Ryder Cup shortly after the U.S. Open. The Norwegian has played Winged Foot, home to multiple golf U.S. Opens.

"Northeast America has great golf courses, as well as Palm Springs and Miami," said Ruud, who said he's nearly a scratch golfer.

Alcaraz isn't there yet. But he intends to keep playing 18.

"When you're walking to the next hole, you're just forgetting about everything else, just enjoying the moment and enjoy being with your friends," he said. "I just love being like that."

## Cracker Barrel is keeping its old-time logo after new design elicited an uproar

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

Cracker Barrel said late Tuesday it's returning to its old logo after critics — including President Donald Trump — protested the company's plan to modernize.

In a post on its website, Cracker Barrel said it will retain its old logo, which features an older man in overalls sitting next to a barrel and the words "Old Country Store."

"We thank our guests for sharing your voices and love for Cracker Barrel," the company said in a statement. "Our new logo is going away and our 'Old Timer' will remain."

The tempest over the logo began last week, when the company announced plans for a simplified design featuring only the company's name. Lebanon, Tennessee-based Cracker Barrel, which has 660 restaurants in 43 states, made the change as part of a wider plan to modernize its restaurants and appeal to younger customers.

The chain's sales have been slipping as it faces growing competition from breakfast chains and others. In its 2024 fiscal year, Cracker Barrel's same-store sales, or sales at locations open at least a year, dropped 0.1% despite a 4.9% increase in menu prices. Same-store retail sales at its shops fell 5.5%.

But many protested the change. On Monday, Cracker Barrel put out an apologetic statement, saying it

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"could have done a better job sharing who we are and who we'll always be."

At that point, Cracker Barrel didn't say it would change the logo, but said it would listen to its customers and keep many of the things they have come to love about the restaurant, like the rocking chairs on its front porches. The company said it would continue to honor Uncle Herschel — the older man in its logo, who represents the uncle of Cracker Barrel's founder — on its menu and on items sold in its stores.

But the controversy continued. On Tuesday morning, Trump said via Truth Social that Cracker Barrel "should go back to the old logo, admit a mistake based on customer response (the ultimate Poll), and manage the company better than ever before." Cracker Barrel's shares rose after more than a week of declines.

By Tuesday evening, Cracker Barrel had made its decision and scrapped the new logo.

"At Cracker Barrel, it's always been – and always will be – about serving up delicious food, warm welcomes, and the kind of country hospitality that feels like family," the company said. "As a proud American institution, our 70,000 hardworking employees look forward to welcoming you to our table soon."

Trump was among those celebrating the move.

"Good luck into the future. Make lots of money and, most importantly, make your customers happy again!" Trump said via Truth Social.

## Russian forces break into another region of Ukraine with peace efforts stuck

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia's invading forces have broken into an eighth region of Ukraine, a Ukrainian military official said Wednesday, seeking to capture more ground in their three-year war of attrition as U.S.-led peace efforts struggle to gain traction.

Some Russian troops have entered the villages of Novoheorhiivka and Zaporizke in the eastern Dnipropetrovsk region, a major Ukrainian industrial center next to the Donetsk region where fierce fighting has been taking place, Victor Trehubov, spokesman for local ground forces, told The Associated Press by phone.

Russia's Defense Ministry claimed earlier this month that its forces had taken the two villages.

But the Russians have not entrenched or built fortifications there, and fighting is continuing in the villages, Trehubov said.

Ukrainian troops are under severe strain as they try to hold back Russia's bigger army. Military analysts say there is no sign of a looming collapse of Ukrainian defenses and note that Russian forces have been unable to take major towns and cities, but their slow slog through rural areas keeps Ukraine under pressure.

The front line, where tens of thousands of troops on both sides have been killed, snakes along roughly 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) of eastern and southeastern Ukraine, which borders Russia. Russian forces are already in the Sumy, Kharkiv, Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Kherson and Mykolaiv regions.

