

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 1 of 64

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- 1440 News Headlines](#)
- [4- Cyclones Hand Groton First Loss; Tigers Look Ahead to Hamlin Tournament](#)
- [7- Obit: Karen Sue Johnson](#)
- [8- Utah Elk Farmers Buy Bulls from Minnesota](#)
- [9- SD SearchLight: State lost \\$21 million on failed Lincoln County prison site, governor's office says](#)
- [10- SD SearchLight: Batch of Trump nominees moves through US Senate after Thune and Republicans change rules](#)
- [11- SD SearchLight: Inmates, ex-guard and others charged in alleged drug and contraband conspiracy at penitentiary](#)
- [12- SD SearchLight: Decline in K-12 national reading, math, science scores probed by US Senate panel](#)
- [14- SD SearchLight: 'Crumbled like a house of cards': Judge slams DOJ claims about deporting migrant children](#)
- [15- SD SearchLight: DACA recipients swept up in Trump mass deportation campaign, advocates report](#)
- [16- SD SearchLight: Permanent extension of federal health care subsidies estimated to cost \\$350 billion](#)
- [17- SD SearchLight: US rolls toward a 'terrible' government shutdown, no exit ramp in sight](#)
- [19- SD SearchLight: More states protect access to the COVID shot as feds restrict eligibility](#)
- [22- Weather Pages](#)
- [27- Daily Devotional](#)
- [28- Subscription Form](#)
- [29- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [30- Upcoming Groton Events](#)
- [31- News from the Associated Press](#)

## Friday, Sept. 19

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

## Saturday, Sept. 20

Gypsy Day Parade in Aberdeen  
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

# GOOD MORNING!

Whatever you decide to do,  
make sure it brings a  
smile to your face  
and joy to your heart.



Have a  
Blessed  
Day!



**Football**  
Groton at Deuel  
Friday, Sept. 19, 7:00 p.m.

Groton  
Area  
Tigers  
Groton, SD

**GDILIVE**  
on  
YouTube

A production of the  
**Groton Daily Independent**

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



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# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 2 of 64

# 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.**

## Kimmel Fallout Continues

Sinclair Broadcast Group, the nation's largest ABC affiliate owner, outlined demands yesterday for "Jimmy Kimmel Live!" to return to its stations after the host's remarks about the killing of conservative activist Charlie Kirk. Kimmel suggested Kirk's killer came from the MAGA movement, though prosecutors later indicted a suspect whose views were described by family as politically left-leaning.

Sinclair said the comments crossed its expected professional standards and called for Kimmel to directly apologize to Kirk's family and contribute financially to both the family and Turning Point USA, the group Kirk founded. Sinclair also requested formal talks with ABC executives about ensuring accountability in network programming.

"Jimmy Kimmel Live!" averaged 1.77 million viewers and led the 18-49 demographic with 220,000 in the second quarter of 2025. Late-night ratings have declined overall, however, with similar shows trailing leading podcasts in younger audiences. Sinclair said it will run a televised tribute to Kirk tonight in the late-night slot.

## Vaccine Panel Recommendations

A vaccine advisory panel for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention meets for the second of two days today. It is expected to recommend delaying the hepatitis B vaccine administered to newborns, and will also discuss COVID-19 vaccines for children.

Hepatitis B causes serious liver infections; when infants are infected, up to 90% develop chronic infections. The virus can be transmitted from mother to baby, through sexual activity, or through intravenous drug use. In 2021, nearly 0.5% of babies were born to mothers who tested positive. The CDC has nonetheless recommended all infants receive the first dose at birth—an approach corresponding with a higher percentage of babies completing the dosing schedule by 19 months. The panel is expected to recommend that babies wait until they are at least 1 month old to receive the first dose, assuming the mother tests negative.

The panel separately voted yesterday against recommending a combination vaccine for measles, mumps, rubella, and varicella (chickenpox) before age 4. For the first dose, the panel recommended the more common approach of separate MMR and chickenpox vaccines.

## Uber Drone Delivery

Uber Technologies announced plans yesterday to begin aerial food deliveries in partnership with Tel Aviv-based drone operator Flytrex. The service will launch in unspecified test markets later this year; Uber shares closed up 1.9%.

Uber first attempted drone food delivery in 2019 with an in-house aerial arm, but regulatory hurdles stalled the effort. It's now investing an undisclosed sum in Flytrex, one of four companies approved by the Federal Aviation Administration to fly drones beyond operators' lines of sight. (Watch in action.) Flytrex has delivered over 200,000 meals to suburban homes in the last three years and partnered with Uber rival DoorDash in June to serve Dallas-Fort Worth. DoorDash also uses Alphabet-owned Wing for drone deliveries in Texas, Virginia, North Carolina, and Australia.

Drone deliveries could become increasingly common if the FAA passes a rule proposed last month easing operating restrictions. Supporters say the rule would expand access to goods and cut emissions, while critics warn of safety risks.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 3 of 64

## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

American track star Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone wins 400-meter title at World Track and Field Championships, with fastest time in 40 years.

Team USA leads medal count.

Police search home of singer D4vd after decomposed remains of missing 15-year-old girl found inside his vehicle last week.

WNBA playoffs round one wraps tonight; see updated bracket and schedule.

14 former NC State athletes file lawsuit accusing the university's former director of sports medicine of sexual abuse.

## Science & Technology

China's DeepSeek AI publishes peer-reviewed study finding its AI model R1 did not rely on rival models like ChatGPT for training, cost \$294K to create—tens of millions less than rivals' estimated cost.

Paleoentomologists unearth prehistoric insects preserved in amber for the first time in South America, providing a window into the ancient Amazon rainforest.

Some dogs—dubbed “gifted word learners”—can extend word meanings to new objects based on function, not just appearance; the skill is considered a cornerstone of early language development in toddlers.

## Business & Markets

US stock markets close up (S&P 500 +0.5%, Dow +0.3%, Nasdaq +1.0%); all three indexes notch record highs.

Intel shares close up over 22%, posting best day in 38 years, after Nvidia announces \$5B investment; comes after the US government agreed to buy a nearly 10% stake in Intel last month.

American Express raises Platinum Card annual fee to \$895 from \$695, with over \$3,500 in annual benefits; move follows JPMorgan and Citigroup, which revamped cards for affluent customers this year.

## Politics & World Affairs

Turning Point USA names Erika Kirk, widow of conservative activist Charlie Kirk, as the youth organization's new CEO.

President Donald Trump suggests the US is working to reestablish a presence at Afghanistan's Bagram Air Base due to the base's proximity to rival China.

United Nations cites progress toward three-month ceasefire proposal for the civil war in Sudan, backed by the US and Saudi Arabia (More)



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 4 of 64

## Cyclones Hand Groton First Loss; Tigers Look Ahead to Hamlin Tournament

CLARK — The Groton Area Tigers met their toughest challenge of the season Thursday night, falling to Class A power Clark-Willow Lake in straight sets on the road. The Cyclones, now 14-0, stayed unbeaten with a 25-17, 25-23, 25-14 win, handing Groton its first loss of the season.

Clark-Willow Lake wasted little time in the opening set, sprinting out to a 6-1 lead. Groton battled back, tying it at 9 and even edging ahead 10-9 before the Cyclones regrouped and pulled away. A late 21-15 lead set up a 25-17 finish.

The second set was a thriller. The score was tied 14 times with five lead changes. Groton held a 23-21 edge, but Clark-Willow Lake showed why it hasn't lost this fall, rattling off the last four points for a 25-23 victory. In set three, the Cyclones took full control, building a 13-4 lead and never looking back in a 25-14 closing set.

Groton's varsity leaders included:

McKenna Tietz: 5 digs

Talli Wright: 1 ace, 2 assists

Tevan Hanson: 6 kills

Taryn Traphagen: 8 kills

Chesney Weber: 4 kills, 2 aces, 20 assists, 1 block

Kella Tracy: 4 kills, 2 blocks

Jerica Locke: 9 digs

Rylee Dunker: 2 kills, 2 blocks

Jaedyn Penning: 4 kills, 16 digs

Clark-Willow Lake was led by Shelby Begeman with 12 kills, a block, and an ace. Ella Sass had 8 kills and 4 blocks, while Kelsey Hofer added 8 kills.

Groton did notch victories at the lower levels. The Tigers' junior varsity won its opener 25-21, dropped the second set 21-25, and roared back in the tiebreaker 15-6. Standouts included McKenna Tietz with 2 aces, Kinsley Rowen with 5 kills, Tevan Hanson with 3 aces and a kill, McKenna Krause with 3 kills and an ace, Rylen Eckern with 2 aces, Abby Fjeldheim and Emerlee Jones with 5 kills each, Elizabeth Cole with 5 kills and a block, and Liby Althoff with 3 kills.

Groton also dominated the C-match, sweeping 25-20 and 25-4. Rowen paced the Tigers with 6 kills and an ace. Audrey Davis added 5 kills, Abby Fjeldheim had 6 kills and an ace, and Neely Althoff chipped in 2 kills, 2 aces, and a block. Brooklyn Spanier had 3 kills, while teammates Tori Schuster, Ryelle Gilbert, Rylen Eckern, and Addison Hoeft all added contributions from the service line or at the net.

For head coach Chelsea Hanson, the night was less about the loss and more about growth.

"You don't stop a team like Clark-Willow Lake when they're hitting like that," Hanson said. "The first set we gave them too many points with errors, but after that they just started scoring on kill shots that there was no defending. They played a fantastic game, hats off to them."

Despite the sweep, Hanson said she saw positives in her varsity squad, pointing to the fight they showed in the second



**Talli Wright got an ace serve on her first serve of the game.** (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



**Rylee Dunker**  
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 5 of 64

set and the production her younger levels turned in.

"Competition is good for us," Hanson said. "I don't expect to go undefeated, and matches like this show us what we need to work on. I was disappointed in how quickly we dropped in the third set, but we'll learn from it. I told the girls not to hang their heads — this is part of the process."

She also noted that Clark-Willow Lake's size and home-court advantage made the task even tougher.

"They're huge, and the lower ceilings here definitely came into play a couple of times, but again, that's just volleyball. We were throwing everything at them — double blocks, triple blocks, moving the defense — it just didn't matter tonight."

The Tigers (5-1) now turn their attention to the Hamlin Tournament on Saturday, where they'll face Sisseton at 9 a.m. before matching up with Dell Rapids later in the day.

"This week is about being battle-tested," Hanson said. "We've got Dell Rapids, the number one team in the state, then Warner next week. By the end of this stretch, we'll know where we stand. If we're going to take some hits, I'd rather take them now, learn, and get better for when it matters most."



**Chesney Weber**  
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



**Jerica Locke**  
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



**Taryn Traphagen**  
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



**Tevan Hanson**  
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 6 of 64



**McKenna Tietz**  
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



**Sydney Locke**  
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



**Jaedyn Penning**  
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



**Liby Althoff**  
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

## The Life of Karen Sue Johnson



The memorial service for Karen Sue Johnson, 71, of Groton, SD, will be 10:00am, Monday, September 21, 2025, at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Aberdeen, with the Rev. Jacob Smith officiating. Karen died Sunday, September 14, at Avera Mother Joseph Manor, Aberdeen.

Visitation will be Sunday from 6:00pm to 7:00pm, followed by a prayer service at 7:00pm, led by Rev. Jacob Smith, at Spitzer-Miller Funeral Home, 1111 South Main Street.

Karen Sue Redlinger was born June 5, 1954, to John Marvin and Lola Mae (Burt) Redlinger in Columbus, OH. Her family moved to San Diego, CA and then to Seattle, WA. She grew up and attended school in Seattle, WA where Karen met the Johnson clan. She graduated from West Seattle High school in 1972.

On June 8, 1972, Karen was united in marriage to Clayton Johnson in Seattle. They moved several times including Wyoming, Minnesota, California, Washington, and finally to South Dakota in 1991. Karen earned an accounting degree from Lake Area Tech in Watertown, SD.

Karen was mostly a stay-at-home mom and grammy-nanny. After raising her own four children, she took in four of her grandchildren. She was a very talented seamstress and sewed clothes for herself and many of her family members, and even doll clothes. She enjoyed crafting, crocheting, cross stitching, and knitting. Most of the things she made were given away. She also loved reading and attending church when she was able.

Grateful for having shared Karen's life are her husband: Clayton; her children: Kari Johnson, Tara (Clint) Fjelstad, Tami Johnson, and Mari (Aaron) Sundberg; her grandchildren: Kyle Kohrs, Kaitlin Kohrs, Kelli Kohrs, Kimberly (Jesse) Chandler, Nathan (Jesse) Fjelstad, Jenifer Fjelstad, Trystian (Nikki) Johnson-Sanders, Veronica Johnson, Gabriella Johnson, Elizabeth Johnson, Rebekah Sundberg, Caralyn Sundberg, and Scarlett Sundberg; her great-grandchildren: Ronnie Gruenstein, Clayton Kohrs, and Eliana Fjelstad; and her siblings: Gloria Bertsch, John Paul (Bonnie) Redlinger, Chuck Jason Redlinger, and Orval (Elizabeth) Redlinger.

Preceding Karen in death are her parents: John Marvin Redlinger, Lola Mae (Richard) Iverson, and her brother William Edward 'Ed' Redlinger.



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 8 of 64

## Utah Elk Farmers Buy Bulls from Minnesota

Two elk farmers from Utah recently made the trip to Minnesota to purchase new animals for their herd. On their way through they stopped at the Groton Dairy Queen. The farmers explained that they were short on bulls this year, so they turned to an elk farm in Minnesota that specializes in raising the animals.

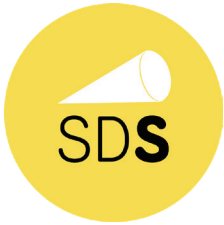
They bought three elk at a cost of \$25,000 each, reflecting the high value placed on breeding stock in the elk industry. The bulls will be transported back to Utah, where they will be introduced into the herd for breeding purposes.

Elk farming is a niche but growing agricultural sector in the United States. Farmers raise the animals for a variety of reasons — including velvet antlers, breeding, hunting preserves, and even meat, which is valued as a lean alternative to beef. Because bulls play a key role in herd development and genetic diversity, quality breeding animals command steep prices, sometimes reaching tens of thousands of dollars.

For these Utah farmers, the investment represents both a commitment to herd health and a strategic move to improve future production. Their Minnesota purchase highlights the interstate ties among elk farmers, who often look beyond state lines to find the right animals for their operations.







## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### State lost \$21 million on failed Lincoln County prison site, governor's office says

**Rhoden says taxpayers will still come out ahead on new plan compared to old one**

**BY: JOHN HULT-SEPTEMBER 18, 2025 6:15 PM**

South Dakota taxpayers lost \$21 million when their leaders abandoned plans for a men's prison in southern Lincoln County.

Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden's office released the figure to lawmakers on Wednesday and to the public on Thursday. It came as part of what he described as a funding plan for a prison in Sioux Falls, the merits of which will be debated during a special session of the Legislature on Tuesday in Pierre.

Lawmakers in February rejected Rhoden's plea — which he inherited from his predecessor, Kristi Noem — for support of a 1,500-bed, \$825 million prison on the controversial Lincoln County site. That land's neighbors, who unsuccessfully sued the state over zoning on the property, helped sour the deal by persuading local lawmakers to oppose it.

By the time the Legislature rejected the Lincoln County plan, the state had already spent or obligated more than \$50 million in preparatory funding.

The sunk costs came up during meetings of the Project Prison Reset task force, a group convened in the wake of February's prison vote failure. Its members ultimately voted to back a 1,500-bed men's prison in northeastern Sioux Falls and cap its price at \$650 million.

Lt. Gov. Tony Venhuizen, the task force's leader, said some of the Lincoln County money could be clawed back by repurposing Lincoln County prison designs for a new location.

Tuesday's funding plan spelled out how much for the first time.

The state spent a total of \$52.7 million on the Lincoln County endeavor, the plan says. According to the Rhoden administration, \$31.9 million of those costs should not be considered lost, because they funded local water wastewater improvements, were spent on prison designs that are being repurposed, and were recovered in the swap of the Lincoln County land for the Sioux Falls land.

Of the total amount spent, \$10 million was federal funding, given to Lennox to pay for the wastewater upgrades needed to service a prison. The Rhoden administration does not consider that wasted money, reasoning that the federal funding would've gone to a local infrastructure project one way or another.

The remaining \$42.7 million came from state coffers. About \$17.4 million of the design work paid for out of that pool of funds has since been folded into a layout for the prison on Benson Road in Sioux Falls.

Also counted in that \$42.7 million was an \$8 million transfer from one state office to another: the Department of Corrections to the Office of School and Public Lands. The transfer gave Corrections the title to the 320 Lincoln County acres upon which it had hoped to build its prison. The state took ownership of the land years ago, when the owners died without heirs or a will, and had been leasing it for farming.

As industrial land, an official assessment determined in 2023, those farm acres would be worth \$8 million.

According to a purchase agreement signed for the Benson Road property last month, however, those Lincoln County acres are worth \$4.5 million if they keep growing crops.

Thursday's funding plan says the state "recovered" \$4.5 million in "land value" through its purchase agreement, which would swap the Lincoln County land and \$12.5 million in cash for 148 acres along Benson Road, located in an industrial area between Sioux Falls and Brandon. That land is valued at \$17 million, the state said when it announced the land swap deal.

The land deal would only go through with legislative approval.

Earlier this week, Rhoden's office released a document outlining how it was able to revamp its prison plans and reduce square footage to hit the \$650 million construction target set by the prison task force.

After factoring in the \$21 million lost in Lincoln County, Rhoden's funding plan says, the state can still deliver a 1,500-bed prison complex for \$154.2 million less than it asked for — and didn't get — for the same number of beds back in February. Rhoden expects to be able to fund the project with money from the budget legislators adopted last winter and from a prison construction savings account filled by lawmakers during the last several years.

Tuesday's special session is scheduled to begin at 9 a.m. before a speech by Rhoden to a joint session of the state Senate and House of Representatives at 9:30 a.m.

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

## Batch of Trump nominees moves through US Senate after Thune and Republicans change rules

**BY: JENNIFER SHUTT-SEPTEMBER 18, 2025 5:44 PM**

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate voted Thursday to approve dozens of nominees, acting on a rule change GOP leadership made last week that allows the chamber to confirm some of the president's appointees in large batches instead of one at a time.

The 51-47 vote followed weeks of debate over whether senators could work out a deal on groups of nominees, with Democrats warning along the way that any changes to Senate procedures that benefit the Trump administration now will likely aid a future Democratic president.

"What Republicans have done is chip away at the Senate even more to give Donald Trump more power and to rubber-stamp whomever he wants, whenever he wants them, no questions asked," Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said last week after Republicans initiated the rule change.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., said during a floor speech Thursday a few hours before the vote that changing the rules was necessary after Democrats "fully broke the confirmation process."

Thune rebutted Democrats' assessment that Trump has sent the Senate "historically bad" nominees, saying that many of his picks are getting Democratic votes.

"Every single one of these 48 nominees was voted out of committee with bipartisan support. Every single one. A significant number of them were supported by a majority of Democrats on their respective committees," Thune said.

"Under any other president these would be exactly the type of nominees we would confirm in a batch by unanimous consent or voice vote," Thune added. "Democrats' obstruction is not about the quality of the nominees. Let's just put that to rest, pure and simple. It's about Democrats' utter inability to accept the fact the American people elected Donald Trump."

The eight-page resolution, likely the first of many, lists 48 nominees, including

- Theodore J. Garrish, of Maryland, to be an assistant secretary of Energy (Nuclear Energy);
- Jessica Kramer, of Wisconsin, to be an assistant administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency;
- Sean McMaster, of Virginia, to be administrator of the Federal Highway Administration;
- Justin Overbaugh, of Florida, to be a deputy under secretary of Defense;
- Scott Pappano, of Pennsylvania, to be principal deputy administrator of the National Nuclear Security Administration;
- Peter Thomson, of Louisiana, to be inspector general at the Central Intelligence Agency; and
- Andrea Travnicek, of North Dakota, to be an assistant secretary of the Interior.

