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Thursday, Sept. 18

School Breakfast: Biscuits.
School Lunch: Burrito. Bowl, corn.
Cross Country at Lee Park, Aberdeen, 11 a.m.
Volleyball at Clark ((7th-5, 8th-4; C-5, JV-6, V-7:15))

Friday, Sept. 19

School Breakfast: Doughnuts.
School Lunch: Cheese pizza, green beans.
Football at Deuel, 7 p.m.

Saturday, Sept. 20

Volleyball at Hamlin Invitational, 9 a.m.
JH/JV Football at Webster Jamboree, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Boys Soccer at Freeman Academy, Noon



Sunday, Sept. 21

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; Sunday School 10:15 a.m.; Choir 6 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Worship with communion at St. John's, 9 a.m., and Zion, 11 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:45 a.m.

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

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

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

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

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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.

Federal Reserve Cuts Rates

The Federal Reserve announced a quarter-percentage-point cut in benchmark rates yesterday, bringing the range to between 4% and 4.25%—the lowest level in almost three years. The bank signaled the possibility of two additional cuts this year.

The decision saw the Federal Reserve prioritizing a hiring slowdown over inflation. A sluggish 22,000 jobs were added last month; weekly jobless claims reached their highest level in four years last week. The US has also downwardly revised job growth by 911,000 for the one-year period ending in March. Those concerns trumped sticky inflation, with consumer prices rising 2.9% annually last month.

The bank voted 11-1 in yesterday's decision, with the only dissenter being newly appointed Fed Governor Stephen Miran, who preferred a half-point cut. Governor Lisa Cook participated in the meeting after an appeals court ruled the White House lacked authority to fire her. The White House plans to appeal to the Supreme Court.

Trump Visits Britain

President Donald Trump and first lady Melania Trump wrap their two-day state visit to Britain today, hosted by King Charles III and Queen Camilla. Trump is the first elected leader in modern times to be received by the palace on two state visits; his first was in 2019.

The royal family welcomed the Trumps to Windsor Castle with a carriage procession and Britain's largest military ceremony for a foreign leader in living memory, followed by a white-tie banquet. Trump spends today at Prime Minister Keir Starmer's country residence, where they are expected to discuss tariffs and the wars in Ukraine and Gaza. Earlier this week, the leaders finalized a \$42B technology pact featuring investments from Nvidia, OpenAI, and Microsoft.

The visit has elicited several public demonstrations. Four men were arrested for projecting images of Trump with convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein onto Windsor Castle Tuesday. Thousands of protesters—from climate activists to pro-Palestinian groups—rallied in London against his visit.

Dodo Bird Breakthrough

Texas-based de-extinction company Colossal Biosciences announced yesterday it has successfully grown pigeon primordial germ cells—a step toward its goal of reviving the extinct dodo bird.

Until now, humans have only been able to grow these cells (the precursors for sperm and eggs) for chickens and geese. Colossal now hopes to grow the cells from Nicobar pigeons—dodos' closest living relatives—tweaking their genes using specimens of the dodo bird preserved in museums. The goal is to inject the cells into gene-edited chickens, which will serve as surrogates. The company, which recently created pups resembling the dire wolf, believes it can produce a dodo-like bird in five to seven years.

The dodo was a large pigeon in Mauritius in the Indian Ocean that had evolved to lose the ability to fly. It is believed to be the first animal species exterminated by humans, with the last documented sighting in 1662.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

ABC suspends "Jimmy Kimmel Live!" indefinitely following Kimmel's comments about Charlie Kirk during his opening monologue on Monday night's show.

Gino the gorilla dies at age 44; the silverback gorilla was the oldest gorilla at Disney's Animal Kingdom and had been at the park since its 1998 opening.

Two-time Olympic medalist Fred Kerley becomes first track athlete to commit to Enhanced Games, a competition allowing use of performance-enhancing drugs.

Seattle Mariners' Cal Raleigh hits 56th home run to break Mickey Mantle's record for most single-season homers by a switch-hitter.

Science & Technology

Ousted CDC Director Susan Monarez testifies before Senate Health Committee; says Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. plans to change the childhood vaccine schedule this month without an independent data analysis.

Researchers develop AI tool that uses medical records to calculate risk for 1,231 diseases, including Type 2 diabetes and heart conditions.

Wild African chimps easily consume more than the equivalent of two standard alcoholic drinks, according to first-ever measure of ethanol in native fruits.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 -0.1%, Dow +0.6%, Nasdaq -0.3%).

StubHub shares close down in New York Stock Exchange debut after the ticket reseller raised \$800M at a roughly \$8B valuation in initial public offering.

Ben & Jerry's cofounder Jerry Greenfield resigns, claiming parent company Unilever stifled the ice cream brand's independence on social issues.

Annual inflation among European Union members remains steady at 2%, below estimate of 2.1% and in line with the European Central Bank's target.

Politics & World Affairs

Three police officers are killed and two others wounded in a shooting while serving an arrest warrant in York County, Pennsylvania; the shooter has not been publicly identified as of this writing.

President Donald Trump says he will designate Antifa as a terrorist organization.

France's major labor unions call for strikes and demonstrations today against austerity measures proposed by President Emmanuel Macron's administration; more than 250 rallies planned nationwide.

The US and Ukraine launch \$150M joint fund to invest in Ukrainian mineral reserves; each committed \$75M, will split profits.

Saudi Arabia and Pakistan sign mutual defense pact.

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Top-Five Clash Set for Today in Clark: Groton Area vs. Clark-Willow Lake

Two of the top programs in South Dakota Class A volleyball are set to collide this evening when the No. 1-ranked Groton Area Tigers (5-0) travel to Clark to take on the No. 5-ranked Clark-Willow Lake Cyclones (13-0) in a marquee early-season matchup.













Groton enters the contest unbeaten and holding the top spot in the Class A power ratings. The Tigers have shown balance and resilience in their opening stretch, highlighted by a convincing win over Webster Area. In that match, Groton prevailed in four sets, 25-19, 25-10, 24-26, 25-17, flashing both offensive firepower and steady defensive play.

Clark-Willow Lake, meanwhile, has stormed through its schedule without a blemish. At 13-0, the Cyclones have leaned on consistency and depth to secure their place inside the top five of the power ratings. They too have faced Webster Area, earning a four-set victory by scores of 25-17, 20-25, 25-22, 25-20.

That lone common opponent offers a glimpse of what fans can expect Thursday. Both Groton and Clark-Willow Lake showed moments of dominance against Webster, but each also surrendered a set, proving that momentum swings and execution will be crucial when these two unbeaten squads square off.

The Tigers will look to remain perfect and defend their No. 1 ranking, while the Cyclones aim to protect their home court and strengthen their case as a contender in Class A. With two undefeated records and plenty of pride on the line, this matchup in Clark has all the makings of one of the season's most compelling battles.

First serve is scheduled for this evening in Clark and the matches will be broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM.

#	Name	W	L	PCT	PTS
1	 Groton Area	5	0	1.000	47.000
2	 Dakota Valley	10	0	1.000	46.600
3	 Dell Rapids	9	1	.900	46.400
4	 Lennox	9	0	1.000	45.000
5	 Clark/Willow Lake	13	0	1.000	44.923
6	 Wagner	8	2	.800	43.600
7	 Rapid City Christian	11	5	.688	43.062
8	 Miller	5	2	.714	43.000
8	 St. Thomas More	9	2	.818	43.000
8	 Winner	5	2	.714	43.000
11	 Hamlin	6	2	.750	42.857
11	 West Central	5	2	.714	42.857



C Team Volleyball *Cyclones*
Groton at Clark/Willow Lake
Thursday., Sept. 18, 5:00 p.m.
or Sponsored by Grandparents

Groton Area Tigers
Groton, SD

GDILIVE
YouTube
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For more info: GDILIVE.COM





Varsity Volleyball *Cyclones*
Groton at Clark/Willow Lake
Thursday., Sept. 18, 7:15 p.m.

Groton Area Tigers
Groton, SD

GDILIVE
YouTube
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For more info: GDILIVE.COM





JV Team Volleyball *Cyclones*
Groton at Clark/Willow Lake
Thursday., Sept. 18, 6:00 p.m.
or Sponsored by Grandparents

Groton Area Tigers
Groton, SD

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Fly-In, Drive-In Draws Crowd to Groton Municipal Airport

The Groton Municipal Airport was buzzing with activity last weekend as aviation enthusiasts, local families, and visitors gathered for the annual Fly-In, Drive-In. With clear skies overhead and a light breeze on the runway, the event gave the community a chance to experience aviation up close and celebrate the small-town spirit that makes Groton unique.

Several airplanes made their trek to Groton, lining the tarmac with everything from classic small-engine planes to modern aircraft. Pilots eagerly welcomed curious onlookers, answering questions and showing the ins and outs of their planes.

One of the highlights of the day was the opportunity for attendees to take short airplane rides. Local pilots volunteered their time and aircraft, giving both children and adults the chance to see Groton and the surrounding countryside from a whole new perspective. The excited smiles from passengers climbing out of the planes said it all.

The "drive-in" portion of the event added to the atmosphere, as families drove out to the airport to enjoy the sights, sounds, and the sense of adventure. Lawn chairs, cameras, and plenty of conversation filled the hangar area as people swapped stories and shared their appreciation for flight.

Events like this, organizers said, are about more than just airplanes. They bring neighbors together, spark interest in aviation among younger generations, and highlight the role of the Groton Municipal Airport as both a community hub and a vital resource.

As the last planes departed and the crowd thinned, one thing was clear: the Fly-In, Drive-In once again lifted community spirit as high as the aircrafts that soared overhead.



Many aircraft flew in during Saturday and Sunday's Fly-inn. (Photo courtesy Bruce Babcock)



Local retired pilot Bruce Babcock poises next to the rare Spartan Executive aircraft.

(Photo courtesy Bruce Babcock)



The most interesting special custom paint job on the Cub's propeller. (Photo courtesy Bruce Babcock)

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Another pilot taxiing in for more orientation flights. (Photo courtesy Bruce Babcock)



Fly-inn organizer Darrell Hillestad prepares for another orientation ride. (Photo courtesy Bruce Babcock)



1940's Spartan Executive takes off from the Groton Airport during the Annual Groton Fly-inn. It is home based in Aberdeen SD. (Photo courtesy Bruce Babcock)



Locals waiting in line for their turn for an orientation flight. (Photo courtesy Bruce Babcock)



Home built RV-8s depart in formation take-off. (Photo courtesy Bruce Babcock)

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Tigers Split Games Against Top- and Bottom-Ranked Opponents

The Groton Area boys' soccer team showed both grit and growth this past week, battling the state's top-rated team before bouncing back with a decisive win.

The Tigers opened with a road test against James Valley Christian, who entered the match ranked No. 1 in the state Class A power ratings with a 7-1 record. Groton, sitting at No. 4 with a 6-3-1 mark, traded blows with the Vikings before falling 3-2 in a tight contest. Karsten Fliehs and Ethan Kroll each tallied a goal, while Karson Zak added an assist. Goalkeeper Gage Sippel stood tall under relentless pressure, making 18 saves to keep Groton within striking distance.

Groton quickly turned the page in their next outing, earning a 2-0 shutout over Dakota Valley. The Panthers, who are ranked No. 7 in the state power ratings with an 0-5-1 record, struggled to break through against Groton's defense. Olson delivered the offensive spark, scoring both goals, while Zak chipped in with his second assist of the week. Sippel added seven saves to secure the clean sheet.

The Tigers now sit firmly among the state's contenders, showing they can compete with the very best while taking care of business against lower-ranked teams.

Name Released in Pennington County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash

Where: US Highway 16a, mile marker 52, seven miles south of Keystone, SD

When: 5:05 p.m., Saturday, September 13, 2025

Driver 1: Kayla Ann Faul, 27-year-old female from McCall, ID, fatal injuries

Vehicle 1: 2015 Husqvarna FE501 motorcycle

Helmet Used: Yes

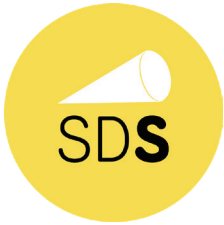
Pennington County, S.D.- A McCall, Idaho woman died in a single motorcycle crash seven miles south of Keystone, SD Saturday evening.

Preliminary crash information indicates Kayla Ann Faul, the driver of a 2015 Husqvarna motorcycle, was traveling eastbound on US Highway 16A and began to pass a group of motorcycles. Entering a sharp curve, Faul lost control and became separated from her motorcycle, sliding off the road. She was wearing a helmet.

Faul was transported to a Rapid City hospital where she died from her injuries.

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

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



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Some lawmakers skeptical as governor pledges rehab task force 'following the passage' of prison bill

Legislature will convene next week in Pierre for a special session

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR-SEPTEMBER 17, 2025 5:28 PM

Several South Dakota lawmakers expressed doubts Wednesday that Gov. Larry Rhoden would change any minds with his pledge to create a Correctional Rehabilitation Task Force "following the passage" of his prison construction plan next week.

"No. Not at all," said House Assistant Majority Leader Marty Overweg, R-New Holland. "I think most people are pretty dug in right now."

A special session Tuesday at the Capitol in Pierre will be the culmination of a years-long effort to replace the oldest parts of the Sioux Falls penitentiary, which predates statehood.

After a proposal from Rhoden's predecessor, Kristi Noem, to build in rural Lincoln County bogged down in local opposition, litigation and legislative concerns about the \$825 million price tag, Rhoden appointed a Project Prison Reset task force to start over.

The group has since endorsed a new site on vacant land in northeast Sioux Falls and a lower price of \$650 million for a 1,500-bed facility. The governor has said there's enough money from the budget adopted last winter and a prison construction fund — which legislators have been filling for several years — to build the prison without debt.

Some opponents have expressed concerns that the state isn't doing enough to keep people out of prison or prevent released inmates from reoffending.

In a news release Wednesday, Rhoden said if legislators approve the prison plan, "the next task is to expand our rehabilitative programming — that's where this task force comes in."

The news release said the task force would assess programming needs for inmates, options for faith-based and Native American-focused programs, and best practices for re-entry models. It would also make recommendations on how to best use the expanded space of the new prison.

Lt. Gov. Tony Venhuizen would lead the group, but no names were provided for other members. The news release said the roster would include legislators from both parties and chambers, plus a cross-section of experts in behavioral health, addiction counseling, correctional rehabilitative services and a tribal representative.

Overweg said he has not decided how he will vote. He is unconvinced that prison construction contractors won't return for more money later after the \$650 million cap has been reached.

Senate Majority Whip Kevin Jensen, R-Canton, is co-chairing a legislative task force on incarceration rates and recidivism this summer and has declared himself a "hard no" on the prison bill. He called Rhoden's announcement overdue and poorly timed, making it appear like a play to garner more votes.

"I'm wondering if it might backfire," Jensen said.

Jensen also called attention to the language in Rhoden's press release, which said the task force would be created "following the passage and signing of the draft legislation for the new prison."

South Dakota Searchlight sought clarity from the governor's office about whether the creation of the task force is contingent on the passage of the prison plan. Spokeswoman Josie Harms responded in writing: "The Correctional Rehabilitation Task Force will be established following the passage and signing of the draft legislation for the new prison. The new prison will significantly increase space for rehabilitative

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programming, warranting the need for this task force." She did not immediately respond to follow-ups.

House Minority Whip Kadyne Wittman, D-Sioux Falls, also serves on the summer task force. She said another task force making recommendations is not what the state needs.

"We have the data, we know what the problems are," she said.

Wittman declined to say how she will vote on the prison proposal but stressed the poor condition of the penitentiary.

"Our current facility is not fit for human habitation," Wittman said. "Nobody wants to fund a new prison less than me, but we have a constitutional and moral obligation to not have people live in squalor."

The prison plan will need two-thirds majority support in the House and Senate, due to a state constitutional provision requiring the higher threshold for bills appropriating money.

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

Governor picks Beresford man to fill vacant South Dakota House seat

BY: SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT STAFF-SEPTEMBER 17, 2025

The governor appointed John Shubeck of Beresford to the South Dakota House of Representatives on Wednesday, filling a seat left vacated by the death of Rep. Richard Vasgaard, a Republican from Centerville. Vasgaard, a farmer, died last month at age 75. He represented District 16, which includes Lincoln, Turner and Union counties in the southeast part of the state.

Governor Larry Rhoden said in a press release that Shubeck, a Republican veteran, farmer, church leader and coach, shares Vasgaard's values.

"I trust he will carry on his proud legacy of service in this new role," Rhoden said.

Shubeck and his wife have four kids. He served in the Marine Corps for 20 years, earning a Bronze Star, Navy Commendation Medal, Navy Achievement Medal and Combat Action Ribbon. He manages a grain and livestock farm and has coached the Centerville middle and high school track teams.

The appointment, effective immediately, comes six days before a special legislative session to consider Rhoden's \$650 million proposal to build a new prison in northeast Sioux Falls that would replace the oldest parts of the state penitentiary.

Rural hospitals often scrap labor and delivery services after mergers, study finds

BY: ANNA CLAIRE VOLLERS-SEPTEMBER 17, 2025 7:00 AM

Rural hospitals are less likely to offer obstetric services after they've been acquired by a larger health system, leading to mixed outcomes for mothers and babies, according to new research.

It's part of an accelerating trend that's reshaped how Americans get health care: Larger health systems gobble up smaller facilities in a bid for financial stability.

"The hospital industry has undergone tremendous transformation over the past few decades, with nearly 1,600 mergers between 1998 and 2021," said Martin Gaynor, a coauthor of the study and emeritus professor of economics and public policy at Carnegie Mellon, in a statement.

Those large-scale changes to the health system can affect costs, quality and access to care, he said.

Over the past five years, more than 100 rural hospitals have stopped delivering babies or announced they'll stop in 2025, according to the most recent data from the Center for Healthcare Quality & Payment Reform. Less than half of rural hospitals still offer labor and delivery services.

Gaynor and a team of researchers from Carnegie Mellon, Northwestern University and the University

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of Georgia examined how hospital mergers have affected access to obstetric care in rural areas, and the quality of that care. They found that rural hospitals were part of more than 450 mergers from 2006-2019.

Once those rural hospitals were acquired by larger systems, they were 30% less likely to still offer labor and delivery services five years later. Many of the shuttered obstetric departments were the sole local source of obstetric care.

That loss translated to fewer resources — such as practicing OB-GYNs — in the county where the acquired hospital was located, researchers found.

The number of births in those counties didn't change; families just had to go elsewhere for care.

Less access to nearby care could explain those counties' small increases in health problems among women during or after pregnancy and child birth, and higher rates of smoking among pregnant women, researchers said.