Russia illegally seized the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine in March 2014, and now occupies about a fifth of Ukraine.

Western leaders have accused Russian President Vladimir Putin of dragging his feet in peace efforts and avoiding serious negotiations while Russian troops move deeper into Ukraine.

U.S. President Donald Trump bristled Tuesday at Putin's stalling on an American proposal for direct peace talks with Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Trump said Friday he expects to decide on next steps in two weeks if direct talks aren't scheduled.

Ukraine has accepted U.S. proposals for a summit with Putin and a ceasefire.

Russia has also balked at U.S. and Western plans to establish postwar security guarantees for Ukraine, which fears another Russian invasion in the future even if a peace deal is clinched now.

The possible security guarantees being worked out by Western officials could include the deployment of European troops in Ukraine. But Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov reiterated Wednesday that soldiers from NATO member countries would be unacceptable for Moscow.

Ukraine is trying to disrupt Russia's war effort by striking infrastructure behind the front line with ling-



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range drones. Gas stations have run dry in some regions of Russia after they struck refineries and other oil infrastructure in recent weeks.

Russia, meanwhile, is continuing its campaign to cripple Ukraine's energy supply ahead of the bitter winter by wrecking the power grid with repeated attacks.

Ukraine's Energy Ministry said Wednesday that Russia struck energy and gas infrastructure in six regions of the country.

## Trump's 50% tariffs on India over Russian oil purchases take effect

By RAJESH ROY Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Steep U.S. tariffs on a range of Indian products took effect Wednesday, threatening a serious blow to India's overseas trade in its largest export market.

President Donald Trump had initially announced a 25% tariff on Indian goods. But earlier this month he signed an executive order imposing an additional 25% tariff due to India's purchases of Russian oil, bringing the combined tariffs imposed by the U.S. on its ally to 50%.

The Indian government estimates the tariffs will impact \$48.2 billion worth of exports. Officials have warned the new duties could make shipments to the U.S. commercially unviable, triggering job losses and slower economic growth.

India-U.S. trade relations have expanded in recent years but remain vulnerable to disputes over market access and domestic political pressures. India is one of the fastest-growing major global economies and it may face a slowdown as a result.

Sectors to be impacted by US tariffs

Estimates by New Delhi-based think tank Global Trade Research Initiative suggest labor-intensive sectors such as textiles, gems and jewelry, leather goods, food and automobiles will be hit hardest.

"The new tariff regime is a strategic shock that threatens to wipe out India's long-established presence in the U.S., causing unemployment in export-driven hubs and weakening its role in the industrial value chain," said Ajay Srivastava, the think tank's founder and a former Indian trade official.

The U.S. has for now exempted some sectors such as pharmaceuticals and electronic goods from additional tariffs, bringing some relief for India as its exposure in these sectors is significant.

Exporters fear losses

Puran Dawar, a leather footwear exporter in northern India's Agra city, says the industry would take a substantial hit in the near term unless domestic demand strengthens and other overseas markets buy more Indian goods.

"This is an absolute shock," said Dawar, whose business with the U.S. has grown in recent years. Dawar's clients include the major fashion retailer Zara.

Dawar, who is also the regional chairman of the Council for Leather Exports — an export promotion body — said the U.S. should understand that the steep tariffs will hurt its own consumers.

Groups representing exporters warn that new import tariffs could hurt India's small and medium enterprises that are heavily reliant on the American market.

"It's a tricky situation. Some product lines will simply become unviable overnight," said Ajay Sahai, director general of the Federation of Indian Export Organizations.

Modi vows not to yield to US pressure

The tariffs come as the U.S. administration continues to push for greater access to India's agriculture and dairy sectors.

India and the U.S. have held five rounds of negotiations for a bilateral trade agreement, but have yet to reach a deal. That's largely because New Delhi has resisted opening these sectors to cheaper American imports, citing concerns that doing so would endanger the jobs of millions of Indians.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has vowed not to yield to the pressure.