The vote followed weeks of frustration from Trump and numerous GOP senators, who are exasperated



by Democrats slowing down the confirmation process for lower-ranking nominees.

The new way of handling nominations "en bloc" doesn't apply to Supreme Court or higher-ranking judicial nominees, or Cabinet-level picks.

*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.*

## **Inmates, ex-guard and others charged in alleged drug and contraband conspiracy at penitentiary**

**BY: JOSHUA HAIAR-SEPTEMBER 18, 2025 12:28 PM**

SIOUX FALLS — Attorney General Marty Jackley announced Thursday that five people — a former guard, two inmates and two others — face charges in connection with an alleged conspiracy to bring drugs and contraband into the South Dakota State Penitentiary.

"It's always begged the question: Where are the drugs coming from? How are they getting into the prison? And today we're able to answer that," Jackley said during a press conference at the Sioux Falls Convention Center.

He announced that a Minnehaha County grand jury on Wednesday indicted former correctional officer Carson DeYoung, 22, of Sioux Falls; inmates Max Bolden, 42, and Simba Oma Maat, 25; and two other people, Nancy Sage, 52, of Sioux Falls, and Chandler Boone, 31, of Denver.

Myriad charges filed

All five face felony charges for allegedly conspiring to distribute meth and a synthetic form of marijuana known as K2, along with allegedly conspiring to deliver cellphones. They also face a misdemeanor charge for allegedly conspiring to deliver vape pens.

DeYoung faces additional counts for possessing and allegedly agreeing to smuggle anabolic steroids. Sage faces extra charges for allegedly possessing meth and K2.

If convicted of all the charges, all five could face decades in prison and tens of thousands of dollars in fines.

Jackley alleged that Boone obtained items and mailed them to Sage, who worked with DeYoung to get them into the prison. A press release from Jackley's office said "DeYoung had not yet transported these particular items into the pen but had agreed to do so," adding, "There is an ongoing investigation as to what other items DeYoung may have transported into the pen."

The indictment covers crimes allegedly committed Aug. 8-14.

"I'm not suggesting there isn't more activity, but that's what we focused on with respect to these charges," Jackley said.

Bolden is already serving a life sentence for murder. Maat is incarcerated for burglary convictions, with release scheduled in 2028. Because both are already serving prison sentences, their maximum sentences if convicted of the new charges would be doubled under state law, Jackley explained.

Jackley said the state Division of Criminal Investigation led the investigation with cooperation from the state Department of Corrections and the Sioux Falls Area Drug Task Force, including staff from the Sioux Falls Police Department and the Minnehaha County Sheriff's Office.

"Transporting illegal items into the prison makes the facility less safe for staff and inmates," Jackley said. "We will not tolerate such activity."

Jackley said the investigation is ongoing and could result in more charges.

New prison vote looms

In response to questions from reporters, Jackley said the indictments had nothing to do with Department of Corrections Secretary Kellie Wasko's recent resignation announcement or the legislative vote scheduled Tuesday on a \$650 million plan to replace the oldest parts of the penitentiary with a new men's prison at a separate site in northeast Sioux Falls.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 12 of 64

When asked if better facilities could have helped prevent the alleged crimes, Jackley said criminal activity will always occur in prisons, but new security systems could help.

"This is an outdated facility that needs to be replaced for the safety of the officers involved, for the prison staff, including medical nurses, as well as other inmates," Jackley said.

The new charges come after a string of unrest, deaths and allegedly criminal incidents at the penitentiary and other state prison facilities during the past several years. That includes an announcement by the state Department of Corrections in May that it had busted a ring of drug smuggling in prison facilities with the aid of the Division of Criminal Investigation and the U.S. Postmaster General's Office.

## Rash of state employee criminal allegations

The new charges against a former correctional officer continue a run of criminal allegations against former state employees related to their work for state government.

Since July of 2024, Jackley has won convictions against former state employees whose crimes included stealing \$1.8 million over the course of 13 years from the state Department of Social Services, creating fake vehicle titles to avoid taxes, filing false food-service inspection reports, using grocery vouchers intended for foster families, and self-issuing a medical marijuana card.

In response, Jackley supported a package of four bills passed during this year's legislative session that expanded the investigatory authority of the state auditor; strengthened the Board of Internal Controls; instituted mandatory reporting requirements for state employees and penalties for failing to report; and established protections for whistleblowers.

Gov. Larry Rhoden signed an executive order in April mandating the creation of a "secure standard reporting mechanism" for employees. The portal delivers whistleblower reports of malfeasance to the state's auditor and attorney general.

Lawmakers also passed legislation this year strengthening the ability of the Legislature's Government Operations and Audit Committee to conduct investigations and issue orders known as subpoenas requiring people to testify or supply information.

Last year, then-Gov. Kristi Noem added an extra internal control officer position to the executive branch and ordered state employees to undergo annual training aimed at preventing criminal activity

*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.*

## Decline in K-12 national reading, math, science scores probed by US Senate panel

**BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA-SEPTEMBER 18, 2025 6:54 PM**

WASHINGTON — Just days after federal data revealed average reading, math and science scores dropped among certain grades since before the coronavirus pandemic, a U.S. Senate panel on Thursday picked apart the root causes and methods for students' academic improvement.

The hearing in the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions centered on the "state of K-12 education" — which GOP members on the committee described as "troubling" — in light of recent data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP.

NAEP, regarded as the gold standard for tracking students' academic performance, showed that average science scores for eighth-graders decreased by 4 points since before the pandemic, in 2019. Average math and reading scores for 12th-graders also fell 3 points between 2019 and 2024.

The assessments were administered between January and March of 2024. Results also showed that just one-third of 12th-graders are considered academically prepared for college in math — a drop from 37% in 2019.



# Groton Daily Independent

**Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 13 of 64**

The committee's chair, Sen. Bill Cassidy, said "it should concern us that children's reading, math and science scores have yet to recover to pre-pandemic levels."

The Louisiana Republican added that "success in education is not determined by how much we spend, but by who makes the decision and how wisely resources are directed," and "when states and local communities are empowered to tailor solutions to meet the unique needs of students, innovation follows."

On the other hand, Sen. Bernie Sanders, ranking member of the panel, said that "while we focus on education — as important as that is — we also have to focus on the conditions under which our children are living."

The Vermont independent noted that "when you're looking at the real world out there, we're looking at millions of families that are struggling to put food on the table, to pay the rent, kids who are growing up in dysfunctional families."

He said that while he's glad the committee is focusing on these issues, "we have got to understand education is important — that means prioritize our children, prioritize our educators."

## Role of technology in education

Martin West, vice chair of the National Assessment Governing Board, which oversees and establishes policy for NAEP, said that while the assessments generally measure what's happening to student achievement rather than the causes, "the patterns it documents can guide our search for explanations and solutions."

He said the rise in smartphones and social media platforms that target youth is, in his view, one area to investigate.

"We lack direct evidence of a causal link between smartphones and learning, but I'm convinced that this technology is a key driver of youth mental health challenges, a distraction from learning, both inside and outside of schools, and a deterrent to reading when NAEP surveys reveal that many fewer students read on their own for fun," he said.

## Indiana's approach

Katie Jenner, Indiana's secretary of Education and the state's commissioner for higher education, pointed to some of the initiatives in her state to improve students' academic performance.

"Over the past three years, Indiana rebuilt early literacy based on the science of reading," she said. "Backed by a major public-private partnership with Lilly Endowment, we have trained thousands of teachers, expanded coaching, and districts are adopting evidence-based materials."

Jenner pointed to the Hoosier State seeing a historic jump in reading scores for third-graders this year, with a rise of nearly 5 percentage points from the previous year.

The state is also working on helping secondary students who continue to struggle with reading, including "deploying an outcomes-based contracting pilot, specifically for middle school reading in areas like tutoring and targeted interventions."

Jenner said Indiana is also "rethinking high school" and "overhauled our diplomas, added outcomes-based incentives to our school funding formulas and ensured the connection to school accountability."

## 'State of education in shambles'

Meanwhile, some Democrats on the panel blasted President Donald Trump's dramatic overhaul of the federal role in education as he seeks to dismantle the Education Department.

Though the assessments were conducted long before the start of Trump's second White House administration, Democrats pointed to the changes the department has undergone since he took office again and their impact on students.

"I'm really glad that we are holding this hearing on the state of education because I am seeing the state of education in shambles under this Department of Education, where the president vowed to dismantle the Department of Education, he set immediately to work to tear apart programs that support our students and schools — no regard to the law or the consequences or even what's best for our students," said Sen. Patty Murray of Washington state.

"So, I see the state of education as delayed and frozen, canceling funding, robbing our schools of support for our teachers and our supports and services kids need to succeed," she said.

Murray expressed concerns that "instead of working with us to fix the education system, Trump and the secretary of Education (Linda McMahon) are making it a lot worse."

*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.*

## 'Crumbled like a house of cards': Judge slams DOJ claims about deporting migrant children

**BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA-SEPTEMBER 18, 2025 3:22 PM**

WASHINGTON — A federal judge Thursday barred the Trump administration from deporting unaccompanied children to Guatemala, finding that the administration's claim of reuniting the children with their parents there "crumbled like a house of cards."

District of Columbia Judge Timothy Kelly issued a preliminary injunction to extend last month's temporary block to prevent the rapid removal of hundreds of Guatemalan children, who were woken in the middle of the night and rushed onto deportation planes over Labor Day weekend.

Kelly, whom President Donald Trump appointed in 2017, rejected the Trump administration's argument that the move was to reunite the children at the request of their parents, a claim that Department of Justice attorneys walked back during last week's hearing.

"But that explanation crumbled like a house of cards about a week later," he wrote in his opinion. "There is no evidence before the Court that the parents of these children sought their return."

Advocates and immigration attorneys for the children rushed to file an emergency block in the middle of the night of Labor Day weekend, which narrowly prevented the removal of 10 Guatemalan children, ages 10 to 17. But hundreds of Guatemalan children would have been removed if not for the temporary restraining order.

600 children identified for removal

Attorneys from the The National Immigration Law Center, which brought the suit, tried to include the class certification to also apply to children from Honduras, but Kelly narrowed the class to only apply to children from Guatemala.

The Trump administration has identified up to 600 Guatemalan children in the Office of Refugee Resettlement custody and foster care to be removed, according to the court filings.

Separately, a federal judge in Arizona issued a temporary restraining order until Sept. 26 to bar the Trump administration from removing Honduran and Guatemalan children in federal custody and foster care from being removed from the United States.

The National Immigration Law Center's Efrén C. Olivares, lead attorney on the District of Columbia case, said in a statement that it's a relief that "hundreds of children ... are now safe from the Trump administration's unlawful attempt to expel them from the United States."

"This decision should send a clear message to the administration that they have no legal authority to circumvent the law to expel unaccompanied children without due process," he said.

A DOJ record 'barren of evidence'

Kelly criticized the Trump administration for its claim that the parents of the Guatemalan children had requested they be returned to their home country.

"In any event, the record here is barren of evidence that any child in the proposed class wants to return to Guatemala, even if their parents can be found," he wrote.

He added that such a move violated the William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008.

"While Defendants plunged ahead in the middle of the night with their "reunification" plan and then represented to a judge that a parent or guardian had requested each child's return, that turned out not to be true," Kelly wrote. "Such a rushed, seemingly error-laden operation to send unaccompanied alien



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 15 of 64

children back to their home countries is one of the things that the TVPRA's process prevents."

In court declarations, many of the parents said they were unaware their children were being returned. One parent, referred to as B.M.R.P., asked for her daughter to remain in the U.S. for her safety.

"I think she is in danger if she does return to Guatemala," B.M.R.P. said. "All I ask is that you help my daughter stay safe – help her stay safe by not returning her to Guatemala."

Attorneys for the children argued that if they were returned to Guatemala, they could face violence and the Trump administration's move to deport them violated immigration procedures for unaccompanied minors.

Congress has carved out special legal protections for immigrant children, such as the 2008 TVPRA law that requires minors be placed in immigration proceedings and have access to legal counsel.

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

## DACA recipients swept up in Trump mass deportation campaign, advocates report

**BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA-SEPTEMBER 18, 2025 3:18 PM**

WASHINGTON — Advocates Thursday raised alarm over immigrants with special deportation protections facing detainment across the country, as the Trump administration continues its aggressive mass deportation campaign.

Home is Here, a coalition of advocates for immigrants with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, status, has documented a pattern of immigration agents targeting DACA recipients. At least 18 DACA recipients are detained, according to a Home is Here tracker.

So far, Home is Here has pinpointed DACA recipients detained in Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Texas, New Mexico, New York, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Rhode Island and Virginia.

The immigrant advocates were joined at a press conference by congressional Democrats and family members of DACA recipients currently detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The lawmakers included Sens. Dick Durbin of Illinois and Alex Padilla of California and Reps. Sylvia Garcia of Texas and Delia Ramirez of Illinois.

"The Trump administration is killing DACA piece by piece," Garcia said.

DACA tied up in court

The Trump administration tried to end DACA during President Donald Trump's first term, but the Supreme Court blocked the effort. Republican-led states have challenged the legality of DACA and its fate is tied up in an appeals court.

There are roughly 550,000 DACA recipients, a program created under the Obama administration for undocumented children brought into the country without legal authorization by their parents.

DACA allows that group to be shielded from deportation and obtain work authorizations and driver's licenses. DACA recipients have to reapply every two years for a renewal fee of \$520 and pass a background check.

Ramirez said the Trump administration's aggressive mass deportation campaign is indiscriminately targeting immigrants and has instilled fear in Latino communities.

"The whole (Trump) administration are waging a campaign of terror against our neighbors, against our own families, against our loved ones as they advance their fascist agenda and they try to cast immigrants as a public enemy," said Ramirez, who is married to a DACA recipient and is the daughter of Guatemalan immigrants.

The Democrats said they would continue to speak out against the detention of DACA recipients and provide assistance in litigation for families. A handful of Democrats have sued ICE over blocked access to detention facilities to conduct oversight.

An arrest, and detainment

The wife of a DACA recipient in ICE detention, Alejandra, who spoke at the press conference, said that she saw through a home security camera her husband, Paulo Cesar Gamez Lira, being arrested by masked men in the driveway of their Texas home.

Alejandra said their children were in the car and they could be heard screaming on the video. Her husband remains in detainment. The ACLU of New Mexico said in a statement he is 28 years old and the father of four U.S. citizen children.

"No family should ever have to endure that kind of terror," she said. "For more than a decade, Paulo has been able to renew his status without issues. He has always followed the rules, done everything this country asked of him, and yet, under this administration, it feels like none of that matters anymore."

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

## Permanent extension of federal health care subsidies estimated to cost \$350 billion

**BY: JENNIFER SHUTT-SEPTEMBER 18, 2025 11:49 AM**

WASHINGTON — The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office announced Thursday that if lawmakers permanently extend the enhanced tax credits for certain people who buy their health insurance through the Affordable Care Act Marketplace, it would cost the government \$350 billion over 10 years and increase the number of those with health insurance by 3.8 million.

The 14-page letter from CBO Director Phillip L. Swagel to congressional leaders projected that extending the enhanced tax credits would reduce the average cost of gross premiums for benchmark plans by 7.6%.

"The estimated decline in benchmark premiums is the result of the expectation that people enrolling in the marketplaces would be healthier on average if the expanded premium tax credit were extended," Swagel wrote.

The nonpartisan health research organization KFF writes on its website the "premium tax credit limits an individual's contribution toward the premium of the 'benchmark' plan, the second-lowest cost silver plan in their Marketplace."

Congress taking action to extend the enhanced tax credits before the end of September, Swagel wrote, would lead 2026 premiums to decrease by 2.4% compared to previous projections.

The enhanced premium tax credits, established by Democrats in 2021 as part of a massive COVID-19 relief package, were extended in 2022 through the Inflation Reduction Act. They are set to expire at the end of 2025.

Extension late in the year

Lawmakers taking action to extend the tax credits later in the year impacts CBO's projections in two ways.

"First, in CBO's estimates, the likelihood that gross premiums for 2026 would be adjusted downward would fall to zero after the start of open enrollment," Swagel wrote, adding that begins Nov. 1 in most marketplaces.

"Second, the estimates would reflect a smaller likelihood that enrollees will see net premiums that incorporate the expanded credit structure at the time they select their marketplace plan (the net premium is the amount of the premium after accounting for the tax credit)," Swagel wrote. "CBO estimates that an enactment date later than September 30 would result in lower costs to the federal government and smaller increases in 2026 enrollment than those presented here."

This is relevant because the tax credits have become intertwined in debates on Capitol Hill over how to fund the government for a couple months as lawmakers try to complete their work on the full-year spending bills.

While conversations about health policy and a stopgap spending bill would traditionally take place separately, concerns about prices spiking during the open enrollment period have merged the issues ahead of

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 17 of 64

the Oct. 1 government shutdown deadline.

Timing is crucial, Democrats say, since the open enrollment period begins on Nov. 1, well before the credits expire.

Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., said earlier this week he views negotiations over the enhanced tax credits as "a December policy issue, not a September funding issue," regardless of the timeline for open enrollment. Republicans, Democrats at odds

Senate Budget Committee ranking member Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., wrote in a statement the CBO letter shows "Republicans in Congress are driving costs up for working families.

"That includes a huge increase in health care costs as they slash the tax credits that so many families rely on. It's disgraceful, and only makes it harder for families to make ends meet. This is just more of their families lose, and billionaires win agenda."

Vermont independent Sen. Bernie Sanders, ranking member on the Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, wrote that "Americans already pay, by far, the highest prices in the world for health care. And it is going to get much worse.

"Thanks to the massive cuts to health care in Trump's 'big beautiful bill,' health insurance premiums will rise, on average, by 75% for 20 million Americans — all so Republicans could give massive tax breaks to billionaires and huge corporations. Working class Americans cannot afford that. These cuts must be rescinded."

House Budget Committee Chairman Jodey Arrington, R-Texas, urged his party not to extend the enhanced tax credits in an op-ed published in the Washington Examiner on Thursday morning before the CBO letter was publicly released.

"Despite Democrats designing these temporary COVID-19 credits to expire this year, they now not only want to extend them—they want to make them permanent," Arrington wrote. "The truth is, even after the Biden COVID-19 credits expire, low- and middle-income families will continue to have access to affordable coverage. Obamacare's traditional tax credits will operate as designed."

*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.*

## US rolls toward a 'terrible' government shutdown, no exit ramp in sight

**BY: JENNIFER SHUTT-SEPTEMBER 18, 2025 9:18 AM**

WASHINGTON — Democrats and Republicans on Capitol Hill have entered a stalemate over whether to fund the government for seven weeks or begin a shutdown that could last considerably longer, amid high partisan tensions.

Lawmakers, it seems, did not learn from two earlier shutdowns that produced zero results for Republicans who tried to force their policy preferences on Democrats.

The 2013 shutdown that lasted 16 days began with GOP demands to repeal the Affordable Care Act, and ended with it remaining the law of the land.

The 2018-2019 shutdown started when President Donald Trump insisted on additional funding for a border wall, but concluded 35 days later with the same amount of money included in the original appropriations bill.

This time around, however, it's Democrats making demands ahead of a funding deadline and striking a markedly different tone from just a few months ago.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said earlier this year that shutting down the government would cede considerable power to the Trump administration and represented a far worse option than advancing a Republican-drafted stopgap spending bill.

"President Trump and Republican leaders would like nothing more than to pull us into the mud of a protracted government shutdown," Schumer said in March. "For Donald Trump, a shutdown would be a



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 18 of 64

gift. It would be the best distraction he could ask for from his awful agenda.”

But that has all changed in the six months since.

Schumer, who fielded considerable blowback from the Democratic base in March, now says his party will not help GOP leaders advance a seven-week temporary funding patch ahead of the Oct. 1 shutdown deadline, since — encouraged by Trump — they didn’t negotiate the bill.