On the flip side, they found that some patients went to higher-quality facilities farther away. And in rural hospitals that didn't close their obstetric departments following a merger, the quality of care tended to rise.

In recent years, officials in dozens of states have championed laws to increase oversight of mergers and other health care dealmaking.

In the wake of devastating hospital closures tied to corporate financial maneuvering, some states have strengthened their antitrust laws.

Last year alone, 22 states enacted at least 34 laws related to health system consolidation and competition, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures, an advisory think tank for lawmakers. Other states, meanwhile, have paved the way for health mergers in a bid to save failing rural hospitals.

At least 35 states now require hospitals, health systems, providers and private equity firms to notify a state official of proposed mergers or other contracts.

Earlier this month, California lawmakers passed a bill to expand the state's authority in overseeing mergers and acquisitions in health care. It's headed to Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom's desk, though Newsom vetoed a similar measure last year.

At the federal level, President Donald Trump's administration has not signaled an interest in increasing antitrust oversight. But Trump's recent tax and spending law did include \$50 billion in funding over the next decade aimed at helping states strengthen rural health care. Massive cuts to Medicaid also in the law could have devastating impacts on rural hospitals struggling to stay afloat, however.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services this week announced that states have until Nov. 5 to apply for rural health funding. States must show that they'll use the federal dollars in a way that aligns with certain CMS goals, including helping improve access to care and strengthening retention of health care workers.

This story was originally produced by Stateline, which is part of States Newsroom, a nonprofit news network which includes South Dakota Searchlight, and is supported by grants and a coalition of donors as a 501c(3) public charity.

Anna Claire Vollers covers health care for Stateline. She is based in Huntsville, Alabama.

Protesters rally against \$12B cut to education in Trump plan, US House bill

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA-SEPTEMBER 17, 2025 3:47 PM

WASHINGTON — Democratic U.S. Reps. Rashida Tlaib of Michigan and Delia Ramirez of Illinois joined advocates Wednesday outside the U.S. Capitol to blast proposed cuts to education spending.

The lawmakers and demonstrators rebuked a congressional spending panel's bill that calls for \$12 billion in spending cuts at the Education Department for the coming fiscal year and fulfills many of President Donald Trump's education spending priorities as he and his administration seek to dismantle the agency.

Dozens of advocates from across the country marched from the Education Department's headquarters to the U.S. Capitol to protest the proposed cuts, organized by the political arm of Popular Democracy, a network of community-based organizations across the country. The march culminated in a press confer-

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ence, where Tlaib and Ramirez rallied with the advocates.

Trump outlines 'winding down' of agency

Trump and his administration have sought to take an ax to the Education Department in an effort to dramatically overhaul the federal role in education.

Earlier this year, Trump requested \$12 billion in spending cuts at the department for fiscal 2026. A summary of the department's request said the cut "reflects an agency that is responsibly winding down."

"You all know, and I feel this from my heart — the fact that the current president wants to gut and completely eliminate the Department of Education is not only despicable, it is unconstitutional," Tlaib said.

"You know the Department of Education is incredibly important for not only those living with disabilities, but different religious backgrounds, diverse communities," she said.

The Michigan Democrat added that "without the Department of Education, we know many of our kids will be left behind, unable to receive ... the education and resources."

House and Senate bills differ

Though the House and Senate Appropriations committees share jurisdiction over funding the Education Department for the coming fiscal year, their bills stand in sharp contrast to each other.

Senate appropriators largely rejected Trump's proposed spending cuts in their bipartisan bill, which advanced out of the committee in July. Their measure tightens requirements for the department to have the necessary staffing levels to fulfill its statutory responsibilities and prevents the agency from transferring certain programs to other federal agencies.

But the House Appropriations Committee's bill, which also passed out of that panel, largely aligns with the president's education agenda and spending cut priorities.

Ramirez of Illinois blasted that bill, saying it "would gut support for English language learners, funding for teacher training and retention and dismantle entire community schools."

She noted that "in an effort to turn the clock back to when discrimination was legal, Republicans are obsessed with dismantling the Department of Education and every program that protects equal opportunity education for our children — that's why Republicans are pushing to take away over \$12 billion from our children's public education."

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.

Former CDC chief says she was fired for resisting RFK Jr. orders on vaccines

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT-SEPTEMBER 17, 2025 3:25 PM

WASHINGTON — Former Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Susan Monarez testified before a U.S. Senate committee Wednesday that she was fired after just 29 days because she refused to pre-approve vaccine recommendations or fire career officials for no reason.

Monarez, who was nominated by President Donald Trump earlier this year and confirmed by the Senate in July on a party-line vote, became a central figure in the country's debate over public health last month after she refused to resign.

Monarez testified that during a meeting in late August, Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. told her she needed to commit to approving upcoming recommendations from the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices without reviewing any data or research.

"He also directed me to dismiss career officials responsible for vaccine policy without cause. He said if I was unwilling to do both, I should resign," Monarez said. "I responded that I could not pre-approve recommendations without reviewing the evidence and I had no basis to fire scientific experts."

Monarez testified before the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee during the nearly three-hour hearing that she told Kennedy if he didn't trust her, then he could fire her.

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During that same late August meeting, Monarez said Kennedy told her the childhood vaccine schedule would be changing in September and that she needed to be on board with that.

"We got into an exchange where I had suggested that I would be open to changing childhood vaccine schedules if the evidence or science was supportive," Monarez testified. "And he responded that there was no science or evidence associated with the childhood vaccine schedule."

ACIP is scheduled to meet Thursday and Friday at the CDC's headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia.

Kennedy testified before a separate Senate committee earlier this month that he did demand that Monarez fire career CDC scientists but said he didn't tell her to accept the recommendations of the vaccine advisory panel without further review.

"What I asked her about is she had made a statement that she was going to not sign on and I wanted clarification about that," Kennedy said at the time. "I told her I didn't want her to have a role if she's not going to sign onto it."

Vaccine safety at issue

Monarez said that undermining vaccine safety will lead to an increase in preventable diseases, some of which have long-term or even lifelong consequences for children's health.

"I believe that we will have our children harmed for things that we know they do not need to be harmed by — polio, measles, diphtheria, chickenpox," she said.

Former CDC Chief Medical Officer Dr. Debra Houry told the committee there are significant ramifications if the new members of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, who were appointed by Kennedy after he fired all of the former members, don't use rigorous science and data to make their recommendations.

"It's going to be heartbreaking," Houry said. "I think what concerns me is these aren't harmless diseases. We just saw the case in California of a young child that died of encephalitis years after measles. These diseases have long-term consequences and in the U.S. we have gone so far in reversing this. We don't want our children to die."

Houry was one of several CDC officials who resigned after learning about Monarez's firing, which happened just weeks after a gunman opened fire at the CDC's headquarters, killing a police officer.

Both Monarez and Houry testified, in response to a question from Connecticut Democratic Sen. Chris Murphy, that confusion about vaccines and CDC recommendations had real consequences.

"I myself was subject to threats," Monarez said. "And I am very concerned that the further promulgation of misleading information will undermine not just the safety and health of our children, but it will also exacerbate some of these tensions — the willingness to commit harm if someone is affronted by a belief that the people like us that are trying to help them are actually not trying to help them."

Houry told the committee the gunman fired about 500 rounds, with approximately 180 of those hitting the building.

"Each bullet was meant for a person, and each of my staff were very traumatized afterwards," Houry said. "I had staff that were covering their kids in the day care parking lot. There were people that were out at the ride-share as bullets were passing over their head. I have many that won't speak about vaccines now and removed their names off of the papers. They don't wish to present publicly anymore because they feel they were personally targeted because of misinformation."

'Did we do something wrong?'

HELP Committee Chairman Bill Cassidy, R-La., said at the beginning of the hearing he intended to invite Kennedy and possibly other HHS officials to testify before his committee later in the year if they wanted to respond to what was said in the Wednesday hearing.

He also raised concerns that Monarez was fired after less than a month in the role, despite her being nominated by Trump, confirmed by the Senate and Kennedy saying while swearing her in that she had "unimpeachable scientific credentials."

"We as senators need to ask ourselves, did we look past something? Did we do something wrong?" Cassidy said. "It may be that we did nothing wrong, in which case, Dr. Monarez and Dr. Houry, the onus

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is upon you to prove that the criticisms leveled by the secretary are not true."

Cassidy later added that "it may be impossible to learn who's telling the truth."

Vermont independent Sen. Bernie Sanders, ranking member on the committee, said the Trump administration's decision to fire Monarez after less than a month in the CDC director's role was because "she refused to act as a rubber stamp to implement Secretary Kennedy's dangerous agenda to substantially limit the use of safe and effective vaccines that would endanger the lives of the American people and people throughout the world."

Sanders raised concerns that the loss of career officials at the CDC and other federal health agencies could hamper the country from addressing disease outbreaks in the months and years ahead.

Confusion over whether Monarez was recorded

There were a few awkward moments in the hearing, in addition to the serious discussion about the Trump administration's approach to public health.

One came after Florida Republican Sen. Ashley Moody mentioned twice during her five minutes of questions that Monarez had spoken with Cassidy about her firing, implying that was somehow improper.

Cassidy gave a lengthy statement afterward, clarifying the record.

"As chairman of the committee with jurisdiction over the CDC that favorably reported Dr. Monarez as the CDC director, it is entirely appropriate for someone with oversight concerns to contact my office, or me, or frankly any of us," Cassidy said. "Upon receiving outreach from Dr. Monarez, I contacted both the secretary and the White House to inquire about what was happening and to express concerns about what was alleged. As soon as the director was fired, the HELP Committee began reviewing the situation, as it is our responsibility, and any and all communication with the witnesses was conducted by HELP staff in coordination with attorneys."

Another somewhat uncomfortable and slightly confusing moment came after Oklahoma Republican Sen. Markwayne Mullin told Monarez that someone had recorded her meeting or meetings with Kennedy.

Mullin then repeatedly questioned her recollection of her conversations with Kennedy, implying that he had a different view because he had listened to the recording.

The exchange led Cassidy to give another statement to the committee. He appeared somewhat frustrated that someone gave just one senator on the panel the recording, that Mullin had not shared it with any other members of the committee and that HHS had chosen not to give it to the committee in response to a request for documents related to Monarez's firing.

"If a recording does not exist, I ask Sen. Mullin to retract his line of questions," Cassidy said. "I'll also note that if he has it, I'm also curious why only one senator was given this and why we're just hearing about it now."

A few minutes later, Cassidy announced to the hearing room that Mullin told reporters elsewhere that he was mistaken about there being a recording of the meeting or meetings.

Monarez lawyer

Several GOP senators on the panel also questioned Monarez at length about when and why she chose to hire legal representation and why she ultimately went with Mark Zaid, who has made public statements against Trump and his policies.

Monarez testified that she wasn't aware of Zaid's political beliefs when she hired him and hasn't spoken with him about politics.

"I was seeking some critical counsel to be able to help me make sure that I was understanding and aware of everything that had transpired and preparing for what might be next, including this committee hearing," Monarez said. "Mark and I have never spoken about politics. I never asked him about his politics. He has never asked me about my politics."

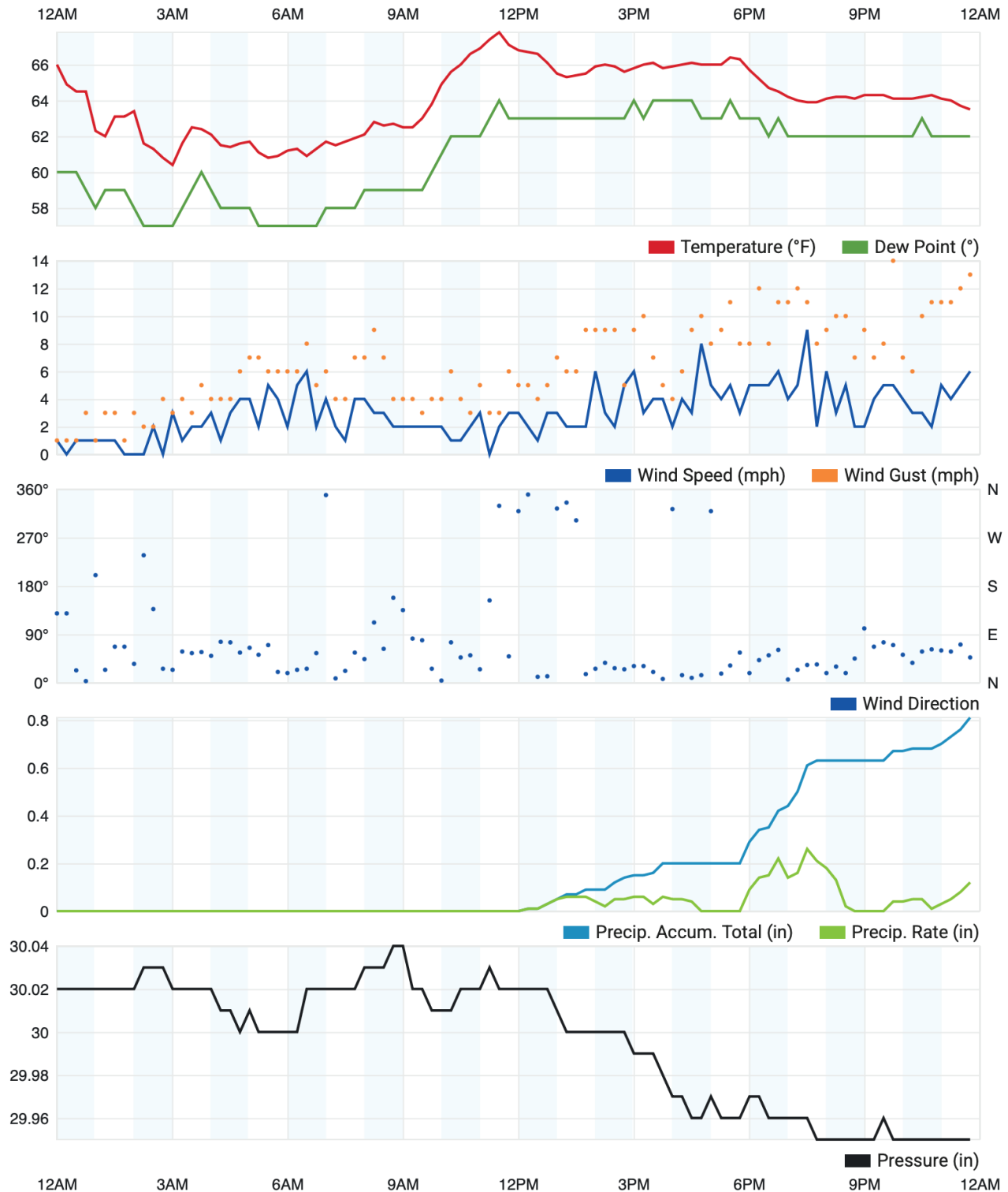
Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

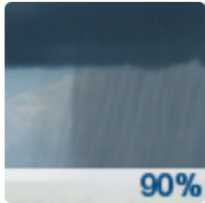
September 17, 2025



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Thursday



High: 64 °F

Showers and
Patchy Fog

Thursday
Night



Low: 56 °F

Chance
T-storms and
Patchy Fog

Friday



High: 66 °F

Chance
Showers and
Patchy Fog

Friday Night



Low: 53 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Saturday



High: 71 °F

Partly Sunny



Wet Weather Continues Today into Friday

September 18, 2025

4:47 AM

Timing of Rainfall Chances Through Friday

Probability of Precipitation Forecast (%)

	9/18 Thu						9/19 Fri						
	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm
Aberdeen	80	85	90	70	35	30	35	45	35	40	40	40	40
Britton	65	55	70	70	45	35	45	45	55	60	65	65	65
Brookings	25	20	30	40	40	30	30	20	20	20	40	40	40
Chamberlain	35	40	45	45	45	10	10	10	15	15	15	15	15
Clark	50	35	30	35	30	20	20	20	30	40	45	45	45
Eagle Butte	90	85	90	70	30	20	25	25	25	20	10	5	5
Ellendale	100	90	90	90	65	35	50	55	55	55	45	45	45
Eureka	95	95	95	50	50	40	35	55	45	45	30	25	25
Gettysburg	100	95	80	60	40	25	25	25	25	25	15	15	15
Huron	30	35	40	50	50	20	20	10	10	10	30	30	30
Kennebec	80	75	55	45	25	15	10	15	15	15	5	5	5
McIntosh	40	60	90	90	50	45	55	50	30	20	10	10	10
Milbank	40	35	20	30	30	35	50	55	65	60	60	60	60
Miller	65	50	45	75	60	20	25	25	20	20	20	20	20
Mobridge	100	100	95	90	55	45	45	50	50	30	20	15	15
Murdo	90	95	85	50	20	10	10	10	10	10	5	0	0
Pierre	100	100	90	40	25	20	15	20	15	15	5	5	5
Redfield	70	45	30	40	35	20	20	25	30	30	30	30	30
Sisseton	50	70	50	45	40	55	45	50	60	65	65	65	65
Watertown	30	20	20	25	35	30	25	30	50	55	50	45	45
Webster	40	40	40	40	40	30	30	35	50	60	50	50	50
Wheaton	35	45	45	40	25	30	45	70	75	70	75	75	75

Key Messages:

- Low pressure will continue to circulate over the area and deliver periods of showers and a few thunderstorms through the end of the week. No severe weather is expected.
- Highest chances of rainfall (60-90%) will be through this evening along and west of the James Valley
 - 50-70% chances will be late tonight through Friday afternoon across northeast SD/west central MN
- Additional rainfall amounts of up to 1 inch will be possible through Friday. **Heaviest rainfall in red box**

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

A slow moving low pressure system will continue to sit and spin over the area today into tomorrow. This will lead to continued chances for showers and a few thunderstorms across central and northeast South Dakota and west central Minnesota. No severe weather is expected today through Friday. Highest chances for rain will set up across along and west of the James Valley today into tonight while areas across far northeast South Dakota and west central Minnesota will see the best chances overnight tonight through Friday afternoon. This system will finally slowly pull away from the area during the first half of the weekend with rainfall coming to an end late Friday and early Saturday.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 68 °F at 11:28 AM