"For me, the interests of farmers, small businesses and dairy are topmost. My government will ensure they aren't impacted," Modi said at a rally this week in his home state of Gujarat.

Modi said the world was witnessing a "politics of economic selfishness."

A U.S. delegation canceled plans to visit New Delhi this week for a sixth round of trade talks.

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India plans local reforms to cushion the blow from tariffs  
The Indian government has begun working on reforms to boost local consumption and insulate the economy.

It has moved to change the goods and services tax, or consumption tax, to lower costs for insurance, cars and appliances ahead of the major Hindu festival of Diwali in October.

The government council will meet early next month to decide whether to cut taxes.

The Trade Ministry and Finance Ministry are discussing financial incentives that would include favorable bank loan rates for exporters.

The Trade Ministry is also weighing steps to expand exports to other regions, particularly Latin America, Africa and Southeast Asia. Trade negotiations underway with the European Union could gain renewed urgency as India works to reduce its dependence on the U.S. market.

## Today in History:

### August 28, MLK delivers "I Have a Dream" speech

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, Aug. 28, the 240th day of 2025. There are 125 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Aug. 28, 1963, during the March on Washington, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech before an estimated 250,000 people in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.

Also on this date:

In 1845, the first issue of "Scientific American" magazine was published; it remains the oldest continuously published magazine in the United States.

In 1862, the Second Battle of Bull Run began in Prince William County, Virginia, during the Civil War; the Union army retreated two days later after suffering 14,000 casualties.

In 1898, pharmacist Caleb Bradham of New Bern, North Carolina changed the name of the carbonated beverage he'd created five years earlier from "Brad's Drink" to "Pepsi-Cola."

In 1955, Emmett Till, a Black teenager from Chicago, was abducted from his uncle's home in Money, Mississippi, by two white men after he had allegedly whistled at a white woman four days prior; he was found brutally slain three days later.

In 1957, then U.S. Senator Strom Thurmond (D-South Carolina) began what remains the longest speaking filibuster in Senate history (24 hours and 18 minutes) seeking to stall the passage of the Civil Rights Act of that year.

In 1968, police and anti-war demonstrators clashed in the streets of Chicago as the Democratic National Convention nominated Hubert H. Humphrey for president.

In 1988, 70 people were killed when three Italian Air Force stunt planes collided during an air show at the U.S. Air Base in Ramstein, West Germany.

In 2005, New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin ordered a mandatory evacuation as Hurricane Katrina approached the city.

In 2013, a military jury sentenced Maj. Nidal Hasan to death for the 2009 shooting rampage at Fort Hood that claimed 13 lives and left 30 people injured.

In 2016, six scientists completed a yearlong Mars simulation on the big island of Hawaii, where they emerged after living in a dome in near isolation on Mauna Loa.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Ken Jenkins (TV: "Scrubs") is 85. Former MLB manager and player Lou Piniella (pih-NEHL'-uh) is 82. Former MLB pitcher Ron Guidry (GIH'-dree) is 75. Former U.S. Poet Laureate Rita Dove is 73. Artist Ai Weiwei is 68. Actor Daniel Stern is 68. Olympic gold medal figure skater Scott Hamilton is 67. Actor Jennifer Coolidge is 64. Film director David Fincher is 63. Country singer Shania (shah-NY'-uh) Twain is 60. "Pokemon" creator Satoshi Tajiri is 60. Actor Billy Boyd is 57. Actor Jack Black is 56. Hockey Hall of Famer Pierre Turgeon is 56. Actor Jason Priestley is 56. Olympic gold medal swimmer Janet Evans is 54. Actor Carly Pope is 44. Country singer Jake Owen is 44. Country singer LeAnn Rimes is 43. Rock singer Florence Welch (Florence and the Machine) is 39. Actor Quvenzhané (kwuh-VEHN'-zhah-nay) Wallis is 22.