“Democrats don’t want a shutdown, but Republicans cannot shut Democrats out of the process and pretend like the last nine months have been business as usual,” Schumer said. “Republicans know that these abuses can’t just continue as if everything is just fine.”

If Schumer sticks to that stance and is joined by enough other Democrats and independents, the Senate will not have sufficient votes for the funding patch.

Republicans hold majorities in both chambers of Congress but cannot advance legislation in the Senate without the support of at least 60 lawmakers, which typically forces bipartisanship on major issues.

Schumer on a ‘fool’s errand’?

Republicans and Democrats interviewed by States Newsroom said the most recent shutdowns show that forcing a funding lapse doesn’t lead to policy wins or political victories. But they appeared to acknowledge the increasing likelihood of one beginning next month.

West Virginia Republican Sen. Shelley Moore Capito referred to the prior government shutdowns as a “misery march” and deferred to Democrats on how exactly lawmakers would get out of a funding lapse if one begins.

“When a shutdown gets predicated on a policy position that’s never going to work — which I think is what Schumer’s brought to (Majority Leader John Thune) — I think that it’s a fool’s errand, quite frankly,” Capito said. “And it’s unfair to the American people.”

Louisiana Republican Sen. John Kennedy said Schumer should consider what Trump will do in the event of a shutdown, when the president has considerable authority to determine which federal workers and operations are exempt and which are not.

“He will have pretty much unfettered discretion, at least in his mind, to do whatever he wants to do,” Kennedy said. “And I personally think the president will make it very painful.”

Exempt federal employees continue to work during a shutdown and often handle the preservation of life or property, or national security issues. Non-exempt workers are essentially furloughed. Both categories receive back pay once a shutdown ends.

Trump bars negotiations with Dems

Hawaii Democratic Sen. Brian Schatz said that Trump telling Republicans not to negotiate a short-term stopgap bill with Democrats led to the impasse.

“Shutdowns are terrible and they should be avoided. And Donald Trump may or may not know that the only way to avoid a shutdown is to work with both parties,” Schatz said. “And yesterday morning ... he said, ‘I don’t need to deal with the Democrats.’ And so, Godspeed.”

Connecticut Democratic Sen. Chris Murphy said nothing can be accomplished unless Republican leaders begin serious talks over government funding.

“Right now, we don’t even have a negotiation,” Murphy said. “The basic responsibility of a majority party when you’re working on a budget is to negotiate with a minority. You need our votes. So who knows what’s possible because right now, they’re refusing to talk to Democrats.”

Alabama Republican Sen. Katie Britt said Schumer’s change in stance on shutdowns is largely political and stems from the criticism he experienced from his own party earlier this year after helping advance the March stopgap.

Nearly every House Democrat voted against that six-month stopgap bill and many voiced frustrations after Schumer aided Republicans in advancing the bill through the Senate.

“This is all about political theater because, unfortunately for all of us that are trying to actually get something done, he’s afraid of his own shadow. And that shadow’s name is AOC,” Britt said, referring to Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, who is rumored as a potential Democratic primary opponent

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 19 of 64

when Schumer faces reelection in 2028.

Dems want health care subsidy extension

House Appropriations Committee ranking member Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn., said there's still time to avoid a shutdown if GOP leaders begin serious bipartisan negotiations on funding and health care.

"We still have time. We can negotiate a continuing resolution," DeLauro said. "But there are, as I said, Democratic priorities. And look, the American people are very concerned about what's happening with health care. It's already out there. So, you know, they're going to hear about it. They'll hear about the fight that we're going to make on this."

Democrats have said for weeks that they want Republicans to negotiate an extension of the enhanced Affordable Care Act tax credits that are set to expire at the end of the calendar year. The credits are used by people who purchase their own health insurance on the ACA market.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., said earlier this week that he views that as "a December policy issue, not a September funding issue," even though open enrollment in that health insurance marketplace begins on Nov. 1 and ends on Dec. 15.

There are several health policy provisions in House Republicans' stopgap spending bill, though none addressing that particular issue.

Johnson hopes to pass the legislation this week amid a razor-thin majority and some opposition from within his own party. House approval, which is far from guaranteed, would send the bill to the Senate, where it likely will not get the votes to become law before the deadline.

Complicating matters is a week-long recess for Rosh Hashanah. Both chambers are set to return on Sept. 29, with very little time to broker a bipartisan agreement and hold votes, though leaders could cancel part of that break.

No pay for feds during shutdown

The two most recent shutdowns began after GOP lawmakers believed it was the best way to bring attention to significant policy disputes and force Democrats to back their proposals.

But the status quo remained after both shutdowns.

Despite those experiences, Democrats appear ready to gamble they'll have better luck amid the unprecedented actions of the second Trump administration to challenge the congressional power of the purse and more, though that's far from a guarantee.

Any shutdown, especially a prolonged one, would cause considerable financial strain for federal employees and Americans who rely on many government services.

Since none of the dozen annual government funding bills have become law on time, all federal workers would go without pay during a shutdown, including those at the Departments of Agriculture, Defense, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Interior and Transportation.

Staff for members of Congress, who weren't affected by the last shutdown, would miss their salaries this time around if a shutdown begins with the new fiscal year on Oct. 1.

*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.*

## More states protect access to the COVID shot as feds restrict eligibility

**Moves represent a state rebellion against the public health authority of the federal government**

**BY: SHALINA CHATLANI-SEPTEMBER 18, 2025 8:00 AM**

At least 17 states have taken steps to ensure broader access to the COVID-19 vaccine since last month, when the federal government significantly restricted eligibility for the shot.

Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Maine, Massachusetts, New Mexico, New

# Groton Daily Independent

**Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 20 of 64**

York, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin have issued orders that aim to make it easier for people to get the COVID-19 vaccine. All but Virginia have Democratic governors.

Together, the moves represent an extraordinary state rebellion against the public health authority of the federal government.

For decades, states have followed the lead of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on which vaccines Americans should get, and when they should get them. Now, rejecting the antivaccine stance of U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., an increasing number of states say they will rely instead on their own public health experts and professional medical organizations for that advice.

Previously, the FDA recommended that the COVID-19 vaccine booster be available to anyone 6 months or older. But in August, the federal agency said the booster shot should be limited to two specific groups: people who are 65 and older, and anyone who is at least six months old and has an underlying health condition, such as asthma or obesity, that increases the risk of a COVID-19 infection becoming severe.

Under the new guidelines, children under 18 without an underlying condition can only get the shot if a health care provider is consulted first, meaning parents can't simply take their kids to a vaccination clinic or pharmacy.

"The American people demanded science, safety, and common sense. This framework delivers all three," Kennedy wrote on the social media platform X on Aug. 27.

In June, Kennedy ousted the entire vaccine advisory committee at the CDC, replacing some of them with vaccine skeptics. The previous month, he announced that the federal government would no longer recommend that pregnant women get the vaccine.

Currently 43 states — all but Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Oregon, Utah and West Virginia, along with the District of Columbia — allow pharmacies to administer FDA-approved shots without a prescription, according to Amy Thibault, a spokesperson for CVS Health.

But the federal government's new COVID-19 recommendations have sown confusion. Many people are unsure whether their local pharmacy will give them the shot without a prescription — and if so, whether their health insurance will pay for it.

In the 17 states that have acted thus far, governors and state public health officials are trying to clear up that confusion, empower pharmacists to administer the shot and, in some cases, mandate that insurers pay for it.

The latest state to act is Wisconsin. Democratic Gov. Tony Evers signed an executive order Monday directing state health officials to create policies that ease vaccine restrictions, and requiring insurers to keep covering the COVID-19 shot.

"Vaccines save lives, folks. Spreading fear, distrust, and disinformation about safe and effective vaccines isn't just reckless, it's dangerous," Evers said in a news release. "RFK and the Trump administration are inserting partisan politics into health care and the science-based decisions of medical professionals and are putting the health and lives of kids, families, and folks across our state at risk in the process."

In addition to Wisconsin, Colorado, Massachusetts and Rhode Island have required insurers to cover the shot, and Arizona Democratic Gov. Katie Hobbs's executive order calls on state insurance regulators to "encourage" insurers to do so.

In many of the states, including Arizona, Colorado, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico and Rhode Island, the governor or the chief public health officer issued a standing order clarifying that pharmacies can administer the vaccine without a prescription.

Earlier this month, New York Democratic Gov. Kathy Hochul issued an executive order allowing pharmacies in her state to administer the shot to anyone 3 or older through October 5. The order can be renewed, pending action by the legislature.

And in Connecticut, Delaware and Pennsylvania, state authorities directed pharmacists to follow the vaccine recommendations issued by professional groups such as the American Academy of Pediatrics,



# Groton Daily Independent

**Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 21 of 64**

the American Academy of Family Physicians and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

North Carolina Democratic Gov. Josh Stein issued an order stating that pharmacies can administer the COVID-19 vaccine without a prescription to all adults over 65 and anyone over 18 with a broad range of underlying health conditions. Virginia's top public health official issued a similar order.

Earlier this month, the Democratic governors of California, Hawaii, Oregon and Washington announced the formation of the West Coast Health Alliance to coordinate vaccine recommendations for their states. The states pledged to use guidelines based on advice from leading medical organizations.

Meanwhile, Republican-controlled Florida doubled down on Kennedy's antivaccine stance, announcing plans to become the first state to phase out all vaccine mandates, including ending requirements that kids be vaccinated against dangerous diseases before enrolling in schools.

At a news conference earlier this month, Florida Surgeon General Joseph Ladapo said vaccine mandates are "immoral."

"Every last one of them is wrong and drips with disdain and slavery," Ladapo said of such requirements.

In Louisiana, Republican U.S. Sen. Bill Cassidy, who is a physician, suggested last week that state Surgeon General Ralph Abraham should issue a blanket prescription for anyone who wants the COVID-19 shot, the Shreveport Times reported.

Republican Gov. Jeff Landry responded angrily on X.

"The last time I checked you have a prescription pad, why don't you just leave a prescription for the dangerous Covid shot at your district office and anyone can swing by and get one! I am sure big pharma would love you for that one!" Landry wrote.

*Stateline reporter Shalina Chatlani can be reached at [schatlani@stateline.org](mailto:schatlani@stateline.org)*

*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.*

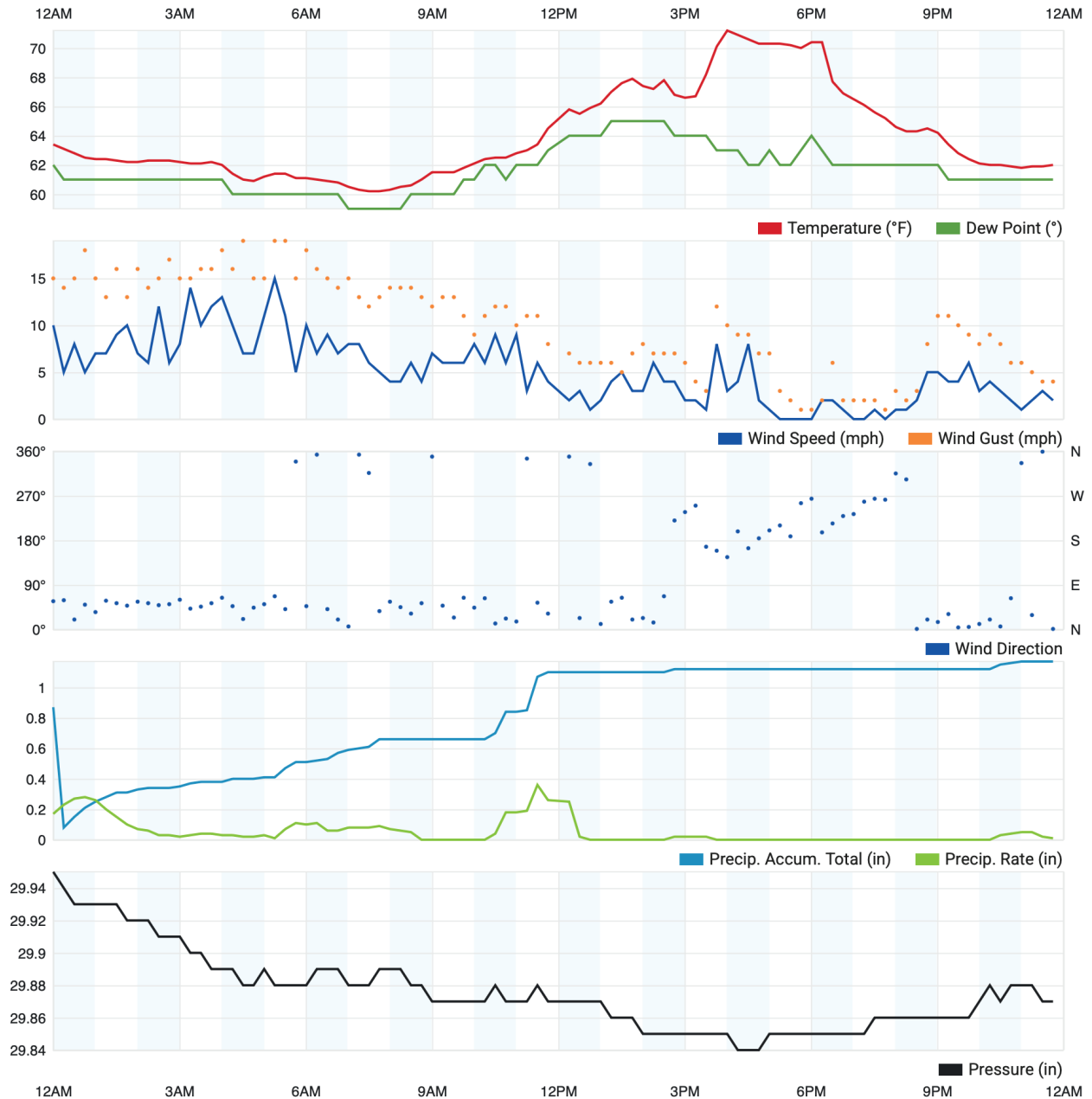
*Shalina Chatlani covers health care and environmental justice for Stateline.*

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 22 of 64

## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

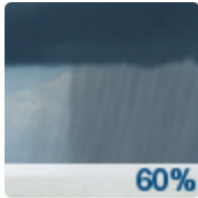
September 18, 2025



# Broton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 23 of 64

Friday



High: 65 °F

Showers  
Likely and  
Areas Fog

Friday Night



Low: 56 °F

Chance  
Showers

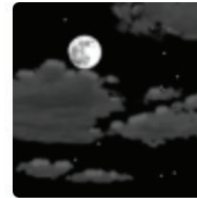
Saturday



High: 69 °F

Chance  
Showers

Saturday Night



Low: 51 °F

Partly Cloudy

Sunday



High: 73 °F

Mostly Sunny



## Wet Weather Continues into Today

September 19, 2025  
4:10 AM

### Timing of Rainfall Chances Through Today

#### Probability of Precipitation Forecast (%)

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

102030405060708090100

Probability of Precipitation (%)

Probability of Precipitation Forecast (%)

### Key Messages:

- Low pressure continues to circulate over the region with periods of showers and a few thunderstorms through today. No severe weather is expected.
- Highest chances of rainfall (50-75%) will continue over northeastern SD into west central MN into this evening.
- Additional chances of rain (20-40%) Saturday afternoon east of the James River



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

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

As a low pressure continues to stay parked over northeastern SD through this evening, showers and a few thunderstorms will continue to drop rain. The highest chances of rainfall (50-75%) will continue over northeastern SD into west central MN this evening, with additional chances of rain (20-40%) east of the James River Saturday afternoon.



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 24 of 64



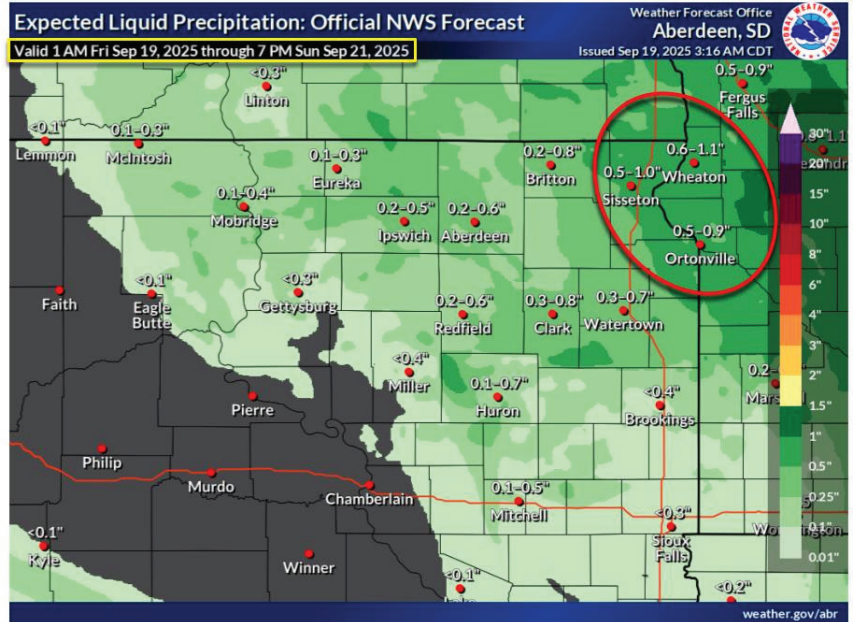
## Additional Rainfall Amounts Through Friday

September 19, 2025  
4:10 AM

### Key Messages:

Additional rainfall amounts of less than a half inch to an inch or more is possible through this evening and Saturday

- 70-85% chance of 0.50" or more over far northeastern SD into west central MN (red circle)
- 25-40% chance of an inch or more for this same location



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

**Additional rainfall amounts of a half inch to an inch or more is possible through this evening and Saturday with a 70-85% chance of 0.50" or more over far northeastern SD into west central MN and 25-40% chance of an inch or more for this same location.**

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 25 of 64

## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 72 °F at 4:03 PM

Low Temp: 60 °F at 7:36 AM

Wind: 23 mph at 5:20 AM

Precip: : 1.18

## Today's Info

Record High: 101 in 1895

Record Low: 26 in 1938

Average High: 74

Average Low: 46

Average Precip in Sept.: 1.26

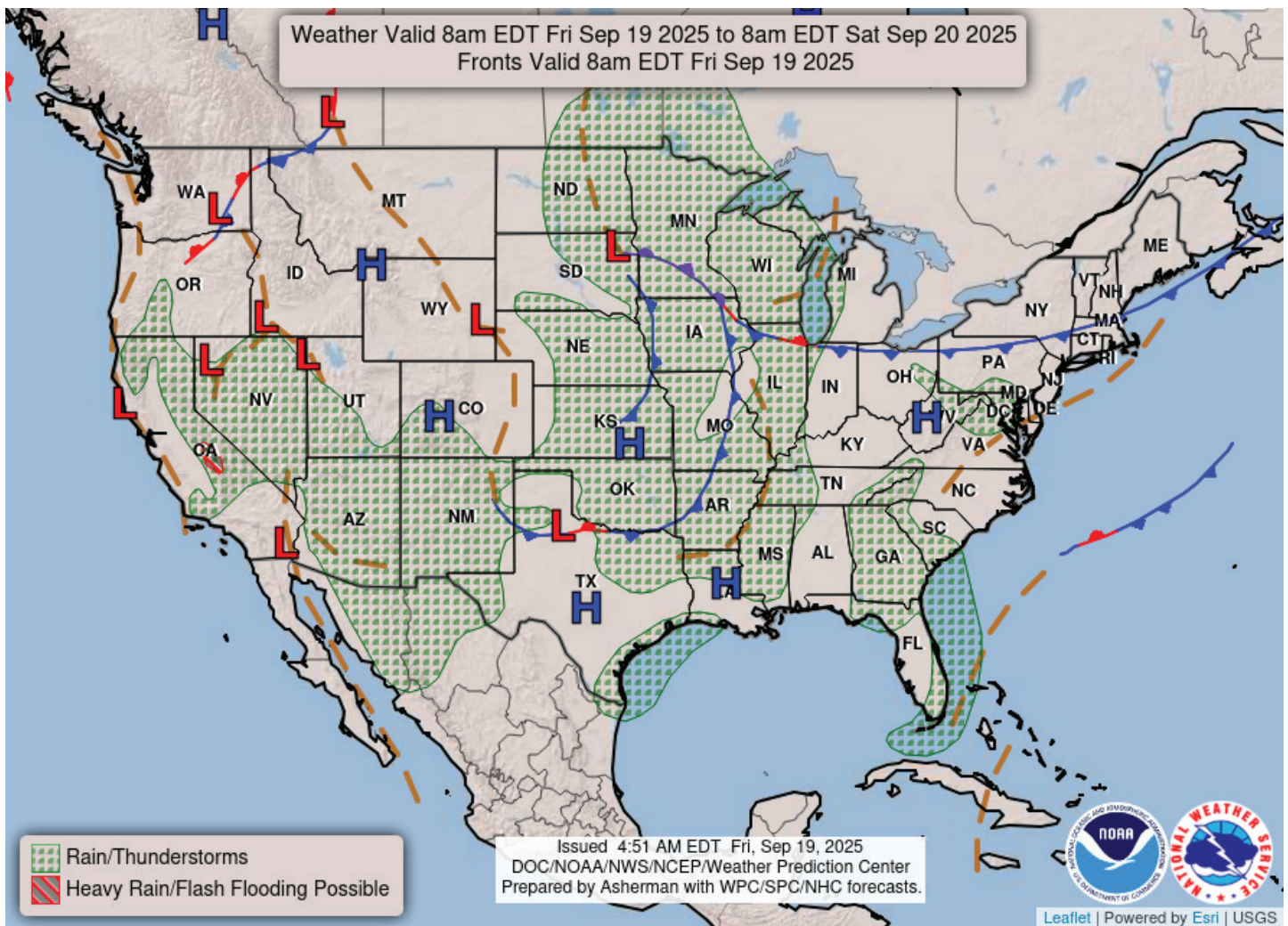
Precip to date in Sept.: 2.22

Average Precip to date: 17.60

Precip Year to Date: 22.52

Sunset Tonight: 7:36 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:17 am



# Groton Daily Independent

**Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 26 of 64**

## **Today in Weather History**

September 19, 1991: Record to near record cold hit central and northeast South Dakota on this day. Temperatures fell into the 20s during the morning bringing a hard freeze to much of the area. Pierre and Mobridge had record lows of 24 degrees while Timber Lake set a record low of 21 degrees. Near record lows of 28 degrees and 22 degrees occurred at Aberdeen and Kennebec, respectively.