Low Temp: 60 °F at 2:55 AM

Wind: 15 mph at 9:37 PM

Precip: : 0.76

Today's Info

Record High: 95 in 2000

Record Low: 22 in 1896

Average High: 74

Average Low: 46

Average Precip in Sept.: 1.20

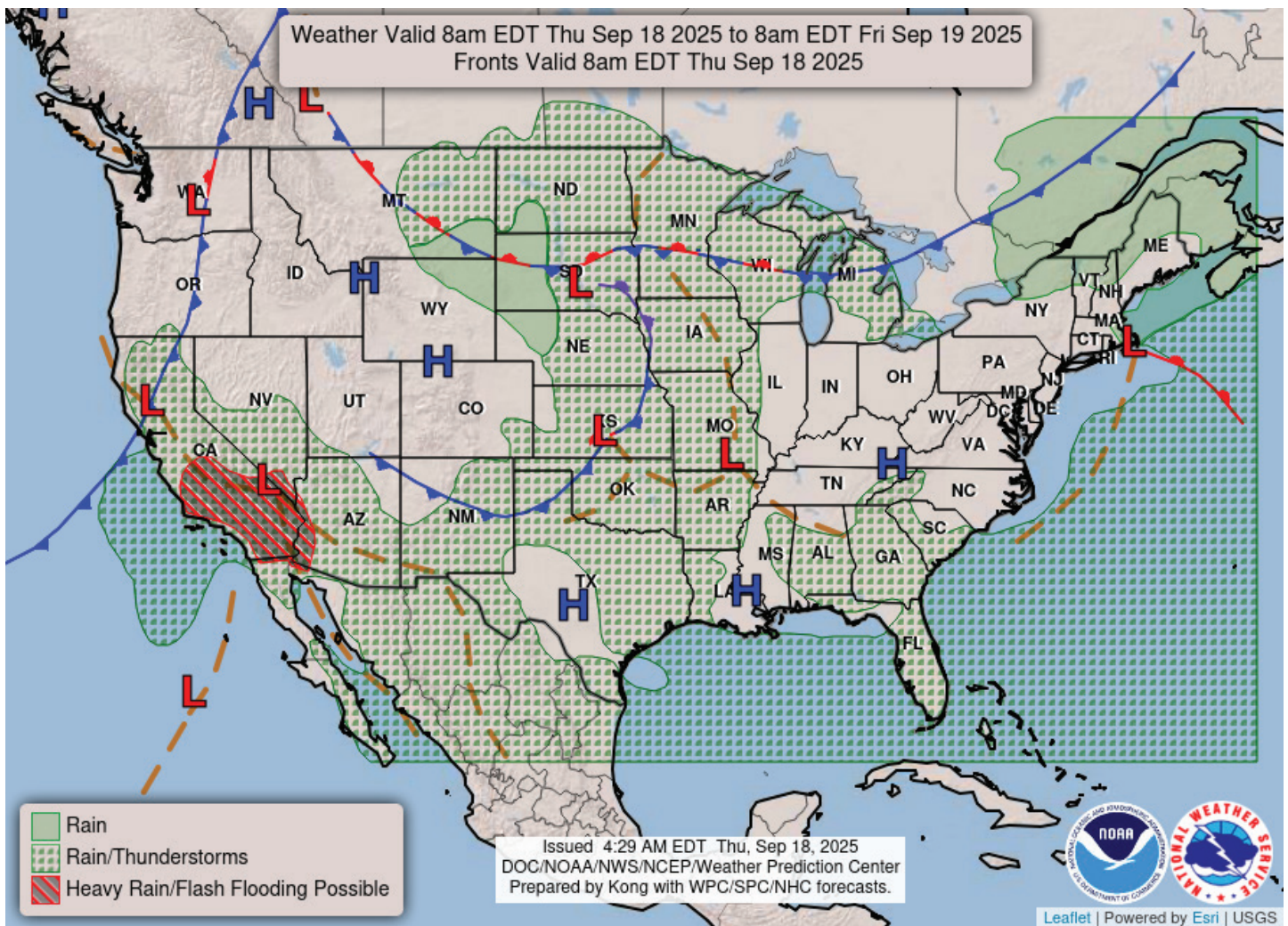
Precip to date in Sept.: 1.04

Average Precip to date: 17.54

Precip Year to Date: 21.34

Sunset Tonight: 7:38 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:16 am



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Today in Weather History

September 18, 2000: Mid-September record to near record heat occurred across central and northeast South Dakota as well as west central Minnesota. Aberdeen, Kennebec, Pierre, and Wheaton all set record highs for the day. Aberdeen and Wheaton set record highs of 95 degrees. Kennebec rose to a record high of 99 degrees while Pierre rose to 104 degrees on this day in 2000. Some of the near record highs occurred at Timber Lake and Mobridge with 92 degrees and 97 degrees, respectively.

1926: The great "Miami Hurricane" produced winds of 138 mph that drove ocean waters into the Biscayne Bay drowning 135 persons. The eye of the hurricane passed over Miami, at which time the barometric pressure reached 27.61 inches. Tides up to twelve feet high accompanied the storm, which claimed a total of 372 lives. Click [HERE](#) for more information from the NWS Office in Miami, Florida.

1941: One of the greatest aurora borealis or northern lights ever observed in the central Atlantic and mid-central portions of the U.S. occurred on the night of September 18-19th. The displays continued from twilight until just before dawn and were observed as far south as Florida and southern California.

1987 - Early morning thunderstorms in northern Texas produced wind gusts to 65 mph at Sulphur Springs, and 2.50 inches of rain in one hour at Commerce, which caused widespread street flooding. Bonham TX received 4.50 inches of rain which also resulted in widespread street flooding as Pig Branch overflowed its banks. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - A strong cold front produced severe thunderstorms in the north central U.S. High winds behind the cold front gusted to 92 mph at Fort Collins CO, and up to a foot of snow blanketed the mountains of Montana, with seven inches reported at Great Falls. High winds in Colorado caused three million dollars damage. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Hurricane Hugo hit Puerto Rico, producing wind gusts to 92 mph at San Juan, and wind gusts to 120 mph at Roosevelt Roads. Hugo produced a storm surge of four to six feet, and northeastern sections of the island were deluged with more than ten inches of rain. Hugo claimed the lives of a dozen persons in Puerto Rico, and caused a billion dollars damage, including 100 million dollars damage to crops. Thunderstorms representing what remained of Hurricane Octave continued to bring heavy rain to the valleys of northern California. Heavier 24 hour rainfall totals included 3.15 inches at Redding, and 2.66 inches at Red Bluff. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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IT'S THERE - WAITING

Mary and I had been on a long trip. We had been driving for hours. We arrived home in the midst of a storm. The wind seemed to be coming from every direction, and the rain was cold and biting. We sat in our car for a moment looking at our home that was dark and empty. I left the lights on in the car and made my way up the steps, turned on the lights and turned up the thermostat. Suddenly, what had once been dark and dismal was now warm and welcoming.

Although our home was cold and dark, power was available to eliminate the darkness and provide energy for warmth. But it was necessary for me to do "something" to change things.

In a spiritual sense, this is true of prayer. The writer of Psalm 118 was in a situation where he desperately needed help. He knew there was a source of power that was beyond himself that he could go to if he chose to. And he did! Hear his words: "In my anguish, I cried to the Lord, and He answered me by setting me free!"

The prayer of faith is far more powerful than any source of power we know. It is the most unused force for good that is available to man.

It was Jesus who challenged us to go to this Source of power for anything and everything: "You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it!" Jesus set no limits on what we might ask for as long as it is in keeping with His nature and character. Whatever we ask for, if it will bring honor and glory to His name, He will give us.

Prayer: Help us, Father, to take Your challenge to pray for anything that we might need as long as it honors You. Thank You for Your light and warmth. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: – In my anguish, I cried to the Lord, and He answered me by setting me free. Psalm 118:5

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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 09.16.25

10 14 34 40 43 5

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$423,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 2 Mins
1 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 09.17.25

8 33 36 45 51 2

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$3,090,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 15 Hrs 17
Mins 1 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 09.17.25

3 11 29 40 41 2

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 32 Mins 1
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 09.17.25

1 21 24 28 30

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$26,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 15 Hrs 32
Mins 1 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 09.17.25

8 19 47 51 58 21

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 1 Mins
0 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 09.17.25

7 30 50 54 62 20

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$99,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 1 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

State-funded gun range in South Dakota nearly finished, expected to open in November

By BART PFANKUCH/South Dakota News Watch South Dakota News Watch

PIEDMONT, S.D. (AP) — Dust plumes rose frequently along a gravel section of Elk Vale Road on the open prairie of Meade County, South Dakota in early September where workers are vigorously trying to finish a gun range that will be among the nation's largest.

Plumbers, landscapers, equipment operators and construction crews were all busy working or driving to or from the 400-acre site. The goal, according to the South Dakota Game, Fish & Parks Department, is to have the range, located about 12 miles north of Rapid City, ready for public use on Saturday, Nov. 8.

Construction on the range — now known as the Pete Lien & Sons Shooting Sports Complex — has happened quickly and is going along smoothly, far different from the long, up-and-down path the project went through in the planning and funding processes.

The range proposal was raised by the GFP in 2021 with strong support from former Gov. Kristi Noem. Despite opposition by some lawmakers and neighbors, it is close to completion and is creating a buzz among shooting enthusiasts across the state and region, said John Kanta, a GFP section chief.

"There's a tremendous amount of excitement among folks who want to start using it," he said. "Some weeks we're hearing from people daily who are super excited to get out there and start shooting or get their events scheduled."

The \$20 million range will include 160 rifle, handgun and shotgun shooting bays, a tactical shooting range for shooting and moving, and a 10,000 square-foot main building that can house events, law enforcement training and firearm education, Kanta said.

Some lawmakers opposed funding mechanism

Almost immediately after the range proposal was announced, both support and opposition arose within the South Dakota Legislature.

While some lawmakers have supported construction as a way to serve the public and potentially generate millions of dollars in annual tourism revenue, others have been bothered by the way the project has been funded.

Rep. Liz May, a Republican from Kyle, opposed the use of taxpayer money to build the range. May, who serves on the Joint Committee on Appropriations, said lawmakers defeated six separate bills or funding mechanisms brought forward by range supporters.

"We kept killing it, and they kept bringing it back and bringing it back," May told News Watch. "I've got nothing against guns or gun ranges. But that's just not an appropriate use of taxpayer dollars."

May was particularly bothered when Noem allocated \$13.5 million in Future Fund dollars toward construction of the range in 2024.

The Future Fund consists of money collected from most South Dakota businesses as part of unemployment compensation fees. The money is required to be used for "workforce development and technical assistance programs" for workers, including those who have been laid off. Grants are made by the Governor's Office of Economic Development and do not require legislative approval.

"There was opposition from landowners and lawmakers, and they basically just ignored all that and went around the process by using those Future Funds," May said. "With the whole thing — they really stepped outside the boundaries."

Donors step in to complete project

GFP officials promised that donations would help fund the construction of the gun range, and their plan has succeeded, with more than \$6.3 million either donated or pledged for the project so far.

According to a GFP budget document, obtained by News Watch through a public records request, more than \$3 million has been donated and another \$3.3 million has been pledged over the next five years by

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corporations, individuals and groups that support the project.

About a third of the donations have come from firearm industry businesses or groups that support shooting. The top donation of \$800,000 with a commitment to give another \$1.2 million in the next three years came from Pete Lien & Sons, a Rapid City concrete company that is now the namesake of the range.

The next largest donation of \$600,000 came from South Dakota Youth Hunting Adventures, a charity group, followed by \$200,000 from Scull Construction of Rapid City and \$150,000 each from firearm manufacturers Smith & Wesson and Glock.

Annual ongoing expenses at the range will be about \$400,000 and include three full-time employees and some seasonal workers as well as upkeep, Kanta said. Those costs will be covered by permit fees paid by some users, support from government agencies that use the range for training and possibly from some federal grant funds, he said.

"No general fund money will be used," Kanta said.

Some neighbor opposition remains

Joe Norman and his wife, Diane, own a home and a 7,600-acre cattle ranch in Meade County with borders that extend to within close proximity of the gun range site.

Norman, 69, is one of several ranchers and landowners in the area who oppose the location of the gun range. After testifying before the Legislature and opposing the range in public meetings, he is resigned to the fact the range is about to become reality.

Yet Norman remains concerned about heavy traffic on gravel roads in the area, disruption of his cattle, and the noise from the repeated firing of handguns and rifles.

"If they've got 175 shooting bays and it's full, that's potentially 175 shots every minute. And if they do that for 10 to 12 hours a day, I think the noise is going to be unbelievable," Norman told News Watch. "The roads have also gone to heck with all the construction traffic."

Initially, the range was expected to have 175 shooting bays, though that number has been reduced to 160, Kanta said.

Norman said he's already heard some shooting at the site, even though the formal opening is not until November. He's concerned that promises to keep the noise level under 64 decibels will be difficult or impossible to monitor and enforce.

Noise from the range will be reduced by the natural topography of the land and by berms and baffling that will help stifle sound, Kanta said. Shooters will aim to the east and northeast where there are no structures for miles, and lead bullets will be captured and contained within federal environmental guidelines, he said.

As part of an agreement with Meade County, a 3-mile section of Elk Vale Road leading to the range will also be paved in the coming months to reduce dust from vehicles.

Norman said he's disappointed that, in his opinion, the concerns of neighbors were largely ignored by the GFP, state officials and lawmakers who supported the range and were determined to find a way to get it funded and built.

"We were fighting the governor, the lieutenant governor and legislators," he said. "It feels like the GFP responses have all been smoke and mirrors."

Excitement building for new shooting option

Despite its strong firearm culture, South Dakota has a fairly limited number of gun ranges. And one argument from range supporters was that more controlled shooting sites were needed to prevent gun owners from leaving messes and creating nuisances at unofficial shooting sites in the Black Hills.

The GFP operates 20 public shooting sites, though most are for archery and only seven allow firearm discharges. Those that allow firearms include North Point in Lake Andes, Oahe Downstream in Fort Pierre, Louis Smith near Mobridge, Brule Bottom north of Chamberlain and South Shore in Codington County.

This interactive map on the GFP website includes location and consumer information for 67 public and private shooting range sites in the state, though many have limited access or are for archery only.

A few ranges are outdoors and allow easy public access, such as the Fall River Gun Club near Hot Springs and the Watertown Area Shooting Complex. A few ranges are indoors, including at Gary's Gun Shop in Sioux Falls.

The large size, wide range of shooting options and quality of amenities at the new state range will make it a destination for shooting enthusiasts across the state and nation and possibly even internationally, said Mark Blote, a co-owner of First Stop Gun & Coin in Rapid City.

Blote visited the range site in early September and was impressed with the progress. Excitement over the range's opening is palpable in the firearms community and in the local tourism industry, he said.

"I think it's going to be great for the gun folks in our area. But it's truly a world-class facility, so it will do a lot for the economy," Blote said. "It's going to bring in a lot of competitions, which will help the hotels and restaurants."

This story was originally published by South Dakota News Watch and distributed through a partnership with The Associated Press.

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According to a GFP budget document, obtained by News Watch through a public records request, more than \$3 million has been donated and another \$3.3 million has been pledged over the next five years by corporations, individuals and groups that support the project.

About a third of the donations have come from firearm industry businesses or groups that support shooting. The top donation of \$800,000 with a commitment to give another \$1.2 million in the next three years came from Pete Lien & Sons, a Rapid City concrete company that is now the namesake of the range.

The next largest donation of \$600,000 came from South Dakota Youth Hunting Adventures, a charity group, followed by \$200,000 from Scull Construction of Rapid City and \$150,000 each from firearm manufacturers Smith & Wesson and Glock.

Annual ongoing expenses at the range will be about \$400,000 and include three full-time employees and some seasonal workers as well as upkeep, Kanta said. Those costs will be covered by permit fees paid by some users, support from government agencies that use the range for training and possibly from some federal grant funds, he said.

"No general fund money will be used," Kanta said.

Some neighbor opposition remains

Joe Norman and his wife, Diane, own a home and a 7,600-acre cattle ranch in Meade County with borders that extend to within close proximity of the gun range site.

Norman, 69, is one of several ranchers and landowners in the area who oppose the location of the gun range. After testifying before the Legislature and opposing the range in public meetings, he is resigned to the fact the range is about to become reality.

Yet Norman remains concerned about heavy traffic on gravel roads in the area, disruption of his cattle, and the noise from the repeated firing of handguns and rifles.

"If they've got 175 shooting bays and it's full, that's potentially 175 shots every minute. And if they do that for 10 to 12 hours a day, I think the noise is going to be unbelievable," Norman told News Watch. "The roads have also gone to heck with all the construction traffic."

Initially, the range was expected to have 175 shooting bays, though that number has been reduced to 160, Kanta said.

Norman said he's already heard some shooting at the site, even though the formal opening is not until November. He's concerned that promises to keep the noise level under 64 decibels will be difficult or impossible to monitor and enforce.

Noise from the range will be reduced by the natural topography of the land and by berms and baffling that will help stifle sound, Kanta said. Shooters will aim to the east and northeast where there are no structures for miles, and lead bullets will be captured and contained within federal environmental guidelines, he said.

As part of an agreement with Meade County, a 3-mile section of Elk Vale Road leading to the range will also be paved in the coming months to reduce dust from vehicles.

Norman said he's disappointed that, in his opinion, the concerns of neighbors were largely ignored by the GFP, state officials and lawmakers who supported the range and were determined to find a way to get it funded and built.

"We were fighting the governor, the lieutenant governor and legislators," he said. "It feels like the GFP responses have all been smoke and mirrors."

Excitement building for new shooting option

Despite its strong firearm culture, South Dakota has a fairly limited number of gun ranges. And one argu-

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ment from range supporters was that more controlled shooting sites were needed to prevent gun owners from leaving messes and creating nuisances at unofficial shooting sites in the Black Hills.

The GFP operates 20 public shooting sites, though most are for archery and only seven allow firearm discharges. Those that allow firearms include North Point in Lake Andes, Oahe Downstream in Fort Pierre, Louis Smith near Mobridge, Brule Bottom north of Chamberlain and South Shore in Codington County.

This interactive map on the GFP website includes location and consumer information for 67 public and private shooting range sites in the state, though many have limited access or are for archery only.

A few ranges are outdoors and allow easy public access, such as the Fall River Gun Club near Hot Springs and the Watertown Area Shooting Complex. A few ranges are indoors, including at Gary's Gun Shop in Sioux Falls.

The large size, wide range of shooting options and quality of amenities at the new state range will make it a destination for shooting enthusiasts across the state and nation and possibly even internationally, said Mark Blote, a co-owner of First Stop Gun & Coin in Rapid City.

Blote visited the range site in early September and was impressed with the progress. Excitement over the range's opening is palpable in the firearms community and in the local tourism industry, he said.

"I think it's going to be great for the gun folks in our area. But it's truly a world-class facility, so it will do a lot for the economy," Blote said. "It's going to bring in a lot of competitions, which will help the hotels and restaurants."

Despair deepens for a Palestinian family forced to flee across Gaza yet again

By ABDEL KAREEM HANA and LEE KEATH Associated Press

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip (AP) — Exhaustion, despair and anger are grinding away at Ne'man Abu Jarad. Once again, for the 11th time, he and his family have been forced to uproot and move across the Gaza Strip.

"It's a renewal of the torture. We're not being displaced, we're dying," Ne'man said last week as the family packed up their possessions and tents in Gaza City to escape escalating Israel bombardment ahead of a planned invasion of the city.

The next day, they unpacked in southern Gaza on barren former agricultural land outside the city of Khan Younis, unsure where they would now find food and water.

This has been the Abu Jarads' life for nearly two years, since fleeing their home in the far north of Gaza days after Israel launched its onslaught in response to Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack. Like countless Palestinian families, they have fled the length of Gaza and back, forced to move every few months as Israel attacks each new shelter. The Associated Press has chronicled much of their journey.

During the ceasefire that began in January, they had a bittersweet return to their home, which was damaged but still standing. But within two months, Israel broke the ceasefire, and the Abu Jarads had to wrench themselves away.

With each move, Ne'man and his wife Majida try to preserve some stability for their six daughters and their 2-year-old granddaughter amid the misery of tent life. The youngest is 8-year-old Lana; the eldest is Balsam, in her 20s and married.

But the sense of futility is weighing heavier. No end is in sight and Ne'man fears it will get worse.

"What's coming is dark," he said. "We might be expelled (from Gaza). We might die ... You feel like death is surrounding you. We just scurry from place to place, away from death."

Uprooted yet again

"It gets worse for the girls. It's hard on them to change every time they get used to something," Majida said.

Since May, the family's refuge had been a tent in Gaza City. It wasn't easy, but at least they got to know the neighborhood and their neighbors and figured out where to get water and medical care.

Their daughters could see friends from before the war, who were also displaced nearby. Another family

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in a neighboring building let their daughter Sarah come use their internet to study for online high school classes. The girls downloaded books onto their phones, to study or just to have something to do.

Food was more difficult, as Israeli restrictions on aid pushed Gaza City into famine. Ne'man joined hundreds of others waiting for aid trucks to enter from Israel. It was dangerous – Israeli troops regularly opened fire toward the crowds, and Ne'man saw people getting killed and wounded, Majida said. But he sometimes came back with food.

A few weeks ago, they found a school for Lana. "She was very excited. Her life would have some regularity," Majida said.

But Israel had ordered the population to evacuate, preparing a new assault to seize Gaza City that it said aims to dismantle Hamas, free hostages and move towards taking security control of the strip. Bombardment came closer. One strike leveled an apartment tower a block away, sending shrapnel that pierced the Abu Jarads' tent. Another destroyed a house across the street, killing members of the family sitting outside, Ne'man said.

Lana had only attended three days of classes. But it was time to go. Last Thursday, they joined a growing exodus of Palestinians fleeing south.

Stress tears at the family

Dressed in pink pajamas and leaning against her father in their new camp the next day, Lana described her best friends Sila and Joudi bidding her farewell as they left Gaza City. They hugged her and told her they loved her — and they were crying, Lana said.

"But I did not cry," she added firmly. "I will not cry at all. I won't be sad."

Majida and Ne'man worry about Lana. Their other daughters had a grounding of normal lives. But Lana was only six when Israel's campaign overturned their lives.

"She is gaining awareness in the middle of war, bombardment and life in the tents," Majida said.

Lana can be stubborn and impatient.

"There's things my sisters put up with that I don't put up with," Lana said. She can't tolerate the discomforts of tent life. Having to use the makeshift bathroom upsets her. "Sitting and reading, I can't get comfortable," she said.

Over the months, everything pushes the family to a boil — boredom, lack of privacy, the daily toil of lugging water, gathering firewood, searching for food, cleaning the tent. Behind that lie darker thoughts: the feeling this could be their fate forever, the fear a strike could kill them.

Crammed together in the tent, the girls squabble and fight sometimes.

"We were a model family, understanding and loving," Ne'man said. "I never imagined we'd reach this point. I get afraid the family will fragment from all the pressure."

'In a desert'

The latest move drained what little money they had — hundreds of dollars to buy a new tent and rent a truck to carry their belongings.

It also stripped them of everything that made life bearable. The new camp lies in a stretch of barren dirt and fields. There's no market nearby, no schools. They have to walk 2 kilometers (1.2 miles) to get an internet connection. They are surrounded by strangers.

"We're living in a desert," Ne'man said.

Friday morning, their daughters walked more than a kilometer (half mile) to catch up with a passing water truck. It ran out before they could fill all their plastic jugs.

The family spent the day clearing their spot of land, assembling their two tents — one for the family, one for Ne'man's sister. As they worked, an Israeli strike rang out in the distance. They watched the black smoke rise over Khan Younis. Exhausted by the end of the day, Ne'man still had to dig a latrine and set up the bathroom.

The area had been a closed Israeli military zone until a few weeks ago, when Israel announced displaced could move there. An Israeli military position is not far away. They can see tanks moving in and out.

"It's not safe here," Ne'man said.

Majida tried to focus on practicalities.

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If someday water trucks start coming closer, she said, the girls won't have to walk as far and will grumble less. Once they set aside a corner for a kitchen, where they can cook and do washing, that will start creating a daily routine.

"The more details of daily life that are in place, the more comfortable we will feel," Majida said.

"Things will get better," she said again and again, without a trace of optimism in her voice.

They may have to move again

Four days later, on Tuesday, a voice message from Ne'man came to the AP.

"We're sitting here unable to eat," he said. They have almost no money to buy food. No aid is reaching them.

Worse, a man claiming to be the owner of the land had come, backed by armed men, and demanded they pay rent or leave. Ne'man can't afford rent. He can't afford the costs of moving, but may have no choice.

"Soon we'll die of starvation," he said. "Two years, all our energy has been drained, physically, mentally, financially. We can't bear more than this."

ABC suspends Jimmy Kimmel's late-night show indefinitely over his remarks about Charlie Kirk's death

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — ABC suspended Jimmy Kimmel's late-night show indefinitely beginning Wednesday after comments that he made about Charlie Kirk's killing led a group of ABC-affiliated stations to say it would not air the show and provoked some ominous comments from a top federal regulator.

The veteran late-night comic, made several remarks about the reaction to the conservative activist's assassination last week on "Jimmy Kimmel Live!" Monday and Tuesday nights, including that "many in MAGA land are working very hard to capitalize on the murder of Charlie Kirk."

ABC, which has aired Kimmel's late-night show since 2003, moved swiftly after Nexstar Communications Group said it would pull the show starting Wednesday. Kimmel's comments about Kirk's death "are offensive and insensitive at a critical time in our national political discourse," said Andrew Alford, president of Nexstar's broadcasting division. Nexstar operates 23 ABC affiliates.

There was no immediate comment from Kimmel, whose contract is up in May 2026. ABC's statement did not cite a reason for why his show was preempted.

President Donald Trump celebrated ABC's move on the social media site Truth Social, writing: "Congratulations to ABC for finally having the courage to do what had to be done."

Earlier in the day, FCC Chairman Brendan Carr called Kimmel's comments "truly sick" and said his agency has a strong case for holding Kimmel, ABC and network parent Walt Disney Co. accountable for spreading misinformation. He said the comic appeared to be making an intentional effort to mislead the public that Kirk's assassin was a right-wing Trump supporter.

During his Monday evening monologue, Kimmel suggested Kirk's alleged killer, Tyler Robinson, might have been a pro-Trump Republican. "The MAGA Gang (is) desperately trying to characterize this kid who murdered Charlie Kirk as anything other than one of them and doing everything they can to score political points from it," Kimmel said. "In between the finger-pointing, there was grieving."

"This is a very, very serious issue right now for Disney," Carr said on the Benny Johnson podcast. "We can do this the easy way or the hard way. These companies can find ways to take action on Kimmel or there is going to be additional work for the FCC ahead."

Authorities say the 22-year-old grew up in a conservative household in southern Utah but was enmeshed in "leftist ideology." His parents told investigators he had turned politically left and pro-LGBTQ rights in the last year. His voter status is inactive, meaning he did not vote in two regular general elections. He told his transgender partner that he targeted Kirk because he "had enough of his hatred."

The business landscape around late-night television

Both Disney and Nexstar have FCC business ahead of them. Disney is seeking regulatory approval for ESPN's acquisition of the NFL Network and Nexstar needs the Trump administration go-ahead to complete

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its \$6.2 billion purchase of broadcast rival Tegna.

For both companies, reinstating Kimmel after a suspension would risk the ire of Trump, who has already claimed that the show has been canceled.

While CBS said this past summer that it was canceling Colbert's show next May for financial reasons, some critics have wondered if his stance on Trump played a role. Both Colbert and Kimmel have made the president the frequent target of his jokes. Soon after the Colbert cancellation, the FCC approved CBS parent company Paramount's long-pending deal with Skydance.

Trump similarly celebrated Colbert's impending exit. "I absolutely love that Colbert got fired," Trump said then. "His talent was even less than his ratings. I hear Jimmy Kimmel is next."

Within the past year, both Disney and CBS parent Paramount chose to settle lawsuits brought by Trump against their news divisions rather than fight it out in court.

FCC Commissioner Anna Gomez criticized the administration for "using the weight of government power to suppress lawful expression" in a post on X.

"Another media outlet withered under government pressure, ensuring that the administration will continue to extort and exact retribution on broadcasters and publishers who criticize it," said Ari Cohn, lead counsel for tech policy at the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression. "We cannot be a country where late-night talk show hosts serve at the pleasure of the president."

The scene outside Kimmel's studio after show was suspended

Kimmel departed the Hollywood theater where his show is taped about three hours after ABC's decision. He was seen wearing a black hat, backpack and plaid shirt and kept his head down as he entered a waiting vehicle.

An audience was lined up outside the theater where "Jimmy Kimmel Live!" tapes when they were told Wednesday's show was canceled.

"We were just about to walk in — interestingly enough, they waited to pull the plug on this right as the studio audience was about to walk in," Tommy Williams, a would-be audience member from Jacksonville, Florida, told The Associated Press outside the theater. "They didn't tell us what had happened. They just said that the show was canceled."

More of what Kimmel said on his show

Kimmel said that Trump's response to Kirk's death "is not how an adult grieves the murder of someone he called a friend. This is how a 4-year-old mourns a goldfish, OK?" He also said that FBI chief Kash Patel has handled the investigation into the killing "like a kid who didn't read the book, BSing his way through an oral report."

He returned to the topic on Tuesday night, mocking Vice President JD Vance's performance as guest host for Kirk's podcast.

He said Trump was "fanning the flames" by attacking people on the left. "Which is it, are they a bunch of sissy pickleball players because they're too scared to be hit by tennis balls, or a well-organized deadly team of commandos, because they can't be both of those things."

The move comes as the president, his administration and political party have stepped up their effort to police speech about Kirk's death. Vance earlier this week urged Americans to turn in fellow citizens who mocked the assassination. It is also the latest effort by the administration to use its power to lean on the media. Carr has launched investigations of outlets that have angered Trump and the president has sued numerous media organizations for negative coverage.

Suspect in Charlie Kirk killing feared being shot by police before surrendering, sheriff says

By JESSE BEDAYN, HANNAH SCHOENBAUM and JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

OREM, Utah (AP) — Tyler Robinson, the Utah man accused of assassinating Charlie Kirk, was afraid of being shot by police and eventually agreed to surrender only if it was done peacefully, a sheriff involved with taking him into custody said Wednesday.

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Robinson appeared quiet and somber when he arrived with his parents to turn himself in last Thursday at the Washington County Sheriff's office, a day after Kirk was shot and killed at Utah Valley University, said Sheriff Nate Brooksby.

"He didn't want a big SWAT team at his parent's house or his apartment," said the sheriff, who was only involved with the surrender and not the broader investigation. "He was truly fearful about being shot by law enforcement."

On Tuesday, prosecutors charged the 22-year-old Robinson with capital murder and announced they will seek the death penalty while revealing a series of incriminating messages and DNA evidence that they say connect Robinson to the killing of Kirk, a prominent conservative activist and confidant of President Donald Trump.

Robinson also faced his first hearing in the case Tuesday where a judge said he would appoint an attorney to represent him. A message was left Wednesday with the county's public defender office.

Robinson's family has declined to comment to The Associated Press since his arrest.

The Sept. 10 shooting that stunned the nation and exposed deep political divides also left the Utah Valley campus reeling. On Wednesday, students returning for the first day of classes since then gathered silently and stared at the barricaded courtyard where Kirk was hit while speaking to students.

Care stations offering stuffed animals, candy and connections to counseling dotted the campus.

Matthew Caldwell, 24, said his classmates were quieter and seemed more genuine about being in class even with sadness still in air.

"The way that we treat each other in our words can ultimately lead to things like this," he said. "And I think everybody sort of understands that a little bit better now."

Since the shooting, the Republican president has threatened to crack down on what he calls the "radical left" and classify some groups as domestic terrorists. Former Democratic President Barack Obama said this week that Trump has further divided the country rather than work to bring people together.

ABC suspended Jimmy Kimmel's late-night show indefinitely following comments he made about Kirk's killing.

On Wednesday, the House Oversight Committee called on the chief executives of Discord, Steam, Twitch and Reddit to testify on how they are regulating their platforms to prevent violence.

"Congress has a duty to oversee the online platforms that radicals have used to advance political violence," said GOP Rep. James Comer, the committee chair, signaling a shift for congressional Republicans, who had previously scrutinized online platforms for policing free speech.

Robinson knew his capture was inevitable, sheriff says

The shooting at Utah Valley happened more than a three-hour drive from where Robinson grew up near St. George.

That's why the sheriff in Washington County said he was stunned when a retired detective and a friend of the Robinson family called to say he knew the shooter's identity and they were trying to convince him to come in voluntarily.

"I couldn't fathom what actually came out of his mouth," Brooksby said.

The sheriff said he was told that Robinson was possibly suicidal and in a remote area of the southwestern Utah county. An hour later, Robinson arrived at the sheriff's office where he was greeted by plainclothes detectives.

"He knew it was inevitable that he would be caught," said the sheriff. "If at the end of the day we accomplish him surrendering peacefully on his own, I'm going to make some concessions to make that happen."

Hidden note in suspect's apartment

Investigators say that after Robinson fired the single fatal shot, he texted his romantic partner and said to look under a keyboard for a note.

"I had the opportunity to take out Charlie Kirk and I'm going to take it," it said according to court documents.

After expressing shock, his partner who lived with Robinson, asked if he was the shooter. Robinson

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responded, "I am, I'm sorry."

Utah County Attorney Jeff Gray said DNA on the trigger of the rifle used to kill Kirk matched Robinson. Investigators looking at whether Robinson had help

Law enforcement officials say they are looking at whether others knew about Robinson's plans or helped, but they have not said if his partner is among those being investigated, only expressing appreciation for the partner sharing information.

The partner apparently never went to law enforcement after receiving the texts. Robinson remained on the run for more than a day until his parents recognized him in a photo released by authorities.

Also getting a closer look is security the day of the attack. Utah Valley is conducting a review, university President Astrid S. Tuminez said Wednesday.

Was Charlie Kirk targeted over anti-transgender views?

Authorities have not revealed a clear motive in the shooting, but Gray said that Robinson wrote in a text about Kirk to his partner: "I had enough of his hatred. Some hate can't be negotiated out."

Kirk, a 31-year-old father of two, was credited with energizing the Republican youth movement and helping Trump win back the White House in 2024. His political organization, Arizona-based Turning Point USA, brought young, evangelical Christians into politics through social media, his podcast and campus events.

While court documents said Robinson wrote in one text that he planned the attack for more than a week, authorities have not said what they believe that entailed.

Gray declined to answer whether Robinson targeted Kirk for his anti-transgender views. Kirk was shot while taking a question that touched on mass shootings and transgender people.

Robinson was involved in a romantic relationship with his roommate, who investigators say is transgender.

Parents said their son became more political

Robinson's mother told investigators that their son had turned hard left politically in the last year and became more supportive of gay and transgender rights, Gray said.

She recognized him when authorities released a picture of the suspect and his parents confronted him, at which time Robinson said he wanted to kill himself, Gray said.

Robinson detailed movements after the shooting

In a text exchange with his partner released by authorities, Robinson wrote about planning to get his rifle from his "drop point," but that the area was "locked down."

The texts, which Robinson later told his partner to delete, did not include timestamps, leaving it unclear how long after the shooting Robinson sent the messages.

"To be honest I had hoped to keep this secret till I died of old age. I am sorry to involve you," Robinson wrote.

In Britain, Trump basks in a display of regal splendor with King Charles III at Windsor Castle

By DANICA KIRKA, JILL LAWLESS, MICHELLE L. PRICE and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WINDSOR, England (AP) — President Donald Trump relished the glow of a British royal spectacle as he opened a two-day state visit Wednesday, calling the hours of pageantry with King Charles III "one of the highest honors of my life" while also making time for a quiet tribute at Queen Elizabeth II's tomb.

The grandeur-loving president soaked up all the revelry, from the largest guard of honor in living memory — with 120 horses and 1,300 troops — to carriage rides, an air show and a Windsor Castle state dinner.

After the pomp comes the real work Thursday, when Trump and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer meet to talk trade, technology and geopolitical issues.

No U.S. president, or any other world leader, has had the honor of a second U.K. state visit; Trump's first was in 2019, during his previous term. The display of regal splendor was meant to bolster ties with Trump at a time when his America First policies are putting pressure on trade and security arrangements around the globe.

"This was the second state visit, and that's the first, and maybe that's going to be the last time, I hope

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it is actually," Trump joked during the evening banquet.

The visit began with Prince William and his wife, Kate, meeting the presidential helicopter in the private Walled Garden on the vast Windsor estate, then walking Trump and first lady Melania Trump over to be greeted by Charles and Queen Camilla. A gigantic royal standard, the flag used for official celebration days, flew from the Royal Tower.

The guests traveled to the castle in a procession of horse-drawn carriages, past ranks of soldiers, sailors and aviators. The king and the Republican president chatted in the Irish State Coach during the short journey to the castle quadrangle, where both inspected an honor guard of soldiers in red tunics and bearskin hats.

They continued to chat and joke as the day progressed, with the king occasionally putting his hand on Trump's back. The president stepped in front of Charles during a review of troops after the king gestured for him to do so. The king's invitation avoided a violation of protocol, which was not the case in 2019, when Trump stepped in front of Queen Elizabeth.

Part of the day was spent at St. George's Chapel on the castle grounds, where Trump placed a wreath in honor of Elizabeth, who died in 2022.

A full day of pomp and circumstance

The president and Charles toured the Royal Collection Display in an ornate room where officials laid out five tables of artifacts on U.S.-British relations.