1947: A hurricane made landfall near the Chandeleur Islands, LA on this day. Wind gusts of 112 mph and a central pressure of 967 mb were measured at Moisant International Airport. A storm surge of 9.8 feet reached Shell Beach, Lake Borgne. Moisant Airport field was flooded by two ft. of water while Jefferson Parish was flooded to depths of 3.28 ft. New Orleans suffered \$100 million in damages. Total loss of life was 51 people. As a result of this storm, hurricane protection levees were built along the south shore of Lake Pontchartrain to protect Orleans and Jefferson Parishes from future storm surges.

1967 - Hurricane Beulah deluged Brownsville, TX, with 12.19 inches of rain in 24 hours, to establish a record for that location. Hurricane Beulah made landfall on the 20th near the mouth of the Rio Grande River, where a wind gust to 135 mph was reported by a ship in the port. (19th-20th) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Cool autumn-like weather invaded the Central Rockies. Temperatures dipped into the 30s and 40s, with readings in the teens and 20s reported in the higher elevations. Gunnison CO was the cold spot in the nation with a morning low of 15 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thunderstorms developing along a fast moving cold front produced severe weather in Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana and Michigan. Eight tornadoes were reported, including five in Indiana. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 74 mph at Wabash IND. Winds associated with the cold front itself gusted to 69 mph at Kenosha WI. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Showers and thunderstorms produced heavy rain in the Middle and Northern Atlantic Coast Region. Cape Hatteras NC was deluged with nearly 3.50 inches of rain in three hours. Syracuse NY reported 1.77 inches of rain, a record for the date, and Chatham NJ reported an all-time record of 3.45 inches in one day. Hurricane Hugo headed for the Bahamas, and Tropical Storm Iris, following close on its heels, strengthened to near hurricane force. (The National Weather Summary)



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 27 of 64



## PRAYER: FORCE OR FOOLISHNESS

Prayer, for some, is a force that enables them to approach God in worship and wonder or in times of need for the necessities of life. For others, prayer is utter and complete foolishness because they believe it is foolish and a waste of time.

In the life of David, it was a dominant force. Whenever harmful words hurt him, or he received a wound from a battle or had a need that was beyond his limitations, he turned to God in prayer. Listen carefully to his words: "I am a man of prayer."

It is always interesting to listen carefully to someone introduce themselves: "I am a doctor...I am the CEO of...I am a sales representative at...I work for...I am the one who...I set a record by...I am the owner of." We seem to want others to recognize us for what we are doing, what we have done, and not who we are.

But with all his power and prestige, wealth and wisdom, David wanted others to recognize him as someone who was entirely dependent on God: "I am a man of prayer."

Prayer was a force in the life of David. As we read his prayer in the Psalms, we discover that he had no definite time of prayer, no specific place to pray, no particular position he assumed when he prayed, and it seems as though most of the time when he prayed, he was alone.

David realized that prayer was a force in his life. It brought forgiveness when he sinned, peace when he was anxious, victory when he was embattled and constant joy.

Prayer: Father, help us see the need for prayer in our lives when we look at the results of prayer in the life of others. We need You, and we do need prayer. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today:— Give us aid against the enemy, for the help of man is worthless. Psalm 108:12

*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*

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 28 of 64

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# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 29 of 64



## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 09.16.25

10 14 34 40 43 5

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$423,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 7 Mins 9 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: 1 Days 16 Hrs 22 Mins 8 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 09.18.25

14 29 41 44 46 4

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 37 Mins 8 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 09.17.25

1 21 24 28 30

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$26,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 37 Mins 8 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 09.17.25

8 19 47 51 58 21

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 6 Mins 8 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: 1 Days 17 Hrs 6 Mins 8 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)



# Groton Daily Independent

**Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 30 of 64**

## **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

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 31 of 64

## News from the Associated Press

### PREP VOLLEYBALL

Aberdeen Central def. Sioux Falls Washington, 25-17, 26-24, 25-21  
Aberdeen Roncalli def. Webster, 25-23, 25-19, 27-25  
Arlington def. Castlewood, 17-25, 19-25, 25-21, 25-23, 15-13  
Brandon Valley def. Tea, 25-13, 25-13, 25-16  
Bridgewater-Emery def. Viborg-Hurley, 25-11, 25-11, 25-17  
Burke def. Colome, 25-8, 25-9, 25-9  
Chester def. Sioux Falls Lutheran, 25-16, 25-14, 25-5  
Clark-Willow Lake def. Groton, 25-17, 25-23, 25-14  
Colman-Egan def. Iroquois-Lake Preston, 25-16, 25-7, 27-25  
Corsica/Stickney def. Ethan, 18-25, 25-23, 29-27, 25-22  
Crazy Horse def. St. Francis Indian, 22-25, 11-25, 25-20, 25-11  
Dakota Valley def. Canton, 25-9, 25-13, 25-15  
DeSmet def. Elkton-Lake Benton, 12-25, 25-20, 25-18, 25-19  
Dell Rapids St Mary's def. Deubrook, 25-22, 25-17, 25-21  
Dell Rapids def. Brookings, 25-9, 25-15, 17-25, 25-20  
Deuel def. Sisseton, 25-23, 20-25, 25-18, 16-25, 15-13  
Dupree def. Timber Lake, 25-21, 17-25, 25-19, 25-18  
Estelline-Hendricks def. Oldham-Ramona-Rutland, 25-15, 25-11, 25-15  
Florence-Henry def. Milbank, 25-14, 25-12, 25-16  
Gayville-Volin High School def. Centerville, 25-15, 25-10, 25-15  
Gettysburg def. McLaughlin, 25-15, 25-23, 25-10  
Great Plains Lutheran def. Waubay/Summit, 20-25, 25-23, 25-15, 25-22  
Hamlin def. Tiospa Zina, 25-3, 25-1, 25-9  
Herreid-Selby def. Leola-Frederick High School, 25-9, 26-24, 25-13  
Hill City def. Sturgis Brown High School, 25-14, 25-18, 25-21  
Hitchcock-Tulare def. Highmore-Harrold, 25-19, 25-19, 25-8  
Kadoka def. Faith, 25-16, 25-16, 25-10  
Lakota Tech def. Mahpíya Lúta Red Cloud, 25-20, 25-17, 24-26, 25-22  
Lead-Deadwood def. St Thomas More, 25-11, 25-6, 25-19  
Lyman def. Sully Buttes, 25-12, 25-18, 22-25, 25-18  
McCook Central-Montrose def. Beresford, 25-18, 25-19, 16-25, 26-24  
McIntosh High School def. Wakpala, 25-17, 25-21, 25-15  
Miller def. Faulkton, 25-9, 25-12, 25-18  
Mitchell def. Yankton, 25-16, 25-10, 23-25, 25-21  
Northwestern def. Ipswich, 22-25, 25-14, 25-14, 25-21  
Parker/Marion def. Garretson, 25-17, 25-9, 25-12  
Rapid City Christian def. Custer, 25-14, 25-13, 25-14  
Redfield def. Britton-Hecla, 25-14, 33-35, 25-19, 25-17  
Sioux Falls Lincoln def. T F Riggs High School, 25-10, 25-16, 25-10  
Tripp-Delmont-Armour def. Freeman, 25-9, 25-21, 25-22  
Wessington Springs def. Crow Creek Tribal School  
Winner def. Kimball-White Lake, 25-23, 25-9, 25-19  
Wolsey-Wessington def. Aberdeen Christian, 30-28, 16-25, 25-23, 25-19  
Lemmon Triangular=  
Lemmon High School def. Newell, 24-26, 25-17, 25-11, 25-14

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 32 of 64

Lemmon High School def. Tiospaye Topa, 25-3, 25-3, 25-1

Some high school volleyball scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

## PREP FOOTBALL

Aberdeen Roncalli 18, Miller 6  
Little Wound 26, Lower Brule 20  
McLaughlin 18, Marty 14  
Omaha Nation, Neb. 68, Crazy Horse 26  
Tiospa Zina 46, Crow Creek Tribal School 0  
Todd County 38, St. Francis Indian 0

Some high school football scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

## Organic food prices could soar as US imposes import restrictions and new tariffs on specialty sugar

By SARAH RAZA Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The price of most organic food could jump this fall because of new policies and tariffs on imported organic sugar, frustrating manufacturers who say the actions won't help sugar growers but could put some food companies out of business.

More than 90% of organic sugar used by U.S. manufacturers is imported. The price of that product increased in August when the Trump administration imposed steep trade tariffs, and will rise even more when high-tier duties on most organic sugar imports take effect Oct. 1.

The result, according to the Organic Trade Association, is that the price of organic sugar is expected to soar by an average of 30%, increasing costs of producing most organic foods — everything from yogurt to cookies.

Each year, the U.S. imports 1,825 tons (1,656 metric tons) of specialty sugar because it is required under a World Trade Organization agreement. But demand for organic sugar far exceeds that amount, so the U.S. Department of Agriculture sets an annual quota for the amount of specialty sugar that can be imported into the U.S. duty-free.

Last year, the quota was 231,485 tons (210,000 metric tons), which still wasn't enough to meet demand. This year, the USDA's quota taking effect Oct. 1 will be zero, and all organic sugar imports beyond the WTO minimum will be hit with high out-of-quota duties.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has said its restrictions on specialty sugar imports are intended to help the U.S. sugar industry.

In response to questions about its new policy, the USDA released a statement saying that "the decision was not made to benefit any single entity," and it would continue to monitor market conditions.

Specialty sugar policy could lead to higher prices

The limits on duty-free imports of specialty sugar plus a new 50% tariff on Brazil, which supplies 40% of the U.S.' organic sugar, is especially difficult because organic products are already more expensive than their conventional counterparts. Growers must meet more requirements to be certified organic, such as restrictions on pesticides and fertilizers.

U.S. manufacturers say that buying domestic organic sugar isn't an option because there is only one U.S. farm that produces the specialty crop, and converting a conventional farm to organic takes at least three years.

They warn the combined effect of the tariff and import caps may force them either to raise prices or curb production.

"It's essentially punishing domestic manufacturers for using an ingredient that we really can't obtain



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 33 of 64

domestically, and don't have any prospects of obtaining domestically any time in the near future," said Britt Lundgren, who oversees government affairs for organic yogurt maker Stonyfield.

Tom Chapman, co-CEO of the Organic Trade Association, said he expects "dramatic impacts."

"The high tier tariff is so high that we don't see that it's an absorbable rate of tariff, in addition to all the other tariffs that would apply," Chapman said.

Organic food manufacturers will buy most of the imported organic sugar, though some will be offered on grocery shelves, where home bakers likely will see increased prices.

U.S. not producing enough organic sugar to meet demand

Demand for organic sugar had already been outpacing imports for the past several years. But that situation did not spur any new domestic producers, organic food manufacturers said.

In addition to limited production, the U.S. also has limited organic sugar processing because ingredients that are certified organic must be segregated from conventional ingredients when processed.

Whole Earth Brands, a company that sells a variety of sweeteners, is anticipating a 100% increase in organic sugar costs, according to company president Nigel Willerton.

"We supply every major supermarket in the U.S. and natural food stores. We'll see our prices go up quite considerably. There's nothing we can avoid there," he said.

How much prices will change depends on how much sugar is used in the product. For example, sweeteners that are made almost entirely from organic sugar are likely to see bigger price increases than dairy products, where organic sugar is not the main ingredient.

Higher sugar costs may lead some businesses to shut down

Many organic food manufacturers are smaller operations, so they are more sensitive to increases in input costs, Willerton said. Some of them may not have the profit margins to absorb the cost, and they are unable to replace organic sugar substitutes because it would require product reformulation.

"We've got lots of small companies involved in this business," Willerton said. "These small premium companies producing these products are literally going to find themselves priced out of the market."

The U.S. government has long had a prominent role in sugar production, with policies for setting minimum prices and generous loan programs.

Still, Chapman said he doesn't understand what the USDA is trying to accomplish with its restrictions.

"When we looked at the USDA announcements, they were talking about domestic sugar shrinking and mills closing," he said. "There's only one mill. They were in operation before, and they're in operation now."

Florida Crystals Corporation, the only organic sugar producer in the U.S., supplies 8% of the U.S. organic sugar market, up from about 2% a decade ago.

Marianne Martinez, the company's spokesperson, said the USDA's new specialty sugar policy "is encouraging and could result in an increase in U.S.-grown and milled organic cane sugar production if it becomes a long-term policy."

The USDA has not announced any other initiatives to support organic growers in the meantime.

## South Dakota lacks incentives that could lead to movies set there to be filmed there

By MOLLY WETSCH/South Dakota News Watch South Dakota News Watch

Last month, 1,100 theaters across the country showed a movie ostensibly set in rural South Dakota. The film, "Americana," features Sydney Sweeney as a small-town diner waitress on the hunt for a rare Lakota ghost shirt. Singer Halsey and Hunkpapa Lakota actor Zahn McClarnon also star.

However, South Dakotans who watched "Americana" may have left confused at how the state was portrayed – vast, arid deserts and low, Southwestern-style buildings.

That's because it was shot entirely in New Mexico.

And it isn't the only one: the 2017 film "South Dakota" was, despite its name and setting, filmed across the border in Iowa; "Wild Bill," a 1995 movie starring Jeff Bridges, is set entirely in Deadwood but was filmed in California.

# Groton Daily Independent

**Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 34 of 64**

Lack of film incentives can deter filmmakers

Steve Rausch, who spent most of his career in South Dakota as a provider of video production services, moved his business, Focused Motion Media, to Nevada early this year.

He told News Watch that even though South Dakota has been featured in dozens of iconic films and has played host to filming in many, a lack of filming incentives could cause productions to look elsewhere to shoot movies and television shows — even those that rely on South Dakota as their setting.

Film incentives are programs offered state-by-state that encourage productions to shoot in the area. Those usually take the form of tax credits but can also include cash grants or free shooting locations.

South Dakota does not have any film incentive programs. One of only nine states not to have one in place, it acts as a proverbial island in the Midwest, where Minnesota and Iowa to the east, Wyoming to the west and Nebraska to the south have programs.

Those states may draw filmmakers who want to shoot in South Dakota just a few miles away, with similar landscapes and geography, instead, Rausch said.

"Unfortunately, the industry has evolved to where these incentives are vital to production. So if a state doesn't have one, they're crossed off the list immediately," Rausch told News Watch. "A lot of times the rural Western landscape of South Dakota is actually Wyoming or Colorado."

New Mexico, where "Americana" was filmed, has one of the most robust incentive programs in the country. Eligible productions receive a minimum tax credit of 25% — which can be instrumental in getting a film over the line, Rausch said.

"If someone gives you a proposal and says that's going to be \$100,000. Then somebody else says, well, it's going to be \$80,000. Where do you go? You go to the \$80,000," Rausch said.

Film industry brings economic benefits to local communities

When a major production comes to town — like "Dances With Wolves," which was filmed in western South Dakota in 1989 — it brings more than just buzz about the movie to the area. Production crews often stay in hotels or rental properties on-site, and in many cases, contract local workers.

"It's not just (the film industry) that's affected by this. It's all of the small mom-and-pop shops that would be providing meals, catering, hotels, car rentals ... everything that's needed to sustain between 10 and 50 people for a month," Rausch said. "It just so happens that they're coming to the area to practice film. But from gas stations to snow cone trucks, everybody benefits from it."

Tracy Mailloux, owner of Gator Grip and Lighting and administrator of the South Dakota Film and Television Association, said that when a state promotes itself during a film's rollout, the effects last far beyond the initial release.

He gave Georgia as an example, which provides a tax credit to films that include the state's logo somewhere in the completed project and a link to the state's filming website on promotional materials.

"If you're promoting things, a lot of people might think, that's a beautiful scene. Where did they shoot this? Oh, they shot it in South Dakota. We should plan a trip there," Mailloux said.

Film incentive programs may be challenging in South Dakota

Rausch said he led a campaign to instate, or establish, a film incentive program in the state nearly seven years ago. That campaign also aimed to move film resources to the Governor's Office of Economic Development from the Department of Tourism, where all film queries are currently directed.

It was unsuccessful, mostly because of the logistics and fiscal allocations required to create and maintain a film office in the state, Rausch said. Although South Dakota formerly ran a film office affiliated with the state, that initiative was disbanded in 2007.

"Since the film tax incentive wrapped up a number of years ago, we've focused on serving as a resource — connecting production companies with South Dakota's film industry and helping guide them toward the right local or federal contacts for permits and permissions," a representative from Travel South Dakota said in a statement.

Travel South Dakota's website provides information on key benefits for filmmakers in the state as well as a link to the South Dakota Film and Television Association, which maintains a database of local cinema-

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 35 of 64

tographers, actors and other industry workers.

Mailloux said instating a film tax incentive may be difficult for a state that does not already see many big-budget features coming to the area.

"You're going to have to have a state auditor going through all the receipts and making sure everything lines up, you know? So then you've got to fill in that position. And is that position enough to keep them busy year round? I don't know," Mailloux said.

Rausch has not given up on finding a compromise for the state. There are alternatives to film incentives that may prove beneficial to the small but growing industry in the state without dedicating large amounts of dollars and resources, he said.

"I think small steps of at least having people that understand what this business is and how to translate it (to legislators and filmmakers) would make huge grounds," Rausch said.