Among the items were 18th-century watercolors and documents on the United States seeking independence from King George III. There were materials from the first trans-Atlantic cable, including messages between Queen Victoria and President James Buchanan, as well as a 1930s hot dog picnic that a young Elizabeth wrote about, and a large glass vessel that President Dwight D. Eisenhower gave the queen during a 1957 state visit.

The president later walked a red carpet on the castle's East Lawn to watch the Beating Retreat, a military parade ceremony that featured 200-plus musicians, dates to the 1600s and was once used to call patrolling soldiers back to their castle at day's end.

A scheduled flyover by F-35 jets from the U.K. and U.S. militaries was scrapped because of poor weather conditions. But the Red Arrows, the Royal Air Force's aerobatics display team, thundered overhead, leaving streaks of red, white and blue smoke in their wake.

Charles and Camilla presented the president and first lady with a handbound leather volume celebrating the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, as well as the Union flag that flew above Buckingham Palace on the day of Trump's inauguration in January. The royals also gave first lady Melania Trump a silver and enamel bowl and a personalized handbag by British designer Anya Hindmarch.

Trump gave Charles a replica of an Eisenhower sword, and Camilla received a vintage Tiffany & Co. gold, diamond and ruby brooch.

Serious talks coming

The history, tradition and celebrity of the royal family give it a cachet that means presidents and prime ministers covet joining them. In his talks with Trump, Starmer will promote a new U.K.-U.S. technology agreement. The British government hopes the deal, and billions in investment from U.S. tech companies, will help show that the trans-Atlantic bond remains strong despite differences over Ukraine, the Middle East and the future of NATO.

Ahead of the banquet, Trump and Charles walked together, leading a procession. Trump wore white tie, while his wife was in a yellow gown. Charles was in white tie with a blue sash, and Camilla in a blue gown with a tiara.

Beefeaters in traditional red uniforms and ruff collars lined the entrance to the castle's St. George's Hall for the dinner, which featured 100 staff members attending to 160 guests. The grand Waterloo table was set with 1,462 pieces of silver sparkling in the light from 139 candles and elaborate floral arrangements handpicked from the castle grounds.

The guests included Apple's Tim Cook, Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang, Open AI's Sam Altman and golfer Nick Faldo. Also appearing was publishing mogul Rupert Murdoch, whom Trump recently sued for \$10

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billion over The Wall Street Journal's report on a sexually suggestive letter purportedly written by Trump for disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein.

The menu featured Hampshire watercress panna cotta with Parmesan shortbread and quail egg salad, along with Norfolk chicken ballotine. Dessert was vanilla ice cream bombe with a raspberry sherbet interior and lightly poached Victorian plums.

Trump avoids alcohol, but the bar offerings included a cocktail known as a trans-Atlantic whiskey sour infused with marmalade, Warre's 1945 Vintage Port — Trump is the 45th and 47th American president — and Hennessy 1912 cognac Grande Champagne. That was the year Trump's mother, Mary Anne MacLeod, was born in Scotland.

The musical playlist included the theme from the James Bond movies and pop and rock staples, as well as top show tunes, often featured at Trump's campaign rallies.

In his toast, Charles saluted Trump's British roots and his recent visits to the U.K. In a nod to the president's favorite sport, he said, "I understand that British soil makes for rather splendid golf courses."

Trump mostly stuck to his prepared remarks and was on his best behavior, declaring, "This is truly one of the highest honors of my life" and sneaking in only one dig about his predecessor, Democratic President Joe Biden, by saying the U.S. was "sick" a year ago. He also touched on Britain's contributions to literature, history and the arts and said "special" does not begin to do justice to his country's relationship with the U.K.

"Together we've done more good for humanity than any two countries in all of history," Trump said.

Trump being in Windsor doesn't stop protests

Thousands of demonstrators marched through central London on Wednesday to protest Trump's visit. Some held banners that said "No to the racism, no to Trump." Though the activities were smaller than during Trump's visit in June 2019, they included mini versions of the giant Trump baby blimp, an orange-tinted caricature of the president in a diaper that made a big impression during those demonstrations six years ago.

In Windsor, protesters projected an image of Trump and Epstein on a tower at the castle, a reminder of the president's relationship with the late American financier. Police said they arrested four people.

West Coast states issue joint vaccine recommendations ahead of CDC advisers meeting

By GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — Four Democratic-led Western states announced joint recommendations Wednesday about who should be vaccinated for seasonal respiratory viruses, including the flu and COVID-19, saying the Trump administration has jeopardized public health by politicizing the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

California, Oregon, Washington and Hawaii early this month formed the West Coast Health Alliance in an effort to combat what they describe as the "weaponization" of federal health agencies to advance antivaccine policies, despite decades of scientific research showing that vaccines are safe and effective.

Their recommendations follow those of major medical organizations and came a day before a panel of CDC advisers were due to begin meeting to review recommendations for some vaccines, including COVID.

U.S. Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., a leading antivaccine activist before becoming the nation's top health official, fired the entire 17-member panel earlier this year and replaced it with a group that includes several anti-vaccine voices. Former CDC chief Susan Monarez told senators on Wednesday she was fired after 29 days on the job after refusing Kennedy's demands that she sign off on changes to the childhood vaccination schedule without data to back up the changes.

"Public health leaders warn these moves dismantle independent, science-based oversight and inject politics into decisions that protect Americans' health — undermining the CDC's credibility at a moment when trust and clarity are most needed," the West Coast Health Alliance said Wednesday.

In a written statement Wednesday, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services spokesman Andrew Nixon criticized the effort.

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"Democrat-run states that pushed unscientific school lockdowns, toddler mask mandates, and draconian vaccine passports during the COVID era completely eroded the American people's trust in public health agencies," Nixon said. "HHS will ensure policy is based on rigorous evidence and Gold Standard Science, not the failed politics of the pandemic."

The recommendations from the West Coast Health Alliance include that all residents older than 6 months get a flu vaccine and that all babies receive protection from RSV. Among those who should receive the COVID vaccine are children 6 months to 23 months old; all adults over 65, and everyone younger than 65 who has risk factors or is in contact with people with risk factors; anyone pregnant or planning a pregnancy; and "all who choose protection."

Kennedy's moves have prompted debate and action in the states. Florida has taking steps to become the first state to get rid of school vaccine mandates, with some states looking to follow its lead. Others are promising to protect vaccines for children and adults.

Democratic Massachusetts Gov. Maura Healey governor has said the state is requiring insurance carriers to cover vaccinations recommended by its public health department, regardless of whether they are endorsed by the federal government. Her state is also leading a bipartisan coalition of eight Northeast states that met over the summer to discuss coordinating vaccine recommendations.

In New Mexico, pharmacists have received the go-ahead to administer COVID-19 shots based on state health department guidelines rather than just the federal government's immunization advisory committee.

Pennsylvania's pharmacy board voted this month to protect the availability of COVID-19 vaccines for those most in need and to make it accessible across the state, at the urging of Gov. Josh Shapiro. Colorado Gov. Jared Polis and Washington Gov. Bob Ferguson have directed health officials to make sure residents are able to be vaccinated against the virus.

Jerry quits Ben & Jerry's, saying its independence on social issues has been stifled

By MICHELLE CHAPMAN and WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS AP Business Writers

Ben & Jerry's co-founder Jerry Greenfield is leaving the ice cream brand after 47 years, saying that the independence it once had to speak up on social issues has been stifled by its parent company Unilever.

In a letter, which co-founder Ben Cohen posted on social media on Greenfield's behalf, Greenfield said he could not "in good conscience" remain at Ben & Jerry's — citing a loss of independence to Unilever, which he said had once agreed to give Ben & Jerry's autonomy around its social mission when it acquired the brand more than two decades ago.

"For more than 20 years under their ownership, Ben & Jerry's stood up and spoke out in support of peace, justice and human rights, not as abstract concepts, but in relation to real events happening in our world," Greenfield wrote "It's profoundly disappointing to come to the conclusion that that independence, the very basis of our sale to Unilever, is gone."

Ben & Jerry's, famous for its colorful ice cream containers with flavor names such as Cherry Garcia and Phish Food, has also long been known for its progressive political values — speaking out on a range of social issues over the years. And in his letter late Tuesday, Greenfield noted that the brand's loss of independence arrived at time in the U.S. when the Trump administration "is attacking civil rights, voting rights, the rights of immigrants, women and the LGBTQ community."

"Standing up for the values of justice, equity, and our shared humanity has never been more important, and yet Ben & Jerry's has been silenced, sidelined for fear of upsetting those in power," he wrote.

Tensions between Ben & Jerry's and its parent have heightened in recent years — with the ice cream brand accusing Unilever of silencing its statements in support of Palestinians amid Israel's war in Gaza, among other conflicts. And Greenfield's departure also arrives as the consumer product giant, based in London, is spinning off its ice cream business into a stand-alone company called The Magnum Ice Cream Company.

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In a statement on Wednesday, a spokesperson for Magnum said that it would be forever grateful to Greenfield for his contributions to Ben & Jerry's and thanked him for his service, but was not aligned with his viewpoint.

"We disagree with his perspective and have sought to engage both co-founders in a constructive conversation on how to strengthen Ben & Jerry's powerful values-based position in the world," the spokesperson said — adding that Magnum is still committed to Ben & Jerry's mission and remains "focused on carrying forward the legacy of peace, love, and ice cream of this iconic, much-loved brand."

Meanwhile, Greenfield and Cohen have been pushing for Ben & Jerry's to be allowed to become an independently owned company again, saying in a letter to Magnum's board that they don't believe the brand should be part of a corporation that doesn't support its founding mission.

Ben & Jerry's has been at odds with Unilever for a while. In March Ben & Jerry's said that its CEO was unlawfully removed by Unilever in retaliation for the ice cream maker's social and political activism.

In a federal court filing, Ben & Jerry's said that Unilever informed its board on March 3 that it was removing and replacing Ben & Jerry's CEO David Stever. Ben & Jerry's said that violated its merger agreement with Unilever, which states that any decisions regarding a CEO's removal must come after a consultation with an advisory committee from Ben & Jerry's board.

Unilever said in a statement at the time that it hoped Ben & Jerry's board would engage in the agreed-upon process.

Unilever acquired Ben & Jerry's in 2000 for \$326 million. At the time, Ben & Jerry's said the partnership would help the progressive Vermont-based ice cream company expand its social mission. But experts stress that preserving complete independence from a corporate owner is never promised.

"What Ben & Jerry's does spills over onto brand Unilever, and vice versa," said Kimberly Whitler, a marketing professor at the University of Virginia's Darden School of Business. "If a brand wants complete and total autonomy, then it is best to remain independent," she added.

Tommaso Bondi, an assistant professor of marketing at Cornell Tech, speculates that both Unilever and Ben & Jerry's "underestimated" conflicts that would arise out of the arrangement — noting that the way that brands now talk about politics and social issues is "completely different" from when this deal was struck 25 years ago. And the size of the parent company today also piles on pressure.

"Unilever is just simply too big to be polarizing," Bondi said, while speaking out on social issues remains a defining feature of Ben & Jerry's identity. "In some sense, it was an obvious clash," he said.

Particularly in recent years, the marriage has been on shaky ground. In 2021, Ben & Jerry's announced it would stop serving Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank and contested east Jerusalem. The following year, Unilever sold its Israeli business to a local company that said it would sell Ben & Jerry's under its Hebrew and Arabic name throughout Israel and the West Bank.

In March 2024 Unilever announced the spinoff of the ice cream business — including Ben & Jerry's — by the end of 2025 as part of a larger restructuring. Unilever also owns personal hygiene brands like Dove soap and food brands like Hellmann's mayonnaise.

But the acrimony continued. In November, Ben & Jerry's sued Unilever in federal court in New York, accusing it of silencing Ben & Jerry's statements in support of Palestinians in the Gaza war.

In its complaint, Ben & Jerry's said Unilever also refused to let the company release a social media post that identified issues it believed would be challenged during President Donald Trump's second term — including minimum wages, universal health care, abortion and climate change.

Businesses across sectors have encountered growing pressure to take a backseat when it comes to social activism today — particularly amid the Trump administration's wider crackdown on diversity, equity and inclusion efforts in both government and workplaces across the U.S.

Vanessa Burbano, a professor at Columbia Business School, notes that her research shows that corporate stakeholders today "most appreciate" when companies take an apolitical stance, or try their best to distance themselves from politics as much as possible.

Still, Burbano notes that it's a "tough line to navigate." She and others note that there can be a sense

of whiplash if companies stay silent on something today that they may have commented on just a few years ago.

"You need to know what your brand is. You need to know what your brand is not. And you need to be consistent," said Beth Egan, an associate professor of advertising at Syracuse University.

While she understands that a company "the size of Unilever is being cautious in this political environment," Egan adds that it's important to recognize Ben & Jerry's longstanding brand and nature of their relationship as a well-known subsidiary. "I think trying to silence them will probably backfire," she said.

Fired CDC chief Susan Monarez warns senators that RFK Jr. is endangering public health

By AMANDA SEITZ and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. public health system is headed to a "very dangerous place" with Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and his team of anti-vaccine advisers in charge, fired Centers for Disease Control and Prevention chief Susan Monarez warned senators on Wednesday.

Describing extraordinary turmoil inside the nation's health agencies, Monarez and former CDC Chief Medical Officer Chief Debra Houry said Kennedy, a longtime vaccine skeptic, and his political advisers repeatedly rebuffed data supporting the safety and efficacy of vaccines.

Monarez's revelations to senators raised serious questions, even among some Republicans, about Kennedy's self-professed commitment to employ "gold-standard science" for developing public health guidance, including around the nation's vaccination schedule. Her testimony was given to the Senate's health committee just a day before a vaccine panel is set to consider major changes to the routine vaccinations recommended for the nation's children.

Monarez, who was fired after 29 days into her tenure over vaccine policy disagreements with Kennedy, told senators that deadly infectious diseases like polio could be poised to make a devastating comeback if the health secretary and his team continue their public campaign against routine shots.

"I believe preventable diseases will return, and I believe we will have our children harmed by things they don't need to be harmed by," Monarez said before the Senate health committee.

Despite her concerns, some Republicans continued to cast doubts on Wednesday about Monarez's account of her exchanges with Kennedy, firmly throwing their support behind the health secretary. A spokesperson for Kennedy did not provide a response to Monarez's testimony. In a post on X thanking a Republican senator for support during the hearing, Kennedy said "we will earn back Americans' trust and refocus the CDC on its core mission."

Data and scientists removed from the conversation about vaccines, Monarez said

Monarez said Kennedy told her she would need to quit the job if she refused to sign off on the new vaccine recommendations that are expected to be released later this week by the CDC's advisory vaccine panel, which Kennedy has stocked with some medical professionals who are vaccine skeptics. She said that when she asked for data or science to back up Kennedy's request to change the childhood vaccination schedule, he offered none.

She added that Kennedy told her "he spoke to the president every day about changing the childhood vaccination schedule."

Republican Sen. Bill Cassidy, a physician who chairs the powerful health committee, listened intently as Monarez and Houry described conversations with Kennedy and his advisers.

"To be clear, he said there was not science or data, but he still expected you to change the schedule?" Cassidy asked.

Monarez also claimed that Kennedy prohibited her from speaking to the CDC's career staff — many of them scientists and researchers — and instructed her not to speak directly with U.S. senators. Monarez reached out to Cassidy's office after Kennedy fired her, a move that Republican Sen. Ashley Moody faintly criticized on Wednesday.

"It is entirely appropriate for someone with oversight concerns to contact my office, or me, or frankly

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any of us," Cassidy said.

Cassidy, who is up for reelection next year, carefully praised President Donald Trump for his commitment to promoting health policies but made it clear he was concerned about the circumstances surrounding Monarez's removal.

Houry, meanwhile, described similar exchanges with Kennedy's political staff, who she said took an unprecedented role in preparing materials for meetings of the CDC's advisory vaccine panel.

Houry said that she asked a political adviser about providing data around the hepatitis B vaccine for the CDC's advisory panel to look at. The panel is expected to consider on Thursday whether newborns should receive hepatitis B shots. The shot is given to newborns to prevent the spread of the deadly disease from the mother.

Kennedy's political adviser, however, dismissed the data as biased because it might support keeping the shots on the schedule, Houry alleged.

"You're suggesting that they wanted to move away from the birth dose, but they were afraid that your data would say that they should retain it?" Cassidy asked.

Loyal Republicans raise doubts about Monarez's account

Democrats, all of whom opposed Monarez's nomination, questioned Kennedy's motives for firing his supposed handpicked director after she was unanimously approved by Republicans mere weeks ago.

"Frankly, she stood up for protecting the well-being of the American people, and for that reason she was fired," said Sen. Bernie Sanders, an independent from Vermont who caucuses with Democrats.

Monarez said it was both her refusal to sign off on new vaccination recommendations without scientific evidence and her unwillingness to remove high-ranking career CDC officials without cause that led to her ousting.

Kennedy has denied Monarez's accusations that he ordered "rubber-stamped" vaccine recommendations from her office but has acknowledged he demanded firings. He has described Monarez as admitting to him that she is "untrustworthy" in a meeting, a claim Monarez has denied through her attorney.

Several Senate Republicans continued to sow doubts about Monarez's reliability. Their critiques of Monarez were shared on social media accounts belonging to Kennedy and the official U.S. Health and Human Services agency.

At one point, Sen. Markwayne Mullin, an Oklahoma Republican and close ally of Kennedy, told the committee that Monarez's final meeting with the health secretary was recorded. Claiming that she inaccurately recounted the details of her conversation with Kennedy, Mullin reminded Monarez of the "recorded meeting" and pressed her again on whether Monarez told Kennedy she was "untrustworthy."

Mullin later said outside of the hearing that he was "mistaken" about the existence of the recording.

"If HHS has a recording, I ask them to release the recording," Cassidy said.

Several Republicans questioned Monarez's loyalty to Kennedy, with GOP Sen. Tommy Tuberville of Alabama noting that Trump was elected to make changes.

"America needs better than this," Tuberville said.

Monarez said she is 'nervous' about upcoming vaccine panel meeting

The CDC's advisory vaccine panel begins its two-day session in Atlanta on Thursday to discuss shots against COVID-19 and hepatitis B as well as the combination MMR/chickenpox vaccine. It's unclear how the panel might vote on the recommendations, though members have raised doubts about whether hepatitis B shots administered to newborns are necessary and have suggested COVID-19 recommendations should be more restricted.

The CDC director must endorse those recommendations before they become official. Health and Human Services Deputy Secretary Jim O'Neill, now serving as the CDC's acting director, will be responsible for that.

"I'm very nervous about it," Monarez said of the meeting.