Independent and local film thrives in South Dakota

A lack of direct financial film incentives may prevent large, out-of-state productions from coming to town, but it is not necessarily a death sentence for the South Dakota film industry.

Documentaries, especially those that highlight nature or tell Indigenous stories, have been prolific sources of film activity in South Dakota.

Independent films also seem to be a sweet spot for the state, where strong local ties and community interest in regional stories abound.

"There's three or four films that have been shot this year alone in South Dakota, all independent features," Mailloux said.

One reason South Dakota can be appealing to independent filmmakers is the lack of permits needed to shoot in the state. Unlike most other areas, where productions need to apply for permission and pay a fee to shoot at a location, South Dakota has a relatively open environment for filming.

Independent and local films, which typically have smaller budgets and crews, are able to harness the state's wide open spaces and lax requirements for permits in their favor.

"Nomadland," Chloe Zhao's independent Oscar-winning film, finds its main character, played by Frances McDormand, spending much of the middle act in the Badlands and Wall Drug.

Western South Dakota's "East of Wall," also an independent film, saw major success at the Sundance Film Festival, was purchased by Sony Pictures Classics and recently had a sold-out run at the Sioux Falls State Theatre.

"Fall Is A Good Time To Die" is a film written and directed by Sioux Falls native Dalton Coffey, which The New York Times called "sublime." It is set and was entirely shot in the vast prairies of central South Dakota.

The smaller population, although it may cause worries about the size of the industry, can also be a major plus to some filmmakers, Mailloux said.

He told the story of a film about the Battle of Little Bighorn, which was originally set to shoot in Montana. One South Dakotan on the crew saw the benefit of shooting elsewhere and sent the production to the state.

"He said, 'Look, you can shoot there, but you look behind you, you're going to see the road. There's a lot of tourism. Over here, there's a visitor center. Let me bring you to South Dakota. Just entertain me. You don't have to pay me for the day, and I'll show you the exact same landscape.' And they ended up shooting that film in South Dakota just because it was more conducive to what they were doing," Mailloux said.

And there is no substitute for certain landscapes.

Both the Badlands and Mount Rushmore National Memorial are such unique South Dakotan features that filmmakers cannot replicate them anywhere else, Rausch said.

Kate Beecroft, director of "East of Wall," told News Watch that filming in South Dakota allowed her to tell a story that was entirely unique to the state.

"If you're open to the magic, South Dakota is going to provide," Beecroft said. "But you have to be open to it."

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This story was originally published by South Dakota News Watch and distributed through a partnership



with The Associated Press.

## Prosecutor says stalking suspect ambushed Pennsylvania police officers, killing 3

By MARK SCOLFORO, TASSANEE VEJPONGSA and MARC LEVY Associated Press

NORTH CODORUS, Pa. (AP) — A suspected stalker armed with a rifle hid inside his ex-girlfriend's home in the rolling farmland of southern Pennsylvania and ambushed police officers who came to arrest him, killing three of them in a shootout, a prosecutor said Thursday.

Two other officers were seriously wounded before police shot the suspect to death in a hail of gunfire that capped a 15-hour ordeal after a trail camera captured an image of the suspect, armed with an AR-style rifle, peering through a scope into the house Tuesday night.

How the shooting unfolded

The ex-girlfriend and her mother called the police and then fled the house for their safety after officers dispatched Tuesday night were unable to find him there. Police didn't find him at his own home so arrived back at the house Wednesday afternoon.

Using a drone, six officers scoured the property, including farm buildings, before they noticed the door to the home was unlocked — even though the ex-girlfriend and her mother had locked it before fleeing.

Four plainclothes detectives from the Northern York County Regional Police Department wearing bullet-proof vests opened the door and were immediately fired on by the suspect, 24-year-old Matthew James Ruth, who was carrying an AR-style rifle with a suppressor, York County District Attorney Tim Barker said.

Barker said he believed that Ruth had planned to ambush his ex-girlfriend before the detectives walked in.

Ruth fired numerous rounds, killing three of the officers at the door and seriously wounding the fourth, Barker said. A gunfight then ensued between Ruth and two officers outside. Ruth wounded a York County sheriff's deputy before he and another Northern York County Regional officer shot the gunman to death by the road, Barker said.

Detective Sgt. Cody Becker, Detective Mark Baker and Detective Isaiah Emenheiser were killed, he said.

"Each of these men represented the best of policing. They served with professionalism, dedication and courage. They were leaders within our agency, committed to protecting this community and standing beside their fellow officers," Chief Dave Lash said.

All three slain officers were long-time veterans of the nearly 70-officer force, with almost six decades of combined service. Baker, 53, had served 21 years after spending time as a police officer in Philadelphia; Becker, 39, had served 16 years; and Emenheiser, 43, had served 20 years.

The wounded detective and sheriff's officer remained hospitalized, one of whom is in critical but stable condition Thursday.

What happened before the shootout

When the ex-girlfriend's pickup truck mysteriously caught fire one night in August, she suspected Ruth was behind it, but she asked police not to investigate, Barker said.

Instead, she and her mother put up the trail camera and, nearly a month later, called police when they discovered an image of him wearing camouflage and peering into the house through what Barker called a scope-like device.

With misdemeanor warrants for his arrest, police went looking for Ruth.

Investigators went to Ruth's home in Hanover, about 10 miles (16 kilometers) from where the officers were killed, and talked to relatives earlier Wednesday, Barker said. He wasn't there, so they left to try the ex-girlfriend's home again.

Barker said he couldn't immediately say how Ruth got into the ex-girlfriend's house, but he said Ruth had "carefully surveilled the entire residence and the outbuilding areas" and even shot and killed the family dog, a black Labrador, after he entered the home.

Detectives returned to Hanover after the shooting and left with several bags of potential evidence, neighbor Rose Miller said. She didn't know Ruth well, but remembered him working on Boy Scout fundraisers.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 37 of 64

A community mourns

On Thursday night, a couple hundred people gathered for a vigil honoring the officers at a church in Spring Grove, Pennsylvania, some wiping away tears as pastors led prayers and hymns and a woman sang "Amazing Grace." Community members wrote messages on stones and arranged them under a table displaying five lit candles.

"We need to do better as a society," Gov. Josh Shapiro said Wednesday evening. "We need to help the people who think that picking up a gun, picking up a weapon is the answer to resolving disputes."

It was one of the state's deadliest days for law enforcement this century, matching the toll from a shooting in 2009 when three officers were ambushed by a domestic violence suspect sporting a bulletproof vest.

Community members held American flags and saluted as police and emergency vehicles formed a procession to the coroner's office, and people left flowers outside the slain officers' headquarters.

The confrontation unfolded on a rural road in North Codorus, about 46 miles (75 km) north of Baltimore. Neighbor Dirk Anderson heard "quite a few" shots from his home across the street and wondered what was happening. Then he saw a helicopter and police arrive.

In all, some 30 police vehicles arrived, blocking off roads bordered by a barn, a goat farm and soybean and corn fields.

"It's strange walking down this road now and seeing all these cars and knowing what happened here," said Bryan Rice, who lives nearby and regularly walks the road with his wife.

Barker declined to ponder the gunman's "full profile," but said one thing was apparent.

"There is one motive though that is clear for everything. And that is the hateful scourge of domestic violence," he said. "That is what brought us here. That is what brought law enforcement here."

## Trump wraps up UK state visit with gratitude for his hosts while largely sidestepping tough issues

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

AYLESBURY, England (AP) — President Donald Trump said Thursday that he was "tremendously thankful" for the pageantry and splendor lavished on him during his second state visit to the United Kingdom as he wrapped up a trip that largely sidestepped major public disagreements over difficult trade and geopolitical issues.

The mutual warmth, along with Trump's abundance of kind words bestowed on the host country, suggested that an all-out charm offensive by the royal family and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer had its desired effect, even though there was a notable lack of progress on some key matters.

Trump and Starmer signed what both sides hailed as a historic agreement on science and technology, and they held a roundtable with global business leaders where they suggested the deal could mean significant job gains. Among the topics tackled mostly in private talks between Trump and Starmer were the wars in Ukraine and Gaza and U.S. tariff rates on steel imported from Britain.

"The bond between our countries is like no other anywhere in the world," Trump said at a news conference at Chequers, the 16th-century manor house northwest of London that serves as a rural retreat for British leaders. The U.S. and U.K., the American president said, have "done more good for the planet than any other nation in history."

Joining in the bonhomie, Starmer said that "time and time again, it is British and American men and women, side by side, changing the path of history and turning it towards our values, towards freedom, democracy and the rule of law."

The very end of the trip saw Trump's helicopter carrying him from Chequers to the airport at Stansted for his flight to Washington make an unscheduled landing at a local airfield due to what the White House called a "minor hydraulic issue." No one was injured, and a backup chopper completed the journey.

The Trump-Starmer mutual admiration followed King Charles III and Queen Camilla's feting of Trump and first lady Melania Trump at Windsor Castle on Wednesday with all the pomp the monarchy can muster, including the biggest military honor guard ever assembled for a state visit.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 38 of 64

Trump called the king and queen "two fantastic people" and said he was "tremendously thankful" and "grateful beyond words" for the hospitality.

Even high-profile points of dissent, such as Britain's impending move to recognize a Palestinian state, stayed cordial. "I have a disagreement with the prime minister on that score," Trump said, adding that "it's one of our few disagreement, actually."

When Trump was asked about his lack of progress in brokering a deal to end Moscow's war in Ukraine and he acknowledged that Russian President Vladimir Putin has "let me down," Starmer escalated the flattery a notch. The prime minister said he and Trump had discussed how to "decisively increase the pressure on Putin" and that Trump had "led the way here."

There was disagreement, too, over immigration policy.

Trump urged Britain to take a harder line and insisted he had made clear to Starmer that when too many people enter illegally, it "destroys countries from within." Still, when Starmer sharply criticized Hamas, Trump reached over from his podium and slapped the prime minister on the back in support.

'Genuinely like each other'

At an earlier signing ceremony for the agreement meant to promote tech investment, Starmer referred to the Republican president as "my friend, our friend" and spoke of "leaders who respect each other and leaders who genuinely like each other."

The Trumps' final day in Britain began by bidding farewell to the king and queen at Windsor Castle and flying by helicopter to Chequers for more spectacle: a ceremonial honor guard with bagpipers, in a nod to Trump's Scottish heritage, and a parachute demonstration. He also was shown the archive of wartime leader Winston Churchill, who coined the term "special relationship" for the bond between the allies.

It's something Trump's British hosts have stressed repeatedly, almost 250 years after that relationship endured a rocky start in 1776.

To coincide with the visit, Britain said U.S. companies had pledged 150 billion pounds (\$204 billion) in investment in the U.K, including 90 billion pounds (\$122 billion) from investment firm Blackstone in the next decade. Investment will also flow the other way, including almost \$30 billion by pharmaceutical firm GSK in the U.S.

U.K. officials say the deal will bring thousands of jobs and billions in investment in artificial intelligence, quantum computing and nuclear energy. It includes a U.K. arm of Stargate, a Trump-backed AI infrastructure project led by OpenAI, and a host of AI data centers around the U.K. American companies are announcing 31 billion pounds (\$42 billion) in investment in the U.K.'s AI sector, including \$30 billion from Microsoft for products including Britain's largest supercomputer.

British officials said they have not agreed to scrap a digital services tax or water down internet regulation to get the deal, some details of which have yet to be announced.

There was less movement on tariffs.

In May, Starmer and Trump said they had agreed to reduce U.S. tariffs on Britain's key auto and aerospace industries. Talks on lowering duties on steel and aluminum to zero from their current level of 25% have stalled even with a promise four months ago of a settlement within weeks.

Trump was asked in a Fox News Channel interview, taped in London and aired while he flew home, whether he would be willing to decrease tariffs on U.K. steel. He was noncommittal, saying, "We're making a lot of money."

Few advancements on Ukraine while Epstein is largely avoided

The British government has grown increasingly critical of Israel's conduct in Gaza and the suffering of Palestinian civilians. Starmer said the situation was "a humanitarian catastrophe" as he acknowledged a divide with the president on recognizing a Palestinian state.

While the prime minister has played a major part in European efforts to shore up U.S. support for Ukraine, Trump's visit offered few major advancements. Trump even insisted at one point, that the conflict "doesn't affect the U.S."

The president has expressed frustration with Putin, but has not made good on threats to impose new sanctions on Russia. The king, in his state banquet speech Wednesday night, offered Trump a gentle



nudge, noting "as tyranny once again threatens Europe, we and our allies stand together in support of Ukraine, to deter aggression and secure peace."

It seemed like questions about Jeffrey Epstein would dog Trump throughout the trip, especially given that his visit began days after Starmer fired Britain's ambassador to the U.S., Peter Mandelson, over the envoy's past friendship with the convicted sex offender, who authorities say killed himself in 2019.

But Trump largely avoided the issue. Police did arrest four people over a stunt that saw an image of Trump and Jeffrey Epstein projected on a tower at Windsor Castle.

Asked about Mandelson during the news conference, Trump said only that he did not know the former ambassador, despite photographs showing the pair together in the Oval Office.

## **AP Exclusive: Russia, Vietnam using energy profits to avoid possible US sanctions for arms deals**

By DAVID RISING Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Russia and Vietnam have developed a back-door method of concealing arms deal payments to avoid American and other Western sanctions, using the profits from joint oil and gas ventures to pay off defense contracts without any open transfers of cash through the global banking system, according to internal Vietnamese documents obtained by The Associated Press.

Under the system, Vietnam has purchased Russian military equipment including fighter jets, tanks and ships on credit from Moscow, then paid that credit back from its share of profits from a joint Vietnam-Russia oil company operating in Siberia. Such transactions are irregular in international financial markets and in this case are designed to keep cash quietly flowing even if sanctions aimed at ending Russia's war on Ukraine are strengthened, the documents make clear.

The revelation comes at a precarious time when the U.S. is trying to strengthen ties with Vietnam as a bulwark against growing Chinese assertiveness in Southeast Asia, and has ongoing trade negotiations with Hanoi after the White House imposed 20% tariffs, while at the same time President Donald Trump is threatening even more stringent sanctions on Moscow.

The European Union has also added a raft of new sanctions to pressure Russian President Vladimir Putin to end the war, and Trump recently issued an executive order doubling tariffs on India to 50% to pressure New Delhi to stop buying Russian oil and military equipment, which he said was helping enable the war against Ukraine.

The Trump Organization, the president's family business, also broke ground earlier this year on a \$1.5 billion luxury golf complex outside the capital, Hanoi, after Vietnam fast-tracked approval. The president's sons run the organization, but financial disclosures in June indicated that Trump himself benefits from many of its activities.

News that the unorthodox arrangement was in the works leaked in 2023. But rather than shutting it down, an internal document from last year reveals that Russia and Vietnam finalized and implemented it, while also making agreements to ensure it would produce sufficient funds for future military purchases.

The Vietnamese government document that was leaked in 2023 and the newer government document from last year were provided to The Associated Press by an official who said that he was part of a faction opposed to closer ties to Russia at the risk of jeopardizing the growing relationship with Washington. He provided the documents on condition of anonymity to protect himself from possible reprisals from Vietnam's authoritarian government.

The U.S. State Department refused to comment specifically on the documents or the payment plan designed to skirt American sanctions, referring comments to the Vietnamese government. It reiterated broadly, however, that "our sanctions remain in place."

"Those engaging in certain transactions or activities with sanctioned entities and individuals may expose themselves to sanctions risk or be subject to an enforcement action," the State Department said in an email to the AP this week.

# Groton Daily Independent

**Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 40 of 64**

Vietnam's Ministry of Industry, the Vietnam Oil and Gas Group, known as Petrovietnam or PVN, and the Foreign Ministry did not respond to multiple emails seeking comment on the payment scheme. Russia's Finance Ministry, which conducted the negotiations for Moscow, also did not respond.

"It's not your typical flexible financing. It's not your typical offset or counter-trade provisions," said Evan Laksmana, who leads the Southeast Asian Security and Defense research program for the International Institute for Strategic Studies think tank.

"It is," Laksmana said, "next-level stuff."

How the arrangement works

The mechanism involves using Vietnam's profits from a joint Vietnam-Russia oil venture in Siberia, Rusvietpetro, to repay loans for military purchases while avoiding transactions through the global SWIFT network system, which powers most international financial transfers and is overseen by the United States and other Western nations. In effect, it's a series of transactions that skip carefully laid global financial pathways, keeping transactions secret.

Final details of the agreement were laid out last summer in the 2024 memo obtained by the AP, from PVN to Vietnam's Ministry of Industry and Trade ahead of a visit to Hanoi by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The plan outlined involves:

—First, Vietnamese profits from the Rusvietpetro joint venture in Siberia are sent to Moscow to pay back credit extended for military purchases;

—then, Vietnam's profits exceeding the loan repayments are transferred to Russian state-owned oil and gas company Zarubezhneft in Russia;

—finally, in Vietnam, Zarubezhneft uses its joint venture company there to transfer an equal amount of money to PVN, effectively avoiding any international financial transfers.

"In the context of the U.S. and Western countries imposing sanctions on Russia in general and removing Russia from SWIFT in particular, this payment method is considered relatively confidential and appropriate because money only circulates within the territory of Vietnam and Russia and Vietnam does not have to worry about the risks of being affected by the U.S. embargo," PVN's general director, Le Ngoc Son, writes in the June 11, 2024, document.

Laksmana said he did not have previous knowledge of the plan, but that it fit with Moscow's approach toward arms deals in the region. In 2017, for example, Russia agreed to provide 11 Sukhoi Su-35 fighter jets to Indonesia in exchange for palm oil, coffee and other goods.

"Russia was for a long time in Southeast Asia considered to be among the most flexible in terms of its payment mechanisms," he said.

Two Western diplomats posted to Hanoi said they had long suspected Vietnam and Russia had a backdoor agreement to pay for large military contracts, though the specifics of the agreement in the documents obtained by the AP were new to them. They both spoke on condition of anonymity due to the political sensitivities of the issue.

Why is the mechanism necessary?

Zarubezhneft does not currently face sanctions imposed following Russia's attacks on Ukraine, though its CEO, Sergei Kudryashov, was named in a raft of sweeping sanctions on the Russian energy sector announced in January, ten days before Trump was inaugurated.

Zarubezhneft board chairman Evgeniy Murov, a former KGB officer, was also sanctioned by the U.S. in 2014 when he headed the Federal Protective Service, responsible for the safety of Russian President Vladimir Putin and other high-ranking officials.

As individuals on the Office of Foreign Assets Control's SDN list, any assets they have in the U.S. would be blocked and Americans would be prohibited from having direct dealings with them.

The mechanism outlined in the documents obtained by the AP seems intended to avoid the possibility of future sanctions, and the threat of secondary sanctions that could be imposed on those who facilitate the activities of entities under primary sanctions.

"If you want to insulate yourself from any kind of risk, you then basically avoid cross-border transactions and create these kind of offsetting payment schemes," said Ben Hilgenstock, a senior economist at the

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 41 of 64

Kyiv School of Economics who is an expert on Russian sanctions and analyzed the Vietnamese documents for the AP.

Following a wave of fresh Russian attacks on Ukraine this month, Trump has said he is ready to move to a second phase of sanctions on Moscow or countries that buy its oil. Last week, EU and American officials met in Washington to discuss details. Last Friday, Britain announced a new set of sanctions targeting Russia's oil revenues and military supplies, including banning 70 ships from a "shadow fleet" it said is being used to transport Russian oil to circumvent international sanctions.

The main threat of secondary sanctions comes from the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, or CAATSA, measures adopted during Trump's first term, which make it possible to impose sanctions on countries or people with commercial dealings with Russia's military-industrial complex.

The threat is particularly powerful due to its vagueness, Hilgenstock said, which prompts companies and countries to exercise an overabundance of caution.