Israeli troops press forward into Gaza City as more Palestinians flee and death toll passes 65,000

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By JULIA FRANKEL and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli troops and tanks pushed deeper into Gaza City on Wednesday as more people fled the devastated area, and strikes cut off phone and internet services, making it harder for Palestinians to summon ambulances during the military's new offensive.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian death toll in the Israel-Hamas war surpassed 65,000, local health officials said.

The Israeli military said air force and artillery units have struck the city more than 150 times in the last few days, ahead of ground troops moving in. The strikes toppled high-rise towers in areas with densely populated tent camps. Israel claims the towers were being used by Hamas to watch troops.

Regulators said the severed phone and internet services hindered the ability of Palestinians to call for help, coordinate evacuations or share details of the offensive that began Monday and aims to take full control of the city.

Overnight strikes killed at least 16 people, including women and children, hospital officials reported. The death count in Gaza climbed to 65,062, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which is part of the Hamas-run government. Another 165,697 Palestinians have been wounded since the Oct. 7, 2023, attack by Hamas that triggered the war.

The ministry does not say how many of the dead were civilians or militants. Its figures are seen as a reliable estimate by the U.N. and many independent experts.

Israeli bombardment has destroyed vast areas of Gaza, displaced around 90% of the population and caused a catastrophic humanitarian crisis, with experts saying Gaza City is experiencing famine.

Palestinians streamed out of the city — some by car, others on foot. Israel opened another corridor south of Gaza City for two days beginning Wednesday to allow more people to evacuate.

Israeli forces have carried out multiple large-scale raids into Gaza City over the course of the war, only to see militants regroup later. This time, Israel has pledged to take control of the entire city.

Children and parents among the latest fatalities

More than half of the Palestinians killed in overnight Israeli strikes were in Gaza City, including a child and his mother who died in the Shati refugee camp, according to officials from Shifa Hospital, which received the casualties.

In central Gaza, Al-Awda Hospital said an Israeli strike hit a house in the urban Nuseirat refugee camp, killing three, including a pregnant woman. Two parents and their child were also killed when a strike hit their tent in the Muwasi area west of the city of Khan Younis, said officials from Nasser Hospital, where the bodies were brought.

In a statement, the Israeli military said it took steps to mitigate harm to civilians and that it would continue to operate against "terrorist organizations" in Gaza.

The war in Gaza began when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel in the 2023 attack, killing around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting 251 others. Forty-eight hostages remain in Gaza, with fewer than half believed to be alive.

The Gaza Health Ministry said multiple Israeli strikes hit the Rantisi Hospital for children in Gaza City on Tuesday night. It posted pictures on Facebook showing the damaged roof, water tanks and rubble in a hospital hallway.

The ministry said the strikes forced half of some 80 patients to flee the facility. About 40 patients, including four children in intensive care and eight premature babies, remained in the hospital with 30 medical workers, the ministry said.

"This attack has once again shattered the illusion that hospitals or any place in Gaza are safe from Israel's genocide," said Fikr Shalltoot, Gaza director for the aid group Medical Aid for Palestinians.

The Israeli military said it was looking into the strikes. In the past, it has accused Hamas of building military infrastructure inside civilian areas.

The military's Arabic-language spokesman, Col. Avichay Adraee, wrote on social media that a new route opened for those heading south for two days starting at noon Wednesday.

Many Palestinians in the north were cut off from the outside world. The Palestinian Telecommunications

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Regulatory Authority, based in the occupied West Bank, said Israeli strikes on the main network lines in northern Gaza had cut off internet and telephone services Wednesday morning. The Associated Press tried unsuccessfully to reach many people in Gaza City.

The Israeli military said it was reviewing the incident and that it does not deliberately target public communication networks.

An estimated 1 million Palestinians were living in the Gaza City region before warnings to evacuate began ahead of the offensive. The Israeli military estimates 350,000 people have left the city.

Hamas official speaks

Hamas senior official Ghazi Hamad made his first public appearance Wednesday following the Israeli strike on the militant group in Qatar earlier this month.

Ghazi Hamad, a member of Hamas' political bureau, appeared in a live interview broadcast by the Qatari channel Al-Jazeera and accused the United States of being a bad mediator and siding with Israel.

The Hamas negotiating team and consultants were reviewing a U.S. ceasefire proposal when "less than an hour into the meeting, we heard the explosions," Hamad said.

The strike killed five Hamas members and a local security official and infuriated Arab leaders.

Also Wednesday, Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a statement saying it condemned "in the strongest terms" Israel's ground offensive in Gaza. The ministry wrote on X that the operation marked an "extension of the war of genocide" against the Palestinians.

Aid groups condemn offensive

A coalition of leading aid groups Wednesday urged the international community to take stronger measures to stop Israel's offensive on Gaza City. The action came a day after a commission of U.N. experts found Israel was committing genocide in the Palestinian enclave. Israel denies the allegation.

"What we are witnessing in Gaza is not only an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe, but what the U.N. Commission of Inquiry has now concluded is a genocide," read the statement from the aid groups. "States must use every available political, economic and legal tool at their disposal to intervene. Rhetoric and half measures are not enough. This moment demands decisive action."

The message was signed by leaders of over 20 aid organizations operating in Gaza, including the Norwegian Refugee Council, Anera and Save the Children.

Israeli minister says Gaza could be 'real estate bonanza'

Israel's far-right finance minister said Gaza could be a "real estate bonanza" and that he is discussing with the Trump administration how to share the proceeds.

Bezael Smotrich, speaking at an urban-renewal conference in Tel Aviv, said a "business plan" has been submitted to U.S. President Donald Trump.

"We paid a lot of money for this war, so we need to divide how we make a percentage on the land marketing later in Gaza," he said.

"And now, no kidding, we've done the demolition phase, which is always the first phase of urban renewal. Now we need to build. It's much cheaper."

Smotrich, a key ally in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's governing coalition, wants to continue the war until Hamas is eradicated, relocate much of Gaza's population to other countries through what they refer to as "voluntary emigration" and rebuild Jewish settlements that were dismantled in 2005.

Trump said in February he envisioned development in Gaza turning the region into the "Riviera of the Middle East."

What the Fed rate cut will mean for your finances

By CORA LEWIS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The Federal Reserve cut its benchmark interest rate Wednesday for the first time in nine months. Since the last cut, progress on inflation has slowed while the labor market has cooled. That means Americans are dealing with both high prices and a challenging job market.

The federal funds rate, set by the Federal Reserve, is the rate at which banks borrow and lend to one another. While the rates that consumers pay to borrow money aren't directly linked to this rate, shifts in

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Fed policy affect what people pay for credit cards, auto loans, mortgages, and other financial products. Wednesday's quarter-point cut is the first since December and lowers the Fed's short-term rate to about 4.1%, down from 4.3%. The Fed projected it will cut rates two more times before the end of the year.

The Fed has two goals when it sets the rate: one, to manage prices for goods and services, and two, to encourage full employment. This is known as the "dual mandate." Typically, the Fed might increase the rate to try to bring down inflation and decrease it to encourage faster economic growth and more hiring. The challenge now is that inflation is higher than the Fed's 2% target but the job market is weak, putting the Fed in a difficult position.

"The dual mandate is always a balancing act," said Elizabeth Renter, senior economist at personal finance site NerdWallet.

Here's what to know:

A cut will impact mortgages gradually

For prospective homebuyers, the market has already priced in the rate cut, which means it's "unlikely to make a noticeable difference for most consumers at the time of the announcement," according to Bankrate financial analyst Stephen Kates.

"Much of the impact on mortgage rates has already occurred through anticipation alone," he said. "(Mortgage) rates have been falling since January and dropped further as weaker-than-expected economic data pointed to a cooling economy."

Still, Kates said a declining interest rate environment will provide some relief for borrowers over time.

"Whether it's a homeowner with a 7% mortgage or a recent graduate hoping to refinance student loans and credit card debt, lower rates can ease the burden on many indebted households by opening opportunities to refinance or consolidate," he said.

Interest on savings accounts won't be as appealing

For savers, falling interest rates will slowly erode attractive yields currently on offer with certificates of deposit (CDs) and high-yield savings accounts.

Right now, the best rates on offer for each have been hovering at or above 4% for CDs and at 4.6% for high-yield savings accounts, according to DepositAccounts.com.

Those are still better than the trends of recent years, and a good option for consumers who want to earn a return on money they may want to access in the near-term. A high-yield savings account generally has a much higher annual percentage yield than a traditional savings account. The national average for traditional savings accounts is currently 0.38%.

There may be a few accounts with returns of about 4% through the end of 2025, according to Ken Tumin, founder of DepositAccounts.com, but the Fed cuts will filter down to these offerings, lowering the average yields as they do.

Auto loans are not expected to decline soon

Americans have faced steeper auto loan rates over the last three years after the Fed raised its benchmark interest rate starting in early 2022. Those are not expected to decline any time soon. While a cut will contribute to eventual relief, it might be slow in arriving, analysts say.

"If the auto market starts to freeze up and people aren't buying cars, then we may see lending margins start to shrink, but auto loan rates don't move in lockstep with the Fed rate," said Bankrate analyst Stephen Kates.

Prices for new cars have leveled off recently, but remain at historically high levels, not adjusting for inflation.

Generally speaking, an auto loan annual percentage rate can run from about 4% to 30%. Bankrate's most recent weekly survey found that average auto loan interest rates are currently at 7.19% on a 60-month new car loan.

Credit card rate relief could be slow

Interest rates for credit cards are currently at an average of 20.13%, and the Fed's rate cut may be slow to be felt by anyone carrying a large amount of credit card debt. That said, any reduction is positive news.

"While the broader impact of a rate reduction on consumers' financial health remains to be fully seen, it

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could offer some relief from the persistent budgetary pressures driven by inflation,” said Michele Raneri, vice president and head of U.S. research at credit reporting agency TransUnion.

“These savings could contribute to a reduction in delinquency rates across credit card and unsecured personal loan segments,” she said.

Still, the best thing for anyone carrying a large credit card balance is to prioritize paying down high-interest-rate debt, and to seek to transfer any amounts possible to lower APR cards or negotiate directly with credit card companies for accommodation.

With the Sundance Film Festival and filmmaker labs, Robert Redford brought change to cinema

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

Robert Redford was disillusioned with the Hollywood mainstream. The Sundance Kid, who died Tuesday at age 89, knew that there were more stories out there, ones that weren't getting made into films because of the rigidity of the business. So he made something different, founding Sundance Institute and the Sundance Film Festival as an alternative avenue for emerging filmmakers, where independence was a virtue, not a liability.

Over the past four decades, the institute and the festival have given an early platform to countless young filmmakers, including Steven Soderbergh, Paul Thomas Anderson, Quentin Tarantino, Ryan Coogler, Chloé Zhao, Nicole Holofcener, Nia DaCosta, Taika Waititi, Ava DuVernay, Rian Johnson, Gina Prince-Bythewood, Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert and many more.

“For me, the word to be underscored is ‘independence.’ I’ve always believed in that word. That’s what led to me eventually wanting to create a category that supported independent artists who weren’t given a chance to be heard,” Redford told The Associated Press in 2018. “The industry was pretty well controlled by the mainstream, which I was a part of. But I saw other stories out there that weren’t having a chance to be told and I thought, ‘Well, maybe I can commit my energies to giving those people a chance.’ As I look back on it, I feel very good about that.”

In 2019, Redford said he intended to step back from his public facing role at the festival, though he remained the organization’s president and founder until his death.

“I think we’re at a point where I can move on to a different place, because the thing I’ve missed over the years is being able to spend time with the films and with the filmmakers and to see their work and be part of their community,” he said at the 2019 kickoff. “I don’t think the festival needs a whole lot of introduction now: It runs on its own course, and I’m happy for that.”

Inspiration in Utah

Redford’s love affair with Utah began much earlier, on a cross-country motorcycle road trip in 1961 when he bought 2 acres of land. By 1969, with more money in his pocket from his film successes, he’d purchased 5,000 acres, some of which was a mountain resort but most of the land was for wilderness preserves. He named it Sundance, after his character in “Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid.”

In 1981, the year he won best picture and director for “Ordinary People,” he established the Sundance Institute, a nonprofit organization and held the first filmmakers lab at the Sundance Mountain Resort, about 13 miles northeast of Provo. A few years later, in 1985, the institute took over what was then known as the U.S. Film Festival, which would later be renamed the Sundance Film Festival. The festival in the mid-80s hosted the Coen brothers “Blood Simple” and Jim Jarmusch’s “Stranger Than Paradise.”

‘sex, lies and videotape’ and the birth of an indie boom

The festival was really put on the map when Soderbergh premiered “sex, lies and videotape” in Park City in 1989. A true indie, the film went on to win the Palme d’Or at Cannes and get an Oscar nomination, but it was its box office success that ignited a veritable indie film boom. And Sundance was where all the discoveries were happening. In 1991, the festival premiered “Daughters of the Dust,” “Paris is Burning” and “Slacker,” in 1992, Tarantino’s “Reservoir Dogs,” in 1993, Wes Anderson brought “Bottle Rocket,” and

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in 1994 "Hoop Dreams" and "Clerks."

"If it weren't for Robert Redford, independent art houses might not have succeeded," said Gary Meyer, cofounder of Landmark Theatre, and a former festival director at Telluride who also worked with Redford. "Having the 'Sundance Kid' give his stamp of approval to independent features and documentaries brought audiences to our theaters, while helping launch the careers of dozens of filmmakers ... He made it 'cool' to see adventurous movies when they came to commercial neighborhood theaters."

A commitment to Indigenous artists

In 1994, the Sundance Institute also made a commitment to Indigenous filmmakers by launching a festival program to showcase Native and Indigenous films that continues to this day.

Film and TV producer Bird Runningwater, who is Cheyenne and Mescalero Apache, spent 20 years at the Sundance Institute helping Redford build a platform for Indigenous artists.

While hard to sum up the importance of what has been accomplished over the decades, Runningwater called it life-changing for not only artists but for tribal communities as well, to see themselves reflected on the screen in an authentic way.

"I'm so pleased to have been a part of that for Sundance, and it's all thanks to Redford's vision," he said. "You know, he just had this notion that things could be different if we talk our own stories, and I do believe we're in that era of changing things."

The behind-the-scenes power of the labs

The festival might get the most headlines, but it's the year-round work of the Institute that has really left a mark on independent cinema. The screenwriting and directing labs have been just as, if not more, influential in helping to launch the first films of many of Hollywood's top filmmakers over the past 40 years, under the leadership of Michelle Satter, who has helped shepherd projects from "Hard Eight" to "Fruitvale Station" and "Love & Basketball."

"Sundance changed the trajectory of my career," filmmaker and labs adviser Gina Prince-Bythewood told the AP in 2023. "How many of these special projects would have never seen the light of day without Michelle, without Robert Redford's vision, without this incredible place? It's actually really scary to think about."

Native filmmaker Sterlin Harjo ("Rez Ball") said that his career as a young man was defined by Redford's support for independent cinema and supporting Native storytelling.

"I went to the Sundance Filmmakers lab at 23 years old," Harjo wrote on Instagram on Tuesday. "The support from Sundance made me feel like I belonged in an industry that most times felt so unreachable. He personally taught me things about story, shooting, and editing that I take with me today."

Oscar winners and enduring classics

The list of notable films that have played at Sundance grows every year. Some enduring favorites include: "Get Out," "Whiplash," "Little Miss Sunshine," "Memento," "Before Sunrise," "Boyhood," "Y tu mamá también," "Brick," "The Squid and the Whale," "Manchester by the Sea," "Call Me By Your Name" and "A Real Pain."

The festival got its first best picture winner with "CODA," which played at the festival in 2021. Questlove's "Summer of Soul," which also debuted in 2021, won the academy's documentary award that year as well.

Many best documentary winners start at Sundance, including "When We Were Kings," "Born Into Brothels," "An Inconvenient Truth," "Man on Wire," "The Cove," "Searching for Sugarman," "20 Feet from Stardom," "Icarus," "American Factory," "Navalny," and "20 Days in Mariupol." The most recent winner, "No Other Land" was supported by the labs.

The future of Sundance

Redford had worried for years that the festival had outgrown Park City, Utah. In 1996, an estimated 15,504 attended the festival. In 2015, the number had ballooned to 46,100. It peaked in 2018 with 124,900 festivalgoers. The festival estimated that the 2025 edition had 85,472 in-person attendees, a 17% increase from 2024.

Earlier this year, the decision was made to relocate to Boulder, Colorado, starting in 2027. That means

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there will be one last festival in Park City in January.

"Bob's vision launched a movement that, over four decades later, has inspired generations of artists and redefined cinema in the U.S. and around the world," Sundance leaders said in a statement Tuesday. "The vibrant storytelling landscape we cherish today, both as artists and audiences, is unimaginable without his passionate drive and principled leadership."

There were already plans in the works to celebrate the vision of Redford. In the wake of his death, that tribute will be even more deeply felt.

Former Sundance director John Cooper, a close friend of Redford's who led the festival from 2009 to 2020, told The Associated Press in an interview earlier this year that he felt like his role was "to be a keeper of the flame for Robert Redford and his legacy." Now, Cooper, the artistic director of Sonoma's True West Film Center who is still a regular presence at Sundance said, that mission is more important than ever. It's "a lot to process, going from a legacy that was alive in him to one we have to carry on," Cooper told the AP. That legacy, he said, centers on spreading the power of storytelling.

How faith-based support is helping Scouting America stabilize

By DAVID CRARY AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — For the Boy Scouts of America — recently renamed Scouting America — the past 12 years have been arduous. Opening its programs to gay people and later to girls sparked dismay in some quarters. Its 2020 bankruptcy declaration led to prolonged wrangling over compensation for thousands of men claiming they were sexually abused as scouts.

Yet the 115-year-old organization — though serving far fewer youths than at its peak decades ago — seems to be stabilizing, with a slight uptick in membership last year. A key factor is the abiding loyalty of major religious denominations that still view scouting's mission as uniquely in tune with their own.

"I tell parents this is the best time to be involved with Scouting America, and the best time to be involved through a Catholic unit," said Bill Guglielmi, who chairs the National Catholic Committee on Scouting. "There is a hunger out there now for finding a values-based organization."

Guglielmi and others who are engaged in faith-based scouting praise the manner in which time-honored scouting programs — such as camping and expeditions — have been blended with newfangled activities such as indoor skydiving and an artificial-intelligence merit badge. But foremost, they value the organization's continued commitment to communal prayer.

"Worship is a big deal here," said Bill McCalister, who served more than 40 years as scoutmaster of Troop 285 in San Antonio under sponsorship of a United Methodist church.

"Every campout, we have a formal worship service. Sometimes we serve Communion," he said. "Many scouts come to me and say, 'Mr. Mac, this is my church.'"