"Everyone else is left figuring out where exactly the red line is and how to toe it, and how not to cross it," he said. "And the result is compliance, or more often overcompliance."

Vietnam's strategic strength is on the rise

Vietnam has one of the most capable militaries in Southeast Asia and has been strengthening its naval and air power, largely geared toward a possible threat from China. China today is Vietnam's largest trade partner, but confrontations between the two countries over South China Sea territorial claims are growing.

The United States, meantime, is Vietnam's largest export market. And since Washington lifted its arms embargo on Vietnam in 2016, it has become increasingly important in supplying defense goods. The U.S. government also sees Vietnam as an important strategic partner as it seeks to counter China.

A decades-long defense relationship with Russia means that Vietnam will be dependent upon Russia for spare parts and other material for years to come, however, and recent contracts suggest Hanoi is not backing away from Moscow even as ties with the U.S. grow closer.

In 2011, Russia extended Vietnam \$2 billion in credit for a deal that included two frigates for its navy and 64 T90S tanks. Another \$8 billion in credit was given for a 2023 defense deal involving SU-30 fighter jets and two more frigates; none of which Russia has delivered yet.

The official who provided the two internal Vietnamese-language documents detailing the repayment arrangement provided access to other internal government information that was verified by the AP through other sources, demonstrating his role in multiple high-level activities within Vietnam's political and governmental hierarchy.

The earlier document outlining the early stages of planning, from March 2023, was reported on by The New York Times later that same year.

In the earlier document, Vietnam's Finance Ministry warns that arms deals with Russia could lead to American sanctions "because the U.S. has continuously pressured Vietnam to switch to buying U.S. weapons, threatening to sanction Vietnam under CAATSA if Vietnam continues to buy Russian weapons."

But at the same time, it suggests the United States may be persuaded to hold off on imposing sanctions on Vietnam because, among other things, "the U.S. values Vietnam's role in implementing the Indo-Pacific strategy" meant to counter China's growing assertiveness.

When the 2023 document leaked, Vietnam's ruling Communist Party dismissed it as a Russian fake meant to damage Hanoi's relations with Washington, as the countries prepared to elevate their relations to a "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership," Vietnam's highest level of diplomatic ties, an official privy to the internal communications told the AP on condition of anonymity to avoid possible reprisals.

But there was no sign of any rift when then President Joe Biden arrived in September 2023 to finalize the partnership.

Analysis of the documents backs up their authenticity

Both documents appear genuine, from the embedded metadata, format, unique classification codes and other details, said Ben Swanton, co-director of The 88 Project, an NGO focused on human rights abuses in Vietnam that frequently deals with government documents.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 42 of 64

Vietnam also has a track record of deliberately misleading Washington, and when it has been called out on it, so far there has been no action taken, he said.

For example, last year the 88 Project provided the U.S. State Department with internal Vietnamese documents detailing how Hanoi was misinforming Washington about its efforts to address human trafficking concerns, but the State Department upgraded Vietnam in its annual trafficking report anyhow, Swanton said.

"Vietnam has learned that Washington will give it a free pass basically," he said.

The State Department defended the decision to upgrade Vietnam, saying that "the government demonstrated overall increasing efforts" to eliminate trafficking, though conceded it still "did not fully meet the minimum standards."

Plans spelled out in the documents obtained by AP have also now come to fruition. During Putin's June 2024 visit to Hanoi, Zarubezhneft received a license to develop the "Block 11-2" gas field on Vietnam's continental shelf, the same area mentioned in the 2024 PVN memo. An internal PVN document from this April, obtained by the AP from a different source, said Zarubezhneft had begun 3D mapping of the block.

And during a May visit to Moscow, a delegation led by To Lam, Vietnam's top official, signed a number of oil and gas exploration-related deals and a "Strategic Partnership Plan" for defense and other cooperation covering 2026 to 2030, according to a joint statement from both sides.

It now remains to be seen how the mechanism will be used as sanctions pressure grows from the EU and the U.S., said Huong Le-Thu, deputy director of the International Crisis Group think tank's Asia Program.

"Vietnam needs to navigate in this less conducive diplomatic environment where being too close to Russia will not be well received in European capitals," Le-Thu said, noting that Hanoi is also now faced with an American administration far more transactional in approach.

"It's fair to assume they are not going to be as generous as the previous administrations," she said, "even with a recognition of Vietnam's strategic value."

## Kennedy's advisory panel recommends new restrictions on MMRV vaccines

By MIKE STOBBE and LAURA UNGAR Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — U.S. Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s hand-picked vaccine advisory committee on Thursday recommended the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention adopt new restrictions on a combination shot that protects against chickenpox as well as measles, mumps and rubella.

The panel advised that the vaccine known as MMRV not be given before age 4 and that children in this age group instead get separate vaccines — one against MMR and another for varicella, or chickenpox. The vote was 8-3, with one member abstaining.

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices put off an expected vote on hepatitis B shots given to infants on the day they are born. On Friday, it's expected to decide whether to recommend that some babies can wait a month for those shots, and to also take up COVID-19 shots.

The committee makes recommendations to the CDC director on how already-approved vaccines should be used. CDC directors have almost always accepted those recommendations, which are widely heeded by doctors and guide vaccination programs. Committee Chairman Martin Kulldorff said committee members aim to reassure the public and remove unnecessary risks and harms.

But many doctors and public health experts say the committee is creating fear and mistrust around vaccines at a time when U.S. vaccination rates are already falling. Kennedy, a leading antivaccine activist before becoming the nation's top health official, has made or proposed numerous changes to the nation's vaccine system, including firing the entire 17-member panel earlier this year and replacing it with a group that includes several anti-vaccine voices.

Thursday's meeting "promoted false claims and misguided information about vaccines as part of an unprecedented effort to limit access to routine childhood immunizations and sow fear and mistrust in vaccines," Dr. Susan Kressly, president of the American Academy of Pediatrics, said in a statement. "Instead of emerging with clear guidance about vaccines that we know protect against serious illnesses, families



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 43 of 64

are left with confusion, chaos and false information.”

Experts are also concerned the panel’s actions could narrow access to the vaccines. The group voted 8-1, with three abstentions, to keep MMRV covered for kids as young as 12 months under the Vaccines for Children program, which pays for about half the shots given to kids in the U.S.

Several committee members expressed confusion during that follow-up vote on whether to align payments under the program with the more restrictive vaccine guidance they had just passed. Another federal official noted that there are other government insurance programs, including Medicaid, that will need to stop paying for that early combo dose because they have to follow CDC recommendations.

Panelists focus on rare seizures

Discussions on the MMRV vaccine focused largely on rare instances of feverish seizures associated with the first dose, given to kids between ages 1 and 2.

Committee member Dr. Cody Meissner said such seizures may be “a very frightening experience” for families, but medical experts agree they’re not linked to brain function or school problems.

The panel last dealt with the issue in 2009, when it said either the combination shot or separate MMR and chickenpox shots were acceptable for the first dose, but that separate doses were generally preferred. Today, 85% of kids receive separate doses for the first round, according to information presented at the meeting.

Some doctors and public health experts say they are not aware of any new safety data that would explain the revisiting of those vaccination recommendations — and, in fact, many of the studies discussed Thursday were more than a decade old.

Dr. Richard Haupt, a vice president at Merck, which makes the MMRV vaccine ProQuad, said it’s been evaluated through clinical trials and post-approval studies, and the slight increase in feverish seizures after the first dose led to current CDC recommendations. Combination vaccines improve completion and on-time vaccination at a time when the nation is seeing a troubling decline in vaccination coverage, he said.

Mike Osterholm, a University of Minnesota expert on infectious diseases, said he doesn’t see the need for a new recommendation.

“It’s solution looking for a problem,” he said in an interview. “We have managed the MMRV vaccine situation for a number of years without any issues in terms of safety. It is a situation where it also allows a parent to have that discussion with their healthcare provider.”

The vaccine panel also discussed the hepatitis B shot

As many as 2.4 million people in U.S. are estimated to have hepatitis B, which can cause serious liver infections, and half are unaware of infection, a CDC presenter told the panel.

In adults, the virus is spread through sex or through sharing needles during injection-drug use. But it can also be passed to a baby from an infected mother, and as many as 90% of infected infants go on to have chronic infections. The virus can also live on surfaces for more than seven days at room temperature, and unvaccinated children living with anyone with a chronic infection are at risk.

A hepatitis B vaccine was first licensed in the U.S. in 1981. In 2005, the ACIP recommended a dose within 24 hours of birth for all medically stable infants who weigh at least 4.4 pounds (2 kilograms). The infant shots are 85% to 95% effective in preventing chronic hepatitis B infections, studies have shown.

Following the 2005 recommendation, hepatitis B cases among infants fell from 5,494 cases per year in 2005 to 2,214 cases in 2023.

During Thursday’s discussion, some committee members questioned whether babies born to moms who test positive for hepatitis B are the only ones who truly need a vaccine in the first day of life.

By giving virtually all babies the hepatitis B right after birth, “Are we asking our babies to solve an adult problem?” asked committee member Dr. Evelyn Griffin.

But Meissner expressed bewilderment at some of this discussion.

“This an absolutely safe vaccine,” he said. “I’m not sure what we’re gaining by avoiding that first dose within 12 to 24 hours after birth.”

Several outside medical experts asked why the committee was debating the issue at all.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 44 of 64

"The signal that is prompting this is not one of safety," committee member Dr. Robert Malone responded. "It's one of trust. And it's one of parents uncomfortable with this medical procedure being performed at birth in a rather unilateral fashion without significant informed consent."

Osterholm said there will be consequences.

"As more doubt is sown in the safety of vaccines by this committee and political leaders in our health department, we're going to see fewer people getting vaccinated and the return of the diseases we largely conquered," he said. "It will make us less safe and less healthy as a nation."

## Strikes and protests roil France, pitting the streets against Macron and his new prime minister

By NICOLAS GARRIGA, THOMAS ADAMSON and SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Marching with thousands of other protesters in Paris, hospital nurse Aya Touré put her finger on the pulse of many who took to streets across France on Thursday against the government of President Emmanuel Macron.

"Fed up. Really, really fed up," she said. "Those people governing us, they have no clue about real-life issues. We are paying the price."

Strikes that hobbled the Paris Metro and disrupted other services, coupled with nationwide demonstrations that saw sporadic clashes with police who fired volleys of tear gas, gave loud voice to widespread complaints that eight years of leadership by France's business-friendly president have benefited too few people and hurt too many.

The day of upheaval for the European Union's second-largest economy aimed to turn up the heat on new Prime Minister Sébastien Lecornu and his boss, Macron. They're engaged in an intensifying battle both in parliament and on the streets about how to plug holes in France's finances, with opponents fighting proposals to cut spending on public services that underpin the French way of life.

"I don't know how it's even possible to consider making cost savings," said Clara Simon, a history student who marched in the crowd of demonstrators in Paris, brandishing a poster that read: "University in danger."

"There's already no money for soaps in the toilets, no money to fix a seat when it's broken," she said. "I'm angry because the economic and social situation in France is deteriorating every year."

Protesters' anger at budget cuts

Macron's opponents complain that taxpayer-funded public services — free schools and public hospitals, subsidized health care, unemployment benefits and other safety nets that are cherished in France — are being eroded by his governments that have lurched from crisis to crisis since he dissolved parliament in 2024, triggering a legislative election that stacked Parliament's lower house with critics of the president.

Left-wing parties and their supporters want the wealthy and businesses to pay more to help rein in France's debts, rather than see public spending cuts that they contend will hit low-paid and middle-class workers. Placards at the Paris demonstration read: "Tax the rich."

"We need to find money where there's money," said Pierre Courois, a 65-year-old retired civil servant. "France's deficit is an issue, but it's not by cutting on public services that you fix it."

Many complained about mounting poverty, sharpening inequality and struggles to make ends meet.

"Our pay is stuck, colleagues are leaving, and wards are closing beds," said 34-year-old public hospital nurse Stephane Lambert. "For us it's the same story: less money in our pockets, fewer hands to help, more pressure every day."

At a before-dawn protest at a Paris bus depot, striking transportation worker Nadia Belhoum said people are "being squeezed like a lemon even if there's no more juice."

Lecornu's baptism of fire

As he seeks support for belt-tightening, Lecornu has trimmed lifetime benefits for former government ministers — a largely symbolic first step that won't generate huge savings — and scrapped wildly unpopular proposals to eliminate two public holidays, a measure intended to spur revenue. He has been meeting

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 45 of 64

opposition leaders and labor unions to try to build consensus for a budget, but his close relationship with Macron puts him in the firing line, too.

"Bringing in Lecornu doesn't change anything — he's just another man in a suit who will follow Macron's line," said 22-year-old student Juliette Martin.

On his first day in office last week, anti-government protests saw streets choked with smoke, barricades in flames and volleys of tear gas as demonstrators denounced budget cuts and political turmoil. That "Block Everything" campaign became a prelude for Thursday's even larger demonstrations.

"For decades we've been the ones paying for the rich, paying for the billionaires, paying for the capitalists and they've emptied our pockets," automobile factory union representative Jean Pierre Mercier said. "And today, supposedly, we must repay the debt, and once again it's only the workers who are asked to pay, whether we're employed, disabled, or retired."

## Scattered violence

The first whiffs of police tear gas came before daybreak, with scuffles between riot officers and protesters in Paris. The collapse of successive governments — brought down by votes in parliament — that sought to push through savings has given Macron's critics a sense of momentum. The "Block Everything" campaign that developed online before taking to the streets also added to the climate of crisis.

As it did last week, the government said it was again deploying police in exceptionally large numbers — about 80,000 in all — to keep order on Thursday. Police were ordered to break up blockades and other efforts to prevent people who weren't protesting from going about their business.

Paris police used tear gas to disperse a before-dawn blockade of a bus depot and deployed in force, backed by armored vehicles and firing more gas, at the afternoon march in the capital. French broadcasters also reported sporadic clashes in the western cities of Nantes and Rennes, and Lyon in the southeast, with volleys of police tear gas and projectiles targeting officers.

Striking rail workers waving flares made a brief foray into the Paris headquarters of the Economics Ministry, leaving trails of smoke in the air before leaving.

"The bourgeoisie of this country have been gorging themselves, they don't even know what to do with their money anymore. So if there is indeed a crisis, the question is who should pay for it," said Fabien Villedieu, a leader of the SUD-Rail train workers union. "We are asking that the government's austerity plan that consists of making the poorest in this country always pay — whether they are employees, retirees, students — ends and that we make the richest in this country pay."

The Interior Ministry reported 181 arrests nationwide as the afternoon ended and more than 450,000 demonstrators outside Paris, with protests in big cities and small towns. Paris police said that another 55,000 people marched in the capital. Participation estimates from the CGT, among unions that called the strikes and demonstrations, were double those of police, reporting more than 1 million strikers and protesters nationwide.

## Travel disruptions

The Paris Metro operator said that rush-hour services suffered fewer disruptions than anticipated, but that traffic largely stopped outside those hours except on three driverless automated lines.

French national rail company SNCF said that "a few disruptions" were expected on high-speed trains to France and Europe, but most will run.

"Every time there's a protest, it feels like daily life is held hostage," said office worker Nathalie Laurent, grappling with morning disruptions on the Paris Metro.

"Lecornu — he's only just started, but if this is his idea of stability, then he has a long way to go," she said.

## Judge blocks Trump administration from deporting Guatemalan migrant children

By REBECCA SANTANA and VALERIE GONZALEZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal judge on Thursday blocked President Donald Trump's administration from immediately deporting Guatemalan migrant children who came to the U.S. alone back to their home

# Groton Daily Independent

**Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 46 of 64**

country, the latest step in a court struggle over one of the most sensitive issues in Trump's hard-line immigration agenda.

The decision by U.S. District Judge Timothy J. Kelly comes after the Republican administration's Labor Day weekend attempt to remove Guatemalan migrant children who were living in government shelters and foster care.

Trump administration officials said they were seeking to reunify children with parents who wanted them returned home. "But that explanation crumbled like a house of cards about a week later," Kelly, who was nominated by Trump, wrote. "There is no evidence before the Court that the parents of these children sought their return."

Homeland Security Assistant Secretary Tricia McLaughlin in a statement insisted on the administration's initial claims that parents requested being reunited with their children. "This judge is blocking efforts to REUNIFY CHILDREN with their families. Now these children will have to go to shelters," McLaughlin said. "All just to 'get Trump.' This is disgraceful and immoral."

White House spokesperson Abigail Jackson in a statement said that "The lower court wrongly interjected itself into this effort" of reuniting families.

Advocates for the children also submitted a whistleblower account to the court that suggests many of the children who were found eligible for deportation had likely been victims of child abuse, like death threats, gang violence, and human trafficking, Kelly noted in his order.

"The court saw through the government's repeated misrepresentations of critical facts to try to justify the indefensible targeting of vulnerable children who would have faced danger if forcibly sent to other countries," Efrén C. Olivares, vice president of litigation & legal strategy at the National Immigration Law Center, said in a statement.

There was already a temporary order in place preventing the removal of Guatemalan children. But that was set to expire Tuesday. Kelly granted a preliminary injunction extends that temporary protection indefinitely, although the government can appeal.

Kelly did rebuff advocates' push to block the removal of children from additional countries, though he said any attempt to remove those children in a similar way would likely be unlawful. Legal advocates working with Kids in Need of Defense visited Honduras last week and found government officials and nongovernmental organizations working "furiously" to receive as many as 400 children back from the United States.

There are also temporary restraining orders in separate cases in Arizona and Illinois, but those cases are much more narrow in the scope of children they cover, underlining the importance of the Washington case.

In a late-night operation Aug. 30, the administration notified shelters where migrant children traveling alone initially live after they cross the U.S.-Mexico border that they would be returning the children to Guatemala and that they needed to have the kids ready to leave in a matter of hours.

"Our clients were terrified—many had tear-soaked faces and some were visibly shaking with fear," Mishan Wroe, directing attorney at the National Center for Youth Law, one of the plaintiff attorneys, said in a statement.

Contractors for Immigration and Customs Enforcement picked up the Guatemalan children from shelters and foster care and transported them to the airport. The government has said in court filings that it identified 457 children for possible removal to Guatemala although that list was eventually whittled down to 327. In the end, 76 got as far as boarding planes in El Paso and Harlingen, Texas, on Aug. 31 and were set to depart to Guatemala in what the government described as a first phase.

Bertilda López's 17-year-old son was among those slated to be sent to Guatemala. Over Labor Day weekend, he called his family late at night to tell them he was being sent home and she drove through the night to get to the capital.

She expressed mixed feelings about the judge's decision Thursday.

"As a mother I want him to be well, whether that's sending him (home) or him being locked up there," López said. "Maybe it's better that they send him back because he's really sad. The way things are there (in the U.S.), it bothers me that my son is locked up."

Elisabeth Toca, who is sponsoring the boy and hopeful he will be allowed to stay, said she's still hoping



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 47 of 64

she will be able to get him out of U.S. custody and "give him a better life."

Guatemala's government declined to comment, saying only that it was an internal U.S. justice process.

Immigration and children's advocates, who had been alerted of possible efforts to remove Guatemalan minors, immediately sued the Trump administration to prevent the children's removal. The advocates argued that many of these children were fleeing abuse or violence in their home countries and that the government was bypassing longstanding legal procedures meant to protect young migrants from being returned to potentially abusive or violent places.

"This was a tragedy in the making that was barely averted thanks to the tireless efforts of advocates across the country who saw that children were being endangered and raised the alarm," Shaina Aber, executive director of the Acacia Center for Justice, said in a statement.

Another federal judge in Washington granted advocates a temporary restraining order largely preventing the Trump administration from removing Guatemalan migrant children in its care except in limited circumstances where an immigration judge had already ordered their removal after reviewing their cases. That initial 14-day order was set to expire on Sunday, and then Kelly extended it through Tuesday to give him extra time to examine the case.

The government has argued that it has the right to return children in its care and it was acting at the behest of the Guatemalan government. But the government walked back an initial claim alleging the parents requested their children be sent back.