A diversity of faiths in scouting

According to Scouting America's latest data, faith-based organizations account for 42% of the nearly 40,000 units operated by chartered organizations. The Catholic Church and its affiliates are No. 1 — overseeing 3,514 units serving more than 87,100 of the roughly 1 million boys and girls now active in scouting.

Other major sponsors include the United Methodists, the Episcopal Church and various Lutheran and Presbyterian denominations. Nearly 250 units, serving more than 6,500 scouts, are sponsored by Muslim, Jewish and Buddhist organizations.

Roger Krone, Scouting America's president and CEO, took the post in 2023 as the organization emerged from bankruptcy proceedings. He appreciates scouting's religious diversity.

"It really speaks to the alignment of the mission, vision and values that our organization has and what those organizations have," he told The Associated Press. "It's character development, it's spiritual growth, it's community service."

The Boy Scouts lifted a ban on openly gay youth members in 2013 and began accepting girls in 2018 — steps Krone depicted as a message of welcome to any family considering scouting.

One step the organization will not take, Krone said, is abandoning the religious credo at the core of its

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mission. The famed Scout Oath begins, "On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God," while the Scout Law's concluding message is: "Be reverent toward God. Be faithful in your religious duties. Respect the belief of others."

"There are some places today where you're not encouraged to talk about spiritual growth and what may be going on outside your little bubble," Krone said. "In our organization, it's been core to our principles for years and years and will continue to be core."

Krone acknowledges that some nonreligious families, while admiring aspects of scouting, might be uncomfortable with the "Duty to God" pledge. He encourages them to try scouting nonetheless.

"You are all welcome in our organization," he said. "But I want people to know when you come to scouting, there's this concept of reverence and spiritual growth and saying prayers and being thoughtful."

"The parent can come and be a volunteer and go through a couple meetings and a couple of campouts and watch what we do, see what effect the way we deal with duty to God and reverence has on the youth of your child's age, and then make a decision," Krone said. "Don't dismiss us out of hand."

How it's done by Troop 228

That welcoming approach is fully practiced by Troop 228, chartered by St. Kateri Tekakwitha Catholic Church in the Los Angeles suburb of Santa Clarita, according to one of its adult leaders, Christine Tezai.

She estimates that less than half the troop's 40-plus scouts are Catholic, yet all participate in occasional religion-themed events, including an annual Mass at which religious awards are presented.

"It doesn't matter if you're Catholic," Tezai said. "A scout is reverent — it doesn't matter how you're reverent. You don't have to say prayers. ... You know what we do by showing kindness and being helpful."

Her 17-year-old son, Mykhail Tezai, entered Cub Scouts in the first grade. Now, as a high school senior, he's on track to become an Eagle Scout.

He said several fellow scouts don't identify with a specific faith but feel comfortable in a church-chartered troop.

"They're very curious about my religion and being Catholic," he said. "They want to know how it works."

Some faith groups broke away

After the 2013 decision to admit gay youth, some disgruntled conservatives formed a new group, Trail Life USA, which created its own ranks, badges and uniforms. It now claims 65,000 youth members, participating in church-run units aligned with "biblical Christian principles."

The biggest blow came at the start of 2020, when The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints — then the Boy Scouts' largest faith-based partner — withdrew more than 400,000 scouts in favor of new programs of its own.

Krone said many Latter-day Saints families remain fond of Boy Scout programming and now place their children in units unaffiliated with their church.

"We would love to have more Mormon youth in our program," Krone said. "They can have their own program ... but also maybe embrace Scouting America more than they have the last couple of years to gain the benefits of the program we've developed."

As for Trail Life, Krone acknowledged that its conservative Christian outlook has strong appeal for some families.

"But our program will prepare you better for life," he said. "Once you get out of high school ... you need to learn to get along with others in the world as it is today, outside of the environment that you grew up in."

The loss of many units affiliated with the Latter-day Saints and conservative Christian churches was part of a broader shrinkage experienced by the Boy Scouts, which served more than 4 million boys in the 1970s. The COVID-19 pandemic and the bankruptcy process were major factors as membership dwindled.

In all, more than 82,000 people filed claims alleging they were sexually abused as scouts. Leading faith-based sponsors of scout units, including Catholic dioceses and Methodist churches, contributed to a \$2.4 billion reorganization plan that took effect in 2023, allowing the Boy Scouts to keep operating while compensating abuse survivors.

The Rev. Mark Carr, a Jesuit priest who serves as national chaplain for Catholic scouting, said concerns about liability and insurance were key factors in dissuading some dioceses from continuing with scouting.

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For those who stayed, a deep commitment

Steven Scheid, director of the United Methodists' Center for Scouting Ministries, sees some upsides for scouting after its previous difficulties. He cited rigorous child-protection policies that he views as effective in curtailing sex abuse.

"The lessons we can gain out of the mistakes of the past can make a better, stronger community, a safer one," he said.

Back in 2013, the United Methodists accounted for almost 350,000 youth members in the Boy Scouts. The figure now is 52,600.

But Scheid, an assistant scoutmaster of a troop founded in 1916 in Springfield, Tennessee, says adults still loyal to scouting "are deeply committed. ... They see this as a calling."

While Christian churches account for the vast majority of Scouting America's faith-based units, there are more than 3,500 scouts in Muslim-sponsored units and about 1,560 in Jewish-affiliated units.

"Muslims in America are searching for their identity, and there's nothing more American than scouting," said Rashid Abdullah, executive director of the executive director of the National Association of Muslim Americans on Scouting. "It's aligning perfectly with the values of our faith."

Abdullah is also a lead organizer of scout units chartered to the Islamic Center of Northern Virginia Trust and the father of three sons who — like himself — made Eagle Scout.

Another Eagle Scout of long standing is Ricky Mason, a bankruptcy attorney who helped negotiate the reorganization plan and who next year will become the second Jewish chair of the Scouts' National Executive Committee. His mother foresightedly told Mason when he was 7 that he would become an Eagle Scout through their synagogue-sponsored troop in Richmond, Virginia.

Amid concerns that antisemitism is increasing, Mason depicts scouting as a way for the U.S. Jewish community to remain connected with American society.

"In addition to the having fun part, scouting is really about character and leadership development," Mason said. "This organization is needed now more than ever."

Army veteran who burned American flag near White House pleads not guilty to federal charges

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — An Army veteran who set fire to an American flag near the White House to protest President Donald Trump's recent executive order on flag burning pleaded not guilty Wednesday to federal criminal charges.

Jan Carey is charged with two misdemeanors that are not focused on the act of burning a flag. Making his initial court appearance, Carey was arraigned on charges of igniting a fire in an undesignated area and lighting a fire causing damage to property or park resources.

Chief Judge James Boasberg set an Oct. 17 deadline for Carey's lawyers to file a motion to dismiss the case on constitutional grounds. Carey is due back in court on Dec. 1 for a status hearing.

Carey, 54, of Arden, North Carolina, was arrested on Aug. 25 after he set fire to a flag in Lafayette Park, which the National Park Service oversees. Earlier that day, Trump signed an executive order requiring the Justice Department to investigate and prosecute people for burning the American flag.

The Supreme Court has ruled that flag burning is a legitimate political expression protected by the Constitution. Trump's order asserts that burning a flag can be prosecuted if it "is likely to incite imminent lawless action" or amounts to "fighting words."

"You burn a flag, you get one year in jail. You don't get 10 years, you don't get one month," Trump said. "You get one year in jail, and it goes on your record, and you will see flag burning stopping immediately."

Carey said he served in the Army from 1989 to 2012 and was deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan.

"I served this country for over 20 years, having taken an oath to uphold our Constitution. I did not take an oath to serve a dictator, a tyrant or a wannabe king," he told reporters after the hearing.

U.S. Attorney Jeanine Pirro's office filed the charges against Carey. Trump appointed Pirro, a former Fox

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News host and former judge.

"Although we respect the First Amendment, there is a law that prohibits the burning of anything, including a flag, on federal property," office spokesman Tim Lauer said in a statement.

Mara Verheyden-Hilliard, one of Carey's lawyers, said the charges against him represent an effort by the Trump administration to stifle free speech and dissent.

"This is a desecration of the First Amendment by the administration, and it is crucial that people stand up and speak out, exercise their rights," said Verheyden-Hilliard, co-founder of the Partnership for Civil Justice Fund.

Ukraine expects \$3.5 billion fund for US weapons to sustain fight against Russia, Zelenskyy says

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine expects there will be around \$3.5 billion by next month in a fund to buy weapons from the United States and help sustain its more than three-year fight against Russia's all-out invasion, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Wednesday.

The financial arrangement known as the Prioritized Ukraine Requirements List, or PURL, pools contributions from NATO members, except the United States, to purchase American weapons, munitions and equipment.

"We received more than \$2 billion from our partners specifically for the PURL program," Zelenskyy said at a joint news conference in Kyiv with visiting European Parliament President Roberta Metsola. "We will receive additional money in October. I think we will have somewhere around \$3.5-3.6 billion."

Zelenskyy declined to provide details of what weapons the first shipments would include, but said that they would definitely contain missiles for Patriot air defense missile systems and munitions for the High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, or HIMARS.

An end to the war appears no closer, despite months of U.S.-led peace efforts.

The Patriot systems are vital to defend against Russian missile attacks. The HIMARS systems have significantly bolstered the Ukrainian military's precision-strike capability.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov reaffirmed Russia's readiness for peace talks, telling reporters on Wednesday that "we remain open for negotiations and prefer to settle the Ukrainian crisis by political and diplomatic means."

However, Moscow has raised objections about key proposals and negotiations haven't moved forward.

The latest Russian overnight aerial attacks caused disruption to Ukrainian rail and power services, officials said Wednesday. In addition, a Russian glide bomb struck a town in the southern Kherson region of Ukraine, wounding three women and a 3-year-old girl, regional head Oleksandr Prokudin said.

Meanwhile, a U.S.-Ukraine fund devised to spur investments in the Ukrainian mineral sector is set to launch with \$150 million of seed capital, senior Ukrainian officials said Wednesday.

The U.S. International Development Finance Corporation agency will commit \$75 million to the fund, with Ukraine matching that contribution, Ukrainian Economy Minister Oleksii Sobolev said.

"This is enough to launch the first significant investments," Sobolev said, describing the fund as a "beacon" that could draw additional support from other international institutions.

The U.S.-Ukraine deal on developing the Ukrainian mineral sector was signed in April. It gives the U.S. preferential access to new Ukrainian mining projects and is meant to spur reconstruction and enable continued military aid to Ukraine from the U.S.

Prime Minister Yulia Svyrydenko said that the fund would initially focus on energy, infrastructure and critical mineral projects, with a goal of financing three projects by the end of 2026.

Republican Brad Raffensperger to run for Georgia governor after defying Trump over 2020 election

By JEFF AMY Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Georgia's Brad Raffensperger, the Republican secretary of state who rejected Donald Trump's call to help overturn the state's 2020 election results, said Wednesday that he's running for governor in 2026.

The wealthy engineering entrepreneur might appeal most to business-oriented Republicans who once dominated GOP primaries in Georgia, but he is pledging a strongly conservative campaign even while he remains scorned by Trump and his allies. Raffensperger's entry into the field intensifies the primary in a state with an unbroken line of Republican governors since 2002.

"I'm a conservative Republican, and I'm prepared to make the tough decisions. I follow the law and the Constitution, and I'll always do the right thing for Georgia no matter what," Raffensperger said in an announcement video.

Raffensperger defied Trump's wrath to win reelection in 2022, but he will again test GOP primary voters' tolerance for a candidate so clearly targeted by the president. His first challenge may be to even qualify for the primary. Georgia's Republican Party voted in June to ban Raffensperger from running under its banner, although the party chairman said that attempt might not go anywhere.

Two other top Republicans are already in the race — Lt. Gov. Burt Jones and Attorney General Chris Carr. Jones swore himself to be a "duly elected and qualified" elector for Trump in 2020 even though Democrat Joe Biden had been declared the state's winner. Carr sided with Raffensperger in rejecting challenges to the results. Other Republicans include Clark Dean, Scott Ellison and Gregg Kirkpatrick.

On the Democratic side, top candidates include former Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms, state Sen. Jason Esteves and former state Labor Commissioner Michael Thurmond. Geoff Duncan, who like Raffensperger spurned Trump's push to overturn the 2020 election as Republican lieutenant governor, entered the governor's race Tuesday as a Democrat.

Raffensperger pledges what he calls a "bold conservative agenda," including eliminating the state income tax, capping property taxes for seniors, banning drugs that block puberty from gender-affirming care and purging "woke curriculums" from schools. He also promises to work with Trump to increase jobs, deport immigrants with criminal records and "restore law and order."

An introvert in the national spotlight

Although he starts later than other candidates, Raffensperger benefits from an electorate that already knows him, plus an ability to finance his own campaign. The 70-year-old sold his concrete reinforcement company, Tendon Systems, for an undisclosed amount in 2023.

Raffensperger was securely inside the conservative fold before his insistence on honoring the 2020 election results turned the introverted engineer into an unlikely national figure. He opposed abortion and pushed tax cuts as a state legislator, running for secretary of state in 2018 on a platform that emphasized managerial competence. During that race, one of his three sons, Brenton Raffensperger, died at age 27 from a fentanyl overdose.

He spent most of his first two years in office battling lawsuits filed by Democrats that fruitlessly alleged Georgia, under then-Secretary of State Brian Kemp, engaged in illegal voter suppression in 2018 in Kemp's victory over Democrat Stacey Abrams. Raffensperger also was tasked to roll out new Dominion voting machines for a 2020 election thrown off-kilter by the coronavirus pandemic.

Biden's narrow win in Georgia changed things. Raffensperger said publicly that he wished Trump had won, but firmly held that he saw no evidence of widespread fraud or voting irregularities. Trump and his partisans ratcheted up attacks.

In his 2021 book, "Integrity Counts," Raffensperger recounted death threats texted to his wife, an encounter with men whom he suspected of staking out his home, and being escorted out of the Georgia Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, as a handful of protesters entered the building on the day many more protesters stormed the U.S. Capitol.

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But it was a phone call days earlier, on Jan. 2, that wrote Raffensperger's name into history. Trump pressured the secretary of state to "find 11,780 votes" — enough to overturn Joe Biden's win in the state, repeatedly citing disproven claims of fraud and raising the prospect of "criminal offense" if officials didn't change the vote count, according to a recording of the conversation.

Raffensperger pushed back, noting that lawsuits making those claims had been fruitless.

"We don't agree that you have won," Raffensperger told Trump.

Post-2020 political career

That refusal to buckle made Raffensperger a huge political target. Lawmakers outlawed a repeat of his decision to mail absentee ballot applications to voters and restricted the use of absentee ballot drop boxes. They stripped him of his post chairing the State Election Board, eventually creating a Trump-aligned body whose attempts to assert control of election processes were shot down by courts. Trump endorsed U.S. Rep. Jody Hice, who objected to Georgia's electoral votes being counted for President Joe Biden, to challenge Raffensperger in the 2022 Republican primary.

If Raffensperger was rattled, he didn't change his public style. He stuck to a campaign of quiet speeches before civic club members dozing off after a heavy lunch. Voters renominated him, including thousands who previously voted in Democratic primaries but cast ballots in the GOP contest. He then cruised to reelection over a Democrat.

Alexei Navalny's widow says lab reports show her husband was poisoned

By The Associated Press undefined

The widow of Alexei Navalny said Wednesday that two independent labs have found that her husband was poisoned shortly before his death in a Russian prison.

Navalny, who crusaded against official corruption and staged massive anti-Kremlin protests as President Vladimir Putin's fiercest foe, died in the Arctic penal colony in February 2024. He was serving a 19-year sentence that he believed to be politically motivated.

Authorities said that the politician became ill after a walk but have otherwise given few details on his death. He was 47.

In a video released Wednesday, Yulia Navalnaya said that biological samples from Navalny's body had been taken out of Russia and tested at two laboratories abroad.

She said that both laboratories concluded that Navalny had been poisoned, but had not released their findings due to "political considerations."

"These labs in two different countries reached the same conclusion: Alexei was killed. More specifically, he was poisoned," Navalnaya said in the video, which was posted on social media.

In the clip, she questioned the lack of video footage from the prison and showed images purported to be of Navalny's cell on the day of his death showing vomit on the floor. She did not provide direct proof that Navalny had been poisoned or that it had been carried out by prison authorities.

"I demand that the laboratories that conducted the research publish their results," she said. "Stop appeasing Putin for some higher 'considerations.' You cannot placate him. While you stay silent, he does not stop," Navalnaya said.

Navalnaya has repeatedly blamed Putin for Navalny's death, something Russian officials have vehemently denied.

In a press conference Wednesday, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said he was not aware of Navalnaya's statement and said that he could not comment.

Navalnaya said in August 2024 that she was told by Russian investigators that Navalny died from a combination of "a dozen different diseases" and that he finally succumbed to arrhythmia, or an irregular heartbeat.

Navalnaya disputed Russian officials' version of events and said her husband exhibited no instances of heart disease while alive.

Navalny previously suffered from another poisoning in 2020, when the opposition leader fell sick on an internal flight in Russia. He was flown to Berlin while still in a coma for treatment two days later. Labs in Germany, France and Sweden, and tests by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, established that he was exposed to the Soviet-era Novichok nerve agent.

Russian authorities have denied any involvement in the incident, a claim that Navalny challenged as false.

Trump's threat to target 'radical left' after Kirk killing raises fears he's trying to silence foes

By CHRIS MEGERIAN, LISA MASCARO and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is escalating threats to crack down on what he describes as the "radical left" following Charlie Kirk's assassination, stirring fears that his administration is trying to harness outrage over the killing to suppress political opposition.

Without establishing any link to last week's shooting, the Republican president and members of his administration have discussed classifying some groups as domestic terrorists, ordering racketeering investigations and revoking tax-exempt status for progressive nonprofits. The White House pointed to Indivisible, a progressive activist network, and the Open Society Foundations, founded by George Soros, as potential subjects of scrutiny.

Although administration officials insist that their focus is preventing violence, critics see an extension of Trump's campaign of retribution against his political enemies and an erosion of free speech rights. Any moves to weaken liberal groups could also shift the political landscape ahead of next year's midterm elections, which will determine control of Congress and statehouses across the country.

"The radical left has done tremendous damage to the country," Trump told reporters on Tuesday morning when leaving for a state visit to the United Kingdom. "But we're fixing it."

Trump has sometimes made similar threats without following through. But now there's renewed interest fueled by anger over the killing of Kirk, a conservative activist who was a prominent supporter of Trump and friends with many of his advisers.