The Guatemalan government has said that it was concerned over minors in U.S. custody who were going to turn 18 and would then be at risk of being turned over to adult detention facilities.

Children who cross the southern border alone are generally transferred to the Office of Refugee Resettlement, which falls under the Department of Health and Human Services. The children usually live in a network of shelters across the country that are overseen by the resettlement office until they are eventually released to a sponsor, usually a relative.

After advocates got the temporary restraining order approved for Guatemalan children, they also asked the court to extend protections from deportation to children of other nationalities after hearing reports that the government was intending to remove Honduran children as well.

## Nvidia to invest \$5 billion in struggling rival Intel

By KELVIN CHAN and MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writers

Nvidia, the world's leading chipmaker, announced on Thursday that it's investing \$5 billion in Intel and will collaborate with the struggling semiconductor company.

Nvidia said it will spend \$5 billion to buy Intel common stock at \$23.28 a share. The investment, which is subject to regulatory approvals, comes a month after the U.S. government took a 10% stake in Intel.

Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang called it "a fusion of two world-class platforms" that combines Intel's strength in making conventional computer chips, known as CPUs, that power most laptops, with Nvidia's focus on the specialized graphics chips that are critical for artificial intelligence.

"This partnership is a recognition that computing has fundamentally changed," Huang told reporters Thursday. "The era of accelerated and AI computing has arrived."

Intel shares jumped nearly 23%, its biggest one-day percentage gain since 1987. Nvidia shares added more than 3%.

For data centers, Intel will make custom chips that Nvidia will use in its AI infrastructure platforms. For personal computer products, Intel will build chips that integrate Nvidia technology.

The agreement provides a lifeline for Intel, which was a Silicon Valley pioneer that enjoyed decades of growth as its processors powered the personal computer boom, but fell into a slump after missing the shift to the mobile computing era unleashed by the iPhone's 2007 debut.

Intel fell even farther behind in recent years amid the AI boom that's propelled Nvidia into the world's most valuable company. Intel lost nearly \$19 billion last year and another \$3.7 billion in the first six months of this year, and expects to slash its workforce by a quarter by the end of 2025.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 48 of 64

U.S. President Donald Trump's administration stepped in last month to secure a 10% stake — 433.3 million shares of non-voting stock priced at \$20.47 apiece — making it one of Intel's biggest shareholders. Federal officials said they invested in Intel in order to bolster U.S. technology and domestic manufacturing.

Of Nvidia's own Intel stake, Huang said "the Trump administration had no involvement in this partnership at all," though "would have been very supportive, of course."

Intel's stock price surge Thursday pushed the total value of the U.S. government's stake in Intel to \$13.2 billion, a \$2.5 billion increase from before Nvidia's announcement.

Huang said Nvidia has been in talks with Intel for about a year. Intel CEO Lip-Bu Tan, who joined the press call with Huang on Thursday, said he's been talking to Nvidia since he was named Intel's new leader in March.

"This is a very big, important milestone," Tan said. "I call it a game-changing opportunity that we can work together."

The deal is "bullish for U.S. tech," Wedbush Securities analyst Daniel Ives said in a client note.

Ives said it brings Intel "front and center into the AI game" and, combined with the U.S. government stake, adds to "a golden few weeks for Intel after years of pain and frustration for investors."

Nvidia, meanwhile, has soared because its specialized chips are underpinning the AI boom. The chips, known as graphics processing units, or GPUs, are highly effective at developing powerful AI systems.

Left out of the celebration Thursday was another U.S. chipmaking rival, Advanced Micro Devices. Shares in the leading maker of both GPUs and CPUs dropped slightly Thursday. AMD, Intel and Nvidia are all headquartered in Santa Clara, California.

The deal between Nvidia and Intel comes as China moves to be less dependent on U.S. semiconductor technology. This week, Chinese officials reportedly forbade several large domestic technology companies from purchasing Nvidia chips, and China-based Huawei announced that it was expanding its development of AI chips and manufacturing.

While Nvidia and Intel will work together to develop new chips, a manufacturing deal has yet to be struck between the two. The potential access to Intel's chip foundries by Nvidia poses a risk to Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, which currently manufactures the tech giant's flagship processors. Huang emphasized Thursday that both his company and Intel remain "very successful customers" of TSMC.

Huang has been in Britain on a visit that coincides with Trump's trip to the country, and he has been attending events with the president along with other Silicon Valley bigwigs.

At a signing ceremony for a trans-Atlantic tech partnership on Thursday with British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, Trump mused that AI was "taking over the world."

"I'm looking at you guys. You're taking over the world, Jensen," Trump said.

Huang and Trump also both attended a royal banquet, prompting the tech mogul to dish about the Windsor Castle event to Intel's CEO in the seconds before their press event.

"The cognac was excellent, but just not enough of it," Huang told Tan. "I guess the cognac was from 1912."

## DC leaders defend crime fighting efforts to Congress as federal law enforcement surge continues

By GARY FIELDS and MATT BROWN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser on Thursday defended her policies to Congress as President Donald Trump's law enforcement surge is in its second month and lawmakers act to further limit the city's authority.

She was invited to the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform to answer questions about crime in the nation's capital. Trump issued an emergency order last month that federalized the city's police department and launched a surge of law enforcement. The emergency order expired earlier this month but federal agencies and the National Guard continue their operations in the city.

Bowser listed off the city's accomplishments in reducing crime, acknowledging that the federal interven-

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 49 of 64

tion had enhanced those achievements.

"Any crime is too much crime," Bowser said. "But we're trending in the right direction."

Bowser is leading the city at a time when the district's self-governance is being challenged in ways never before seen since the passage of the Home Rule Act of 1973, which grants the district some autonomy. Federal leaders retain significant control over local affairs, including the approval of the budget and laws passed by the D.C. Council.

Committee chair berated Bowser and other officials on crime

Committee chair Rep. James Comer berated Bowser and other city officials for D.C. crime, opening the hearing with a litany of recent offenses, many of them crimes involving current and former congressional staff members, including the fatal shooting of Congressional intern Eric Tarpinian-Jachym.

"These high crime rates are largely driven by historically high rates of juvenile crime, which were enabled by ultra-progressive, soft on crime policies enacted by the D.C. Council and supported by the D.C. Attorney General," he said.

Comer also talked about other changes in D.C. law that had eliminated mandatory minimum sentences for most crimes as well as changes that restricted local police from pursuing criminals.

"Officers cannot execute their duties as effectively, leaving morale, retention and recruitment numbers at historic lows for the Metro Police Department," he said. "These actions send every signal to criminals, especially juveniles, that they can commit crimes in the district without accountability."

Trump has touted the law enforcement surge as a resounding success in driving down the city's crime rate — an assertion Bowser has supported. But data showed that crime was already falling before the federal intervention.

The city's crime has been a central theme for Republicans, including Trump, who proclaimed the emergency in August because of what he described as "disgraceful" and out of control crime. Trump has threatened to issue another emergency order if Bowser follows through on her promise to not cooperate with immigration enforcement.

Bills would realign D.C.'s criminal justice system

At the hearing, the tone of questions from members of the committee depended on party affiliation. Democrats defended the leadership of the district's leaders.

Bowser's appearance before the committee came one day after the House passed the legislation of what would be a major realignment of the district's criminal justice system.

The bills in question — including lowering the age at which juveniles can be charged as adults for some crimes to 14 from 16, as well as eliminating D.C.'s role in selecting judges and leaving that solely to the president, passed out of the committee last week. The House Rules Committee passed the same group of bills on Monday and the House, with a number of Democrats supporting the measures, approved the bills.

The bills are not likely to get through the Senate filibuster but they are among the most comprehensive crime packages to advance in Congress in recent memory.

D.C. Council Chairman Phil Mendelson, also at the hearing, said Washington was "a city under siege."

"It is frustrating to watch this committee debate and vote on 14 bills regarding the district without a single public hearing, with no input from district officials or the public," he said.

D.C. Attorney General Brian Schwab, who filed a lawsuit challenging the federal intervention, said that his office only has jurisdiction in juvenile cases in D.C., where it prosecutes them vigorously. He pointed out that his office prosecutes 84% of all violent juvenile cases, including 90% of homicides and attempted homicides and 87 percent of carjackings. "Kids must face consequences when they break the law," he said.

The hearing included discussions about D.C.'s diversity, equality and inclusion programs, reparations and how to define womanhood, a reflection of how Congress has the power to control broad aspects of the capital's day-to-day workings, should it choose to.

GOP Rep. Nancy Mace of South Carolina pressed Bowser on a series of social policies and language she objected to in the district's legal code. She argued those were causes for federal intervention into the city and said she was introducing legislation to address them.

The five-hour plus hearing had moments of high-tension, primarily between committee members but

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 50 of 64

there were moments of agreement. Under questioning from GOP Rep. Byron Donalds of Florida, Mendelson acknowledged that the additional federal authorities, such as the FBI and the DEA had brought crime down even more during the 30-day period.

"The additional law enforcement resources has been good. We work with those different agencies all the time. There was more of it, more of a good thing," he said. "National Guard is separate. ICE is separate."

"The hearing was disgraceful in its characterization of the district," Bowser told reporters after the hearing. "We know that the district is 700,000 people, great neighborhoods, great businesses, where people want to live, start businesses, send their kids to school and visit. Did the district have a crime spike in 2023? Yes. Have we driven down crime in the two years since? Yes. And so to characterize the district as some dystopian hell hole is categorically false."

## What are Nexstar and Sinclair, the ABC affiliate owners who issued statements against Jimmy Kimmel

By MAE ANDERSON and MATT SEDENSKY Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Two ABC affiliate owners spoke out against late night talk show host Jimmy Kimmel ahead of ABC's decision to suspend the presenter over comments he made about the killing of conservative activist Charlie Kirk. Their comments highlight the influence local TV station owners have on national broadcasters such as Disney-owned ABC.

Here are key facts about the two companies.

**Nexstar Media Group**

Nexstar Media Group, based in Irving, Texas, operates 28 ABC affiliates. It said it would pull Kimmel's show starting Wednesday. Kimmel's comments about Kirk's death were "offensive and insensitive at a critical time in our national political discourse," said Andrew Alford, president of Nexstar's broadcasting division.

The company owns or partners with more than 200 stations in 116 U.S. markets, and owns broadcast networks the CW and NewsNation, as well as the political website The Hill and nearly a third of the Food Network.

It hopes to get even bigger. Last month, it announced a \$6.2 billion deal to buy TEGNA Inc., which owns 64 other TV stations.

The deal would require the Federal Communications Commission to change rules limiting the number of stations a single company can own. The FCC's chair, Brendan Carr, has expressed openness to changing the rule.

**Sinclair Broadcast Group**

Sinclair Broadcast Group, based in Hunt Valley, Maryland, operates 38 local ABC affiliates. On Wednesday the company, which has a reputation for a conservative viewpoint in its broadcasts, called on Kimmel to apologize to Kirk's family and make a "meaningful personal donation" to the activist's political organization, Turning Point USA. Sinclair said its ABC stations will air a tribute to Kirk on Friday in Kimmel's time slot.

Sinclair owns, operates or provides services to 178 TV stations in 81 markets affiliated with all major broadcast networks and owns Tennis Channel.

**Controversies**

Sinclair made headlines in 2018 when a video that stitched together dozens of news anchors for Sinclair-owned local stations reading identical statements decrying "the troubling trend of irresponsible, one-sided news stories plaguing the country" went viral. Sinclair didn't disclose that it ordered the anchors to read the statement.

Nexstar operates similarly.

Danilo Yanich, professor of public policy at the University of Delaware, said the company is the "biggest duplicator" of news content today. His research showed Nexstar stations duplicated broadcasts more than other affiliate owners.

**Affiliate influence**



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 51 of 64

Lauren Herold, an editor of the forthcoming book "Local TV," said the web of companies involved in getting Americans their television shows is "relatively unknown" to most viewers, though their influence has been made known for decades.

Often, Herold said, that's been when local affiliates have balked at airing something they viewed as controversial, such as the episode of the 1990s comedy "Ellen" in which Ellen DeGeneres' character came out as gay.

"It's not a complete oddity," Herold said. "I think what's more alarming about this particular incident to me is the top-down nature of it."

Whereas past flare-ups between affiliates and their parent networks have often involved individual local TV executives, Herold pointed to the powerful voices at play in Kimmel's suspension: Disney CEO Bob Iger, the FCC's chair Carr, as well as Sinclair and Nexstar.

"The FCC kind of pinpointing particular programs to cancel is concerning to people who advocate for television to be a forum for free discussion and debate," Herold said.

Jasmine Bloemhof, a media strategist who has worked with local stations, including ones owned by Sinclair and Nexstar, said consolidation has given such companies "enormous influence." Controversies like the latest involving Kimmel, she said, "reveal the tension between Hollywood-driven programming and the values of everyday Americans."

"Networks may push one agenda, but affiliates owned by companies like Sinclair and Nexstar understand they serve conservative-leaning communities across the country," Bloemhof said. "And that friction is bound to surface."

## Kimmel's future hangs in balance after ABC suspends his late-night show over Charlie Kirk comments

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Jimmy Kimmel's television future hung in the balance Thursday after ABC suspended his late-night show following the host's comments about the assassination of Charlie Kirk, leaving the network's parent company to decide whether supporting him is worth the risk to its business.

Two other companies that operate dozens of ABC stations came out against Kimmel, and they are being cheered on by a Trump administration regulator who can make life difficult for ABC's owner, the Walt Disney Co.

But advocates for free speech say it's time for the company to take a stand.

Kimmel made several remarks on his show Monday and Tuesday about the reaction to the conservative activist's killing last week, suggesting many Trump supporters are trying to capitalize on Kirk's death. "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.

The chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, Brendan Carr, said Kimmel appeared to be making an intentional effort to mislead the public that the man accused in the fatal shooting was a right-wing Trump supporter. Authorities say 22-year-old Tyler Robinson grew up in a conservative household in southern Utah but was enmeshed in "leftist ideology."

Kimmel has not commented on the suspension. His supporters say Carr misread what the comic said and that nowhere did he specifically suggest that Robinson was conservative.

President Donald Trump said Kimmel had bad ratings and should have been fired long ago. "So, you know, you could call that a free speech or not. He was fired for lack of talent," Trump said Thursday at a news conference in Britain. Later while returning to the U.S. aboard Air Force One, he said federal regulators should consider revoking broadcast licenses for networks that "give me only bad publicity."

More than 60 affiliates refuse to air show

ABC, which has aired "Jimmy Kimmel Live!" since 2003, announced the suspension Wednesday shortly after Nexstar Communications Group said its stations would not show Kimmel because his Kirk remarks were "offensive and insensitive." Nexstar operates 28 ABC affiliates.

# Groton Daily Independent

**Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 52 of 64**

Sinclair Broadcast Group said it would not air the show either. The company called on Kimmel to apologize to Kirk's family and make a "meaningful personal donation" to the activist's political organization, Turning Point USA. Sinclair says that its 38 ABC stations will air a tribute to Kirk on Friday in Kimmel's time slot.

Local affiliates in the past occasionally grumbled about some shows from the network and even refused to air them. What's new is that so many stations are working together to apply the pressure at the same time, said Robert Thompson, founding director of the Bleier Center for Television and Popular Culture at Syracuse University.

In some ways, Kimmel's situation harkens back to a famous event in television history. CBS abruptly canceled a popular variety show, "The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour," in 1969 when the network got heat for the hosts' stance against the Vietnam War.

The refusal by 66 stations to air a program represents a significant financial hit. Roughly 230 stations across the country carry ABC programming. The network owns and operates eight of the largest stations, in cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Chicago and Houston.

In an appearance on CNBC Thursday, Carr cheered the moves by Nexstar and Sinclair. While the FCC does not have formal power over the national networks, it does have the authority to suspend the licenses of individual stations in local markets.

"We're reinvigorating the FCC's enforcement of the public interest," Carr said, "and I think that's a good thing."

Two companies have pending business deals

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's blessing to complete its \$6.2 billion purchase of broadcast rival Tegna.

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

Disney arguably started a cascade of media companies choosing not to fight when threatened by the president. The company agreed in December to pay \$15 million toward Trump's presidential library to settle his lawsuit against ABC News. Then CBS News parent Paramount paid \$16 million to make Trump's lawsuit against "60 Minutes" go away.

Shortly after the "60 Minutes" settlement, the FCC approved Paramount's merger with Skydance Media. Also in July, CBS announced that late-night comic Stephen Colbert's show would be canceled at the end of next season for financial reasons, an explanation that raised suspicions that politics played a part. Colbert and Kimmel are the two harshest Trump critics on late-night broadcast television.

The Kimmel suspension was met with anger and disappointment in some political circles and the creative community.

"After years of complaining about cancel culture, the current administration has taken it to a new and dangerous level by routinely threatening regulatory action against media companies unless they muzzle or fire reporters and commentators it doesn't like," former President Barack Obama said Thursday on X.

U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren, a Massachusetts Democrat, said: "First Colbert, now Kimmel ... it sure looks like giant media companies are enabling his authoritarianism."

Kimmel would appear to have "a very narrow path" back to the air on ABC, said Bill Carter, author of "The Late Shift" and an authority on late-night TV. Disney is doubtless getting pressure from stakeholders to avoid a fight.

But Disney CEO Bob Iger has no doubt learned that giving in to a bully doesn't make him go away, Carter said. Iger may see that capitulation in the form of permanently taking Kimmel off the air would be a stain on his reputation, he said.

"It's easy for me to say it's time to stand up," Carter said. "But if not now, when?"

In an interview with Variety this past summer, Kimmel was asked if he was worried that the administration would come after comedians, as it has journalists.

"Well, you'd have to be naive not to worry a little bit," he said. "But that can't change what you're doing."

If comedians were targeted, Kimmel said, he hoped that "even my colleagues on the right will support my right to say what I like."

## Gunman kills 2 at Israeli-run crossing between West Bank and Jordan. 4 soldiers killed in Gaza

By ISAAC SCHARF and AREEJ HAZBOUN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — A Jordanian aid truck driver opened fire and killed two people at an Israeli-run border crossing in the occupied West Bank on Thursday, officials said. The Israeli military also said that four soldiers were killed in the southern Gaza Strip, and that a drone had struck in the area of the southern Israeli city of Eilat.

The Israeli military referred to the shooting at the crossing with Jordan as a militant attack. Israel's Magen David Adom rescue service said that two men, around 60 and 20 years old, were killed. The military said the attacker had been "neutralized," without elaborating.

Jordan's Foreign Ministry condemned the attack and identified the shooter as Abdel-Mutalib al-Qaisi, a man in his late 50s who it said had been driving aid trucks bound for Gaza for three months.

Three Israelis were killed in a September 2024 attack at the crossing, when a retired Jordanian soldier opened fire. That attack appeared to be linked to the ongoing Israel-Hamas war. The Allenby Bridge Crossing over the Jordan River, also known as the King Hussein Bridge, is mainly used by Palestinians and tourists. It was closed after the attack.

The military said the drone had been launched "from the east," without elaborating. Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels have repeatedly fired drones and missiles at Israel, often drawing retaliatory airstrikes.

A missile fired from Yemen set off air raid sirens late Thursday, and the boom of interceptors could be heard in Jerusalem. There were no immediate reports of casualties or damage from the drone or the missile.

Soldiers' deaths could further erode Israeli support for war

Israel captured the West Bank, along with Gaza and east Jerusalem, in the 1967 Mideast war. The Palestinians want all three for a future state. Violence has surged across the occupied West Bank since the Hamas-led attack from Gaza into southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, which ignited the latest war.

Israel is waging a major ground offensive in Gaza City that has forced nearly 250,000 Palestinians to flee, according to the United Nations. Hundreds of thousands remain in the city, large parts of which have already been destroyed in previous Israeli raids.

The four soldiers were killed by an explosive device during an operation in Gaza's southernmost city of Rafah, said Brig. Gen. Effie Defrin, the Israeli military spokesman.