More than 100 nonprofit leaders, representing organizations including the Ford Foundation, the Omidyar Network and the MacArthur Foundation, released a joint letter saying "we reject attempts to exploit political violence to mischaracterize our good work or restrict our fundamental freedoms."

"Attempts to silence speech, criminalize opposing viewpoints, and misrepresent and limit charitable giving undermine our democracy and harm all Americans," they wrote.

White House blames 'terrorist networks'

Authorities said they believe the suspect in Kirk's assassination acted alone, and they charged him with murder on Tuesday.

However, administration officials have repeatedly made sweeping statements about the need for broader investigations and punishments related to Kirk's death.

Attorney General Pam Bondi blamed "left-wing radicals" for the shooting and said "they will be held accountable." Stephen Miller, a top policy adviser, said there was an "organized campaign that led to this assassination."

Miller's comments came during a conversation with Vice President JD Vance, who was guest-hosting Kirk's talk show from his ceremonial office in the White House on Monday.

Miller said he was feeling "focused, righteous anger," and "we are going to channel all of the anger" as they work to "uproot and dismantle these terrorist networks" by using "every resource we have."

Vance blamed "crazies on the far left" for saying the White House would "go after constitutionally protected speech." Instead, he said, "We're going to go after the NGO network that foments, facilitates and engages in violence."

Asked for examples, the White House pointed to demonstrations where police officers and federal agents have been injured, as well as the distribution of goggles and face masks during protests over immigration enforcement in Los Angeles.

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There was also a report that Indivisible offered to reimburse people who gathered at Tesla dealerships to oppose Elon Musk's leadership of the Department of Government Efficiency. Sometimes cars were later vandalized.

Indivisible's leadership has said "political violence is a cancer on democracy" and said that their own organization has "been threatened by right-wingers all year."

Nonprofits brace for impact

Trump's executive actions have rattled nonprofit groups with attempts to limit their work or freeze federal funding, but more aggressive proposals to revoke tax-exempt status never materialized.

Now the mood has darkened as nonprofits recruit lawyers and bolster the security of their offices and staff.

"It's a heightened atmosphere in the wake of political violence, and organizations who fear they might be unjustly targeted in its wake are making sure that they are ready," said Lisa Gilbert, co-president of the government watchdog group Public Citizen.

Trump made retribution against political enemies a cornerstone of his comeback campaign, and he's mobilized the federal government to reshape law firms, universities and other traditionally independent institutions. He also ordered an investigation into ActBlue, an online liberal fundraising platform.

Some nonprofits expect the administration to focus on prominent funders like Soros, a liberal billionaire who has been a conservative target for years, to send a chill through the donor community.

Trump recently said Soros should face a racketeering investigation, though he didn't make any specific allegations. The Open Society Foundations condemned violence and Kirk's assassination in a statement and said "it is disgraceful to use this tragedy for political ends to dangerously divide Americans and attack the First Amendment."

Sen. Chris Murphy, a Democrat from Connecticut, wrote on social media that "the murder of Charlie Kirk could have united Americans to confront political violence" but "Trump and his anti-democratic radicals look to be readying a campaign to destroy dissent."

White House spokeswoman Abigail Jackson said "it is disingenuous and false for Democrats to say administration actions are about political speech." She said the goal is to "target those committing criminal acts and hold them accountable."

Republicans back Trump's calls for investigations

Trump's concerns about political violence are noticeably partisan. He described people who rioted at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, as "hostages" and "patriots," and he pardoned 1,500 of them on his first day back in the Oval Office. He also mocked House Speaker Emerita Nancy Pelosi after an attack on her husband.

When Trump condemned Kirk's killing in a video message last week, he mentioned several examples of "radical left political violence" but ignored attacks on Democrats.

Asked on Monday about the killing of Minnesota state Rep. Melissa Hortman over the summer, Trump said "I'm not familiar" with the case.

"Trump shrugs at right-wing political violence," said Ezra Levin, the co-executive director of Indivisible, in a newsletter.

Some conservative commentators have cheered on a potential crackdown. Laura Loomer, a conspiracy theorist with a long record of bigoted comments, said "let's shut the left down." She also said that she wants Trump "to be the 'dictator' the left thinks he is."

Katie Miller, the wife of Stephen Miller and a former administration spokeswoman, asked Bondi whether there would be "more law enforcement going after these groups" and "putting cuffs on people."

"We will absolutely target you, go after you, if you are targeting anyone with hate speech," Bondi said. "And that's across the aisle."

Her comments sparked a backlash from across the political spectrum, since even hate speech is generally considered to be protected under the First Amendment. Bondi was more circumspect on social media on Tuesday morning, saying they would focus on "hate speech that crosses the line into threats of violence."

Trump is getting more support from Republicans in Congress. Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas and others proposed legislation that would enable the Justice Department to use racketeering laws, originally envisioned to combat organized crime, to prosecute violent protesters and the groups that support them.

Rep. Chip Roy of Texas wants the House to create a special committee to investigate the nonprofit groups, saying "we must follow the money to identify the perpetrators of the coordinated anti-American assaults being carried out against us."

Takeaways from AP's report about the importance of faith-based support for Scouting America

By DAVID CRARY AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — For the Boy Scouts of America — recently renamed Scouting America — the past 12 years have been challenging. Opening its programs to gay people and later to girls angered some critics. Its 2020 bankruptcy declaration triggered disputes over compensation for thousands of men claiming they were sexually abused as scouts.

While the 115-year-old organization now serves far fewer youths than at its peak decades ago, it seems to be stabilizing with a slight uptick in membership last year. One key reason: The loyalty of major religious denominations that still view scouting's mission as uniquely valuable and welcome its continued commitment to reverence and prayer.

Here's a look at the role those faith groups play:

A diversity of faiths in scouting

According to Scouting America's latest data, faith-based organizations account for 42% of the nearly 40,000 units operated by chartered organizations. The Catholic Church and its affiliates are No. 1 — overseeing 3,514 units serving more than 87,100 of the roughly 1 million boys and girls now active in scouting.

Other major sponsors include the United Methodists, the Episcopal Church and various Lutheran and Presbyterian denominations. Nearly 250 units, serving more than 6,500 scouts, are sponsored by Muslim, Jewish and Buddhist organizations.

Roger Krone, Scouting America's president and CEO, took the post in 2023 as the organization emerged from bankruptcy proceedings. He appreciates the diversity of the faith groups engaged in scouting.

"It really speaks to the alignment of the mission, vision and values that our organization has and what those organizations have," he told The Associated Press. "It's character development, it's spiritual growth, it's community service."

Some changes, but not to Scout Oath and Scout Law

The Boy Scouts lifted a ban on openly gay youth members in 2013 and began accepting girls in 2018 — steps that Krone depicted as a message of welcome to any family considering scouting.

One step the organization will not take, Krone said, is abandoning the religious credo at the core of its mission. The famed Scout Oath begins, "On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God," while the Scout Law's concluding message is: "Be reverent toward God. Be faithful in your religious duties. Respect the belief of others."

Krone acknowledged that some nonreligious families, while admiring aspects of scouting, might be uncomfortable with the "Duty to God" pledge. He encourages them to try scouting nonetheless.

Some faith groups broke away

After the 2013 decision to admit gay youth, some disgruntled conservatives formed a new group, Trail Life USA, which created its own ranks, badges and uniforms. It now claims 65,000 youth members, participating in church-run units aligned with "biblical Christian principles."

The biggest blow came at the start of 2020, when The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints — then the Boy Scouts' largest faith-based partner — withdrew more than 400,000 scouts in favor of new programs of its own.

Krone said many Latter-day Saints families remain fond of Boy Scout programming and now place their children in units unaffiliated with their church.

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As for Trail Life, Krone acknowledged that its conservative Christian outlook has strong appeal for some families.

"But our program will prepare you better for life," he said. "Once you get out of high school ... you need to learn to get along with others in the world as it is today, outside of the environment that you grew up in."

COVID and bankruptcy took a toll

The loss of many units affiliated with the Latter-day Saints and conservative Christian churches was part of a broader shrinkage experienced by the Boy Scouts, which served more than 4 million boys in the 1970s. The pandemic and the bankruptcy process were major factors as membership dwindled.

In all, more than 82,000 people filed claims alleging they were sexually abused as scouts. Leading faith-based sponsors of scout units, including Catholic dioceses and Methodist churches, contributed to a \$2.4 billion reorganization plan that took effect in 2023, allowing the Boy Scouts to keep operating while compensating abuse survivors.

For those who stayed, scouting is indispensable

Steven Scheid, director of the United Methodists' Center for Scouting Ministries, sees some upsides for scouting after its previous difficulties. He cited rigorous child-protection policies that he views as effective in curtailing sex abuse.

"The lessons we can gain out of the mistakes of the past can make a better, stronger community, a safer one," he said.

Back in 2013, the United Methodists accounted for almost 350,000 youth members in the Boy Scouts. The figure now is 52,600.

While Christian churches account for the vast majority of Scouting America's faith-based units, there are more than 3,500 scouts in Muslim-sponsored units and about 1,560 in Jewish-affiliated units.

"Muslims in America are searching for their identity, and there's nothing more American than scouting," said Rashid Abdullah, executive director of the National Association of Muslim Americans on Scouting. "It's aligning perfectly with the values of our faith."

Abdullah is also a lead organizer of scout units chartered to the Islamic Center of Northern Virginia Trust and the father of three sons who — like himself — made Eagle Scout.

Another Eagle Scout of long standing is Ricky Mason, a bankruptcy attorney who helped negotiate the reorganization plan and who next year will become the second Jewish chair of the Scouts' National Executive Committee.

Mason depicts scouting as a way for the U.S. Jewish community to remain connected with American society amid concerns that antisemitism is increasing.

German suspect in Madeleine McCann disappearance is released after serving time in unrelated case

By DANIEL NIEMANN and MARKUS SCHREIBER Associated Press

SEHNDE, Germany (AP) — A German national who is under investigation in the disappearance of British toddler Madeleine McCann 18 years ago was released from prison Wednesday after serving his sentence in an unrelated case, police said.

The man, who has been identified by media as Christian Brückner, had been serving a seven-year sentence that stemmed from his 2019 conviction for the rape of a 72-year-old American woman in Portugal.

A car accompanied by several police vans drove out of the prison at Sehnde, near Hannover, in northern Germany, on Wednesday morning. Police confirmed that the man had left.

In June 2020, German prosecutors said the man was being investigated on suspicion of murder in connection with McCann's disappearance on May 3, 2007, from an apartment complex in the Portuguese resort of Praia da Luz. They said they assumed the girl was dead.

Police have since carried out more searches in Portugal. But the suspect, who has denied any involvement in her disappearance, has not been charged in the case. The investigation is not affected by his release. He also remains a suspect in an investigation into McCann's disappearance being conducted by

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Britain's Metropolitan Police, who say he refused their request for an interview.

His lawyer, Friedrich Fölscher, has said charges would have been filed against his client long ago if there had been sufficient evidence.

The 48-year-old spent many years in Portugal, including in the Algarve resort of Praia da Luz around the time of Madeleine's disappearance.

Investigators in the U.K., Portugal and Germany are still piecing together what happened on the night 3-year-old Madeleine disappeared. She was in the same room as her brother and sister — 2-year-old twins — while their parents, Kate and Gerry, had dinner with friends at a nearby restaurant.

The suspect was tried last year over several unrelated sexual offenses he was alleged to have committed in Portugal between 2000 and 2017 and was acquitted in October. The presiding judge said the evidence was insufficient for a conviction, that the court heard from unreliable witnesses and that some had been influenced by media reports on the defendant.

The state court in Hildesheim has said it cannot legally disclose whether he will have to fulfill any conditions after his release. But Fölscher confirmed to regional public broadcaster NDR that his client will be required to wear an electronic foot tag, report regularly to probation services and give up his passport. German weekly Der Spiegel first reported on that decision, without naming sources.

He still faces an Oct. 27 court date in Oldenburg in northwestern Germany in a case in which he is accused of insulting a prison employee. A district court in the city sentenced him to six weeks in prison for that, but the defense has appealed.

A law enforcement surge has taken a toll on children of immigrants in Washington schools

By MORIAH BALINGIT AP Education Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The last time she saw her husband, the father of her three children, was when he left their Washington apartment a month ago to buy milk and diapers. Before long he called to say he had been pulled over — but not to worry, because it was just local police. The next time she heard from him, he was at a detention center in Virginia.

Since that day, the 40-year-old mother of three has been too afraid to take her two sons to their nearby charter school. Like her husband, who has since been deported, she is an immigrant from Guatemala and has lived in the U.S. illegally for more than a decade. She spoke on the condition of anonymity out of fear she would be targeted by immigration authorities.

All three of the couple's children were born in the nation's capital, and the older two attend a local charter school. She planned to keep them home until a volunteer offered to drive them. Still, one of the boys was so upset over his father's absence he missed three days of school one week.

Schools in Washington reopened late last month against the backdrop of a law enforcement surge that brought masked Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents into normally quiet neighborhoods, scenes likely to be replicated elsewhere as President Donald Trump dispatches federal agents to the streets of other big cities.

In some Washington communities, the fear spread by the police presence has taken a toll on children. Some students have had parents swept up in the crackdown. Other students fear they or their family members could be next. Parents are grappling with how to explain the situation.

"In my community, the impact has been immense fear and terror that is threatening student safety getting to and from school every day," said Ben Williams, a high school social studies teacher who also serves on the District of Columbia State Board of Education. "It is really making everyone feel on edge every day as to whether someone, a community member or a parent or someone that is close or connected to the community, could be taken."

Arrests instill fear

In northwest Washington's Mount Pleasant neighborhood, where million-dollar rowhouses and afford-

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able apartments home to immigrant families share the same tree-lined blocks, federal agents became a common sight and neighbors documented several arrests.

Raul Cortez, an immigrant from El Salvador, said his 7-year-old son has grown deeply afraid of police. "The children pay attention. They are very intelligent, and they know what is happening," Cortez said.

A few moments later, his son caught sight of an idling police car. His eyes widened.

Mindful that some parents were afraid of leaving the house, volunteers began organizing "walking buses" to accompany groups of children by foot from apartment buildings to schools. Outside Bancroft Elementary, which teaches students in English and Spanish, volunteers are stationed at street corners in orange vests, ready to blow a whistle if they see signs of immigration authorities.

Immigration enforcement can lead to dips in school attendance

Research has linked immigration raids near schools to lower academic outcomes for Latino students, who are more likely to have family ties to immigrants.

Trump's immigration crackdown also has affected school attendance in other parts of the country. In the months following his January inauguration, districts across the country reported lower attendance as immigrant families kept their children home. In California's Central Valley, immigration raids in January and February coincided with a 22% spike in student absences compared with the previous two school years, according to a study from Stanford University economist Thomas Dee and Big Local News.

In Washington, deputy mayor for education Paul Kihn said at a news conference near the start of the school year that attendance had been about at the same level as last year. D.C. Public Schools, which educates about half of the district's students, said it could not provide data on school attendance during the federal intervention.

But Williams, who represents schools serving large immigrant communities, said attendance at some schools has taken a hit.

Around the country, educators have been on alert since Trump, a Republican, in January directed the Department of Homeland Security to rescind a memo that barred officers from entering schools and churches without a supervisor's approval. They replaced it with guidance that urges officers to use "discretion and a healthy dose of common sense" before setting foot on a school campus.

The country's largest teachers unions filed a lawsuit last week over the immigration crackdown, saying fear stirred by arrests near campuses has led some children to drop out of school.

In response, Homeland Security officials said ICE agents have not entered schools to make arrests. "ICE is not conducting enforcement operations at, or 'raiding,' schools. ICE is not going to schools to make arrests of children," Assistant Secretary Tricia McLaughlin said in a statement.

Emma Leheny, an education attorney who worked for the Education Department under President Joe Biden, a Democrat, said fear can be pervasive even if ICE agents don't enter a school.

"As ICE encircles our local schools or leaves us with the impression that they might, the effect is an immediate chill that extends beyond the school building into the neighborhood and the community," Leheny said.

Many children of those targeted are US citizens

Across the United States, in 2023 there were 4.6 million U.S.-born children who lived with a parent who did not have authorization to be in the country, according to the Pew Research Center. Another 1.5 million children were without legal permission themselves.

For children separated from their parents, the toll is especially steep.

The mother of three from Guatemala said her sons now sleep in her bed and wake in the middle of the night crying. This week, her husband arrived in Guatemala. She is contemplating returning to her home country because without child care, and while she fears deportation, she cannot work.

"My dream was to give them the best education, the one I didn't have," she said.

Her eldest son wanted to be a doctor, and her middle child a police officer.

"That American dream," she said, "is gone."

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Today in History: September 18, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg dies

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, Sept. 18, the 261st day of 2025. There are 104 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Sept. 18, 2020, Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, a towering champion of women's rights who became the court's second female justice, died at her home in Washington at age 87, of complications from pancreatic cancer.

Also on this date:

In 1793, President George Washington laid the cornerstone of the U.S. Capitol.

In 1850, Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act, which created a force of federal commissioners charged with returning escaped slaves to their owners. The act was repealed in 1864 during the American Civil War.

In 1851, the first edition of The New York Times was published.

In 1947, the National Security Act, which created a National Military Establishment and the position of Secretary of Defense, went into effect.

In 1961, United Nations Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld (dahg HAWM'-ahr-shoold) was killed in a plane crash in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia).

In 1970, rock star Jimi Hendrix died in London at age 27.

In 1975, newspaper heiress Patricia Hearst was captured by the FBI in San Francisco, 19 months after being kidnapped by the Symbionese Liberation Army.

In 2014, voters in Scotland rejected independence, opting to remain part of the United Kingdom in a historic referendum.

Today's Birthdays: Hockey Hall of Fame coach Scotty Bowman is 92. Singer Frankie Avalon is 85. Actor Anna Deavere Smith is 75. Neurosurgeon-author-politician Ben Carson is 74. Basketball Hall of Fame coach Rick Pitino is 73. Sen. Tommy Tuberville, R-Alabama, is 71. Hockey Hall of Famer Peter Štátný is 69. Actor Holly Robinson Peete is 61. R&B singer Ricky Bell (Bell Biv DeVoe, New Edition) is 58. Basketball Hall of Famer Toni Kukoč is 57. Actor Aisha Tyler is 55. Actor Jada Pinkett Smith is 54. Actor James Marsden is 52. Rapper-TV host Xzibit is 51. Comedian-actor Jason Sudeikis is 50. Former soccer player Ronaldo is 49. TV host Sara Haines is 48. Actor/comedian Billy Eichner is 47. Rapper Dizzee Rascal is 41. Country singer Tae Kerr (Maddie and Tae) is 30. Soccer player Christian Pulisic is 27.