They are the first casualties to be announced since Israel launched its offensive in Gaza City, in the north.

Such deaths could further erode support for the war among Israelis who fear that the fighting puts soldiers and hostages at risk. At least 460 Israeli soldiers have been killed since the ground invasion of Gaza in October 2023.

The war has killed at least 65,141 Palestinians, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which is part of the Hamas-run government. U.N. agencies and many independent experts consider its figures to be the most reliable estimate of wartime casualties. It does not say how many of those killed were civilians or combatants.

Hamas-led militants killed some 1,200 people in the Oct. 7 attack that started the war and abducted 251 others. Forty-eight hostages remain in Gaza, around 20 of them believed by Israel to be alive, after most of the rest were released in ceasefires or other deals.

Israel cuts funding for award ceremony over film about Palestinian boy

Israel's culture minister has cut funding for the country's most prestigious film awards ceremony, saying this year's best feature winner "spits" on Israeli soldiers.

Miki Zohar said that he was taking the step in response to Tuesday's Ophir Award for "The Sea" — a story about a 12-year-old Palestinian boy who sneaks into Israel from the West Bank in a quest to see the sea for the first time. The film will now represent Israel in the Oscar awards.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 54 of 64

Zohar, a member of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party, said that he was halting funding for the ceremony because of the film's depiction of Israeli soldiers.

"On my watch, the citizens of Israel will not pay out of their pockets for a disgraceful ceremony that spits on the heroic Israeli soldiers," he said in an X post. "The citizens of Israel deserve for their tax money to go to more important and valuable places."

Israeli military to indict former officer over Lebanon ambush

The Israeli military said Thursday that it plans on indicting a former senior officer in connection with the deaths of two Israelis in a Hezbollah ambush in southern Lebanon last November.

Col. Yoav Yarom, who was the chief of staff of the army's Golani infantry brigade, stepped down after the incident. Zeev Erlich, 70, and Gur Kehati, a 20-year-old soldier, were killed.

At the time, the army launched an investigation to determine who allowed Erlich into the combat zone with the forces and why he was allowed to enter.

In a statement Thursday, the army said its military prosecutor plans on filing charges against Yarom, pending a preindictment hearing. Such a hearing is a standard procedure.

According to Israeli media reports, Erlich wasn't on active duty when he was shot, but was wearing a military uniform and had a weapon. Erlich was a well-known West Bank settler and researcher of Jewish history. Media reports said he was permitted to enter Lebanon to explore a local archaeological site.

## **Kimmel's suspension is the latest display of Trump's growing power over the US media landscape**

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump has used threats, lawsuits and government pressure as he remakes the American media landscape, unleashing his long-standing grievances against an industry that has mocked, criticized and scorned him for years.

He's extracted multimillion-dollar settlements, forced companies into costly litigation and prompted changes to programming that he found objectionable.

Now Trump is escalating his campaign of censure and retaliation, invigorated by successful efforts to push ABC late-night host Jimmy Kimmel off the air for his commentary on conservative activist Charlie Kirk's assassination.

Speaking to reporters aboard Air Force One while returning from Great Britain on Thursday, Trump said federal regulators should consider revoking broadcast licenses for networks that "give me only bad publicity."

"All they do is hit Trump," he said. "They're licensed! They're not allowed to do that. They're an arm of the Democrat Party."

Brendan Carr, Trump's handpicked head of the Federal Communications Commission, issued a similar warning the previous day while criticizing Kimmel's remarks about the political ideology of the suspected assassin.

"We can do this the easy way or the hard way," Carr said. "These companies can find ways to change conduct, to take action, frankly, on Kimmel, or there is going to be additional work for the FCC ahead."

ABC suspended Kimmel hours later.

It was the kind of brute force response that Trump and his loyalists have routinely flexed since the Republican president returned to the White House with a vow to retaliate against critics and political opponents. Trump's reach has extended deep into the private sector, using the apparatus of the federal government to pressure companies to make changes that can reshape the public dialogue.

Critics fear crackdowns on free speech

Trump has already reached settlements with ABC and CBS over their coverage. He has filed defamation lawsuits against The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times. Republicans in Congress stripped federal funding from NPR and PBS. At the FCC, Carr has used his influence to target diversity, equity and inclusion programs and to root out what he describes as liberal bias.

In the aftermath of Kirk's assassination, Trump has clamped down more firmly, with broader implica-



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 55 of 64

tions for the future of free speech protections that have been a bedrock of the American political system.

Attorney General Pam Bondi recently said that "we will absolutely target you, go after you, if you are targeting anyone with hate speech." Her words alarmed advocates who fear an elastic definition of the term could be used to criminalize dissent.

The First Amendment is widely viewed as protecting even the most disparaging remarks, and the Supreme Court said in an unanimous opinion last year that "government officials cannot attempt to coerce private parties in order to punish or suppress views that the government disfavors."

Bondi later revised her comments to say she was focused on "hate speech that crosses the line into threats of violence."

Todd Blanche, Bondi's deputy, suggested that protesters could have violated the law by yelling at Trump while he visited a restaurant near the White House.

"Is it sheer happenstance that individuals show up at a restaurant where the president is trying to enjoy dinner in Washington, D.C., and accost him with vile words and vile anger?" Blanche said. He said authorities could investigate whether it's "part of an organized effort to inflict harm and terror and damage to the United States."

Politics and comedy collide on late-night shows

The latest saga with Kimmel began Monday night with the comedian's commentary about last week's shooting of Kirk, which took place on a college campus in Utah.

"We hit some new lows over the weekend with the MAGA gang 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. He also compared Trump's grief to "how a 4-year-old mourns a goldfish."

Trump allies said Kimmel was falsely suggesting that the shooter was right-wing. Authorities have not formally presented a motive for the killing, but evidence indicates that he held liberal beliefs. Gov. Spencer Cox, R-Utah, has said "there clearly was a leftist ideology,"

On Wednesday, Carr appeared on a podcast hosted by Benny Johnson, a conservative commentator, and accused Kimmel of the "sickest conduct possible." Carr said "you could make a strong argument that this is sort of an intentional effort to mislead the American people about a very core fundamental fact."

Carr placed the move against Kimmel in the broader context of Trump's efforts to undermine the power of legacy media companies.

"He smashed the facade that they get to control what we say, what we think, the narrative around events," Carr said. "And we're seeing a lot of consequences from President Trump doing that."

Reminding affiliates that their broadcast licenses come with an "obligation to operate in the public interest," Carr said "it's time for them to step up" and say Kimmel's content "isn't something that we think serves the needs of our local communities."

Kimmel faces corporate backlash

It didn't take long for Nexstar Media Group, the country's biggest operator of television stations, to echo some of Carr's language.

"Continuing to give Mr. Kimmel a broadcast platform in the communities we serve is simply not in the public interest at the current time," Andrew Alford, president of Nexstar's broadcasting division, said in statement.

The controversy landed at a sensitive time for Nexstar, which needs FCC approval for its \$6.2 billion acquisition of Tegna.

ABC soon announced that Kimmel would be taken off the air. It is unclear when or whether he will return. Kimmel has not commented publicly.

Later in the evening, the television company Sinclair said its stations would carry "a special in remembrance of Charlie Kirk" on Friday during Kimmel's usual time slot. The company also asked Kimmel to apologize to Kirk's family and donate money to Turning Point USA, the conservative group that Kirk turned into a political powerhouse.

House Democratic leaders, in a statement, accused Carr of “bullying ABC” and “forcing the company to bend the knee to the Trump administration,” and said a “war” on the First Amendment by Trump and the GOP “is blatantly inconsistent with American values.”

The news of Kimmel’s suspension broke after midnight in Britain, where Trump was traveling for a state visit. But the president soon posted on Truth Social, his social media platform, to celebrate what he called “Great News for America.”

CBS had already announced the cancellation of Stephen Colbert’s show over the summer, and Trump said more dominoes should fall, calling for the cancellation of shows by Jimmy Fallon and Seth Meyers.

“Do it NBC!!!” he wrote.

## **An immigration judge ordered Mahmoud Khalil deported. What happens now?**

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Three months after his release from an immigration jail, Palestinian activist Mahmoud Khalil is facing the growing threat of deportation for his role in campus protests against Israel.

In court documents made public Wednesday, an immigration judge in Louisiana ruled that Khalil should be deported for failing to disclose information on his green card application.

The decision marked a setback for Khalil, a lawful U.S. resident and recent Columbia University graduate student who became the first person targeted by President Donald Trump’s aggressive crackdown on pro-Palestinian activists. But while the ruling puts him one step closer to a final order of removal, it is far from the last word in the case.

For now, Khalil remains protected from detention and deportation under a separate judicial order. His legal team has said they intend to appeal the immigration judge’s ruling, which Khalil has characterized as “further evidence of retaliation” from a “kangaroo court.”

Here’s a look at where things stand in the ongoing legal battle:

What did the immigration judge in Louisiana decide?

The Sept. 12 ruling by the immigration judge, Jamee Comans, builds on her previous order issued in April, which found Khalil could be forced out of the country as a national security risk.

Khalil’s attorneys had challenged that decision, citing his lack of criminal history and close ties to the United States. His wife is a U.S. citizen, as is his 5-month-old son, who was born while Khalil was in federal custody.

Khalil was a prominent figure in protests at Columbia University against the war in Gaza, which spread to campuses nationwide. He was arrested inside his campus apartment building this past March and accused by the Trump administration of supporting “pro-Hamas” activity, referring to the Palestinian militant group that attacked Israel on Oct. 7, 2023. Khalil has repeatedly denied the charge and the federal government has not provided evidence for it.

Khalil has argued he is being targeted for exercising his free speech, pointing to a memo by Secretary of State Marco Rubio that justified his arrest on the grounds that his pro-Palestinian beliefs could undermine U.S. foreign policy interests.

In her latest decision, Comans said she lacked the authority “to question foreign policy determinations” and that Khalil’s “limited family ties” to the country did not amount to a compelling reason to waive her prior ruling.

Comans then sided with the government on a separate claim, finding that Khalil had “willfully misrepresented” facts about his background on his green card application, including his role in a United Nations agency that provides services to Palestinian refugees.

Khalil has maintained that any omissions on the application were unintentional.

What happens now?

Khalil’s attorneys said Wednesday that they intend to appeal the decision. But they also expressed concern about their odds of success in the reliably conservative federal appeals court with jurisdiction over the case.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 57 of 64

If he were to lose his appeal, Khalil would be stripped of his permanent residency status, further restricting his ability to work and travel, according to his attorneys. But the government would still be prohibited from removing him under a June 11 order from a federal judge in New Jersey, Michael Farbiarz.

That order will remain in place while his civil rights case plays out in New Jersey. It may soon be "the only meaningful impediment" to Khalil's deportation, according to a letter that his attorneys sent Wednesday to Farbiarz.

Oral arguments in that case could begin as soon as next month.

Where would he be deported?

Judge Comans has said Khalil would be deported to Algeria, where he maintains citizenship through a distant relative, or "in the alternative" Syria, where he was born in a refugee camp to a Palestinian family.

Attorneys for Khalil have said the publicity surrounding his case would leave him in mortal danger if he were forced to return to either country.

Khalil, 30, fled Syria for Lebanon in 2013 after joining protests against then-President Bashar al-Assad. His family has roots in Tiberias but were displaced during the mass expulsion of Palestinians from what is now Israel, according to court documents.

Khalil has said he will continue advocating for Palestinians as his legal battle plays out. He is also currently suing the Trump administration for \$20 million in damages, alleging that he was falsely imprisoned, maliciously prosecuted and smeared as an antisemite.

Emailed inquiries to the State Department, the White House and the Department of Homeland Security were not returned.

## **Charlie Kirk's Turning Point taps his widow as its next leader.**

### **Questions about its future remain**

By JILL COLVIN and JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Turning Point USA, the organization Charlie Kirk founded to mobilize young, Christian conservatives, has seen a massive surge in interest and support since the activist's assassination last week.

As conservatives mourn Kirk's death, the group appears poised to remain a MAGA juggernaut as it plots its future without Kirk at the helm.

The group's board announced Thursday that Kirk's widow, Erika Kirk, had been unanimously elected as its next leader and will serve as CEO and board chair.

"This was what Charlie hoped for and wanted and he said so numerous times," Tyler Bowyer, the group's chief operating officer, said on social media. "Erika is one with Charlie and Charlie is one with Erika."

Turning Point became a multimillion-dollar operation under Charlie Kirk's leadership, and was credited with helping to return President Donald Trump to office. Since Kirk's killing, his podcast and social media have attracted millions of new followers. There has been an outpouring of interest in expanding Turning Point's footprint on college and high school campuses, the group's spokesperson says, and future large-scale events are continuing as planned.

"It will grow," said Turning Point spokesperson Andrew Kolvet, who is also a producer of "The Charlie Kirk Show" podcast. "What we're seeing is that Charlie's legacy will be much greater, broader, and bigger than we even realized in life."

Trump told reporters in the Oval Office this week that through "this horrible act," Turning Point "could be maybe bigger than it could have ever been had he been there."

"And I will say this: He'd be very happy if he saw what was going on," Trump said.

Inquiries about new Turning Point chapters have soared

Both Turning Point and Kirk's other ventures have received unprecedented interest since he was killed.

Kirk's podcast is now the top show on Apple, his social media accounts have gained millions of followers and his clips have garnered millions of views.

Turning Point has also received over 60,000 inquiries to start new campus chapters, Kolvet said Thursday. The group currently has 3,500 chapters on college campuses and in high schools across the nation.

# Groton Daily Independent

**Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 58 of 64**

Aubree Hudson, president of the Turning Point chapter at Brigham Young University that helped organize the Utah Valley University event where Kirk was assassinated, said hundreds of students have reached out about getting involved.

"That's the beautiful part of this tragedy, that his movement, Turning Point, is exploding," she said.

She predicted conservatives who have been afraid to share their views at school will start speaking up.

"How it looks like without Charlie Kirk, I think we're all gonna try to figure that out," she said. "It's gonna be a curve, but I don't think it's gonna slow us down in any way."

A fundraising behemoth

Turning Point USA is not just a campus advocacy group promoting conservative causes. It and its affiliated group, Turning Point Action, played a crucial role in the 2024 election, helping to turn out voters who don't typically cast ballots in swing states including Arizona, Michigan and Wisconsin.

It is also a fundraising behemoth.

The group's two primary nonprofit arms collectively took in nearly \$100 million in 2024, according to forms filed with the IRS. A separate nonprofit wing called the Turning Point Endowment has another \$60.9 million in the bank.

Kirk's widow and the mother of their two children, Erika Kirk, has vowed to continue the group's mission. She said during an emotional broadcast from her husband's studio that a planned campus tour this fall would go on, as would the podcast and one of the group's marquee events — "America Fest" — planned for December.

She said during her remarks that "the movement my husband built will not die."

"I promise I'll make Turning Point USA the biggest thing that this nation has ever seen," she said.

Erika Kirk steps into a new role

Since its founding, Charlie Kirk has been the operation's public face and crucial to its influence. He was a MAGA celebrity with a loyal following, who grew the operation in large part, through the force of his own personality and rhetorical skill as he traveled the country, speaking and hosting events.

Erika Kirk has a following in her own right. The entrepreneur and podcaster often appeared with her husband at Turning Point events. The former 2012 Miss Arizona USA has also worked as a model, actress and casting director, according to a biography on her website. She founded a Christian clothing line, Proclaim, and a ministry that teaches about the Bible.

Alex Kolodin, a Republican state legislator in Arizona who is closely aligned with the group, said he's confident Kirk's widow will hold the movement together.

"She's not going to let anybody break apart her husband's legacy," Kolodin said.

He said Turning Point wouldn't be what it is today without Kirk's "genius," but said that Kirk had inspired a generation of young conservatives who are social-media savvy and know how to engage their generation. Kolodin predicted some of them will rise to the moment and ensure Kirk's death doesn't leave a void in the online spaces where young people congregate.

"It wouldn't surprise me if the next big thing in that direction was a couple of guys that nobody ever heard of," Kolodin said. "That's actually a reason that I'm optimistic for the future of it."

Also playing a leading role in carrying Kirk's torch is Vice President JD Vance, a friend, who transported Kirk's casket from Utah back to Arizona aboard Air Force Two.

On Monday, Vance guest hosted Kirk's radio show, spending two hours interviewing senior administration officials and sharing stories about the impact of a man he credited for his current position.

He called on Kirk's followers to "get involved," saying "we have to make sure that the next generation of young people feels confident and courageous to speak their mind and to speak the truth."

Others brush off the idea that anyone could take Kirk's mantle.

"There's a lot of discussion about who will 'replace' Charlie Kirk. The answer is that nobody will," conservative podcaster Matt Walsh wrote on X before Thursday's announcement. "There won't be a new Charlie, any more than there was a new Rush Limbaugh. These men are irreplaceable. One of a kind. All we can do is continue the fight in our own way. Which we will. But there will never be another Charlie Kirk."



## What to know about Brendan Carr, the head of the Federal Communications Commission

WASHINGTON (AP) — ABC took comic Jimmy Kimmel's late-night show off the air indefinitely Wednesday, just hours after Federal Communications Commission chairman Brendan Carr called his comments about Charlie Kirk's assassination "truly sick."

Carr is a longtime FCC commissioner named as chairman by President Donald Trump in November. In the months since, he has launched investigations of ABC, CBS and NBC news.

"Americans no longer trust the legacy national news media to report fully, accurately, and fairly. It is time for a change," Carr said in July, after the FCC approved CBS owner Paramount's \$8 billion merger with Skydance.

Here's what to know about Carr:

Carr is a longtime FCC commissioner

The FCC regulates broadcasting, telecommunications and broadband.

Carr was already a longtime member of the commission and served previously as the FCC's general counsel. He was unanimously confirmed by the Senate three times and both Trump and President Joe Biden nominated him to the commission.

Before joining the commission as a staff member in 2012, he worked as an attorney at Wiley Rein LLP and clerked on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit.

He has more recently embraced Trump's ideas about social media and tech. He wrote a section devoted to the FCC in "Project 2025," a sweeping blueprint for gutting the federal workforce and dismantling federal agencies in a second Trump administration produced by the conservative Heritage Foundation. Trump has claimed he didn't know anything about Project 2025, but many of its themes have aligned with his statements.

The FCC takes on broadcast networks

In March, Carr said he was opening an investigation into Walt Disney Co. and ABC to see whether they are "promoting invidious forms of DEI discrimination." He also opened separate investigations into CBS and NBC news.

Talking about the Kimmel situation on Fox News Wednesday, he said broadcasters with FCC licenses have "a unique obligation to operate in the public interest. And over the years, the FCC walked away from enforcing that public interest obligation. I don't think we're better off as a country for it."

In July, he hailed the Paramount-Skydance merger as an opportunity to bring more balance to "once-storied" CBS.

FCC approval of the merger came after months of turmoil around Trump's legal battle with the CBS program "60 Minutes." With the specter of the Trump administration potentially blocking the deal, Paramount agreed to a \$16 million settlement with the president.

CBS then announced it was canceling Stephen Colbert's "Late Show" just days after the comedian sharply criticized the settlement on air. Paramount cited financial reasons, but big names both within and outside the company have questioned those motives.

Shortly before the FCC approved the merger, Paramount agreed to hire an ombudsman at CBS News to investigate complaints of political bias. The job went to Kenneth Weinstein, the former head of a conservative think tank who has made several donations to Republican causes, including President Donald Trump's 2024 campaign.

Carr takes on Kimmel

On Wednesday, Carr said Kimmel appeared to be making an intentional effort to mislead the public that conservative activist Kirk's assassin was a right-wing Trump supporter. He called Kimmel's comments about Kirk's death "truly sick" and said his agency has a strong case for holding Kimmel, ABC and Disney accountable for spreading misinformation.

Kirk, a top conservative podcaster, was shot and killed last week at an appearance on a college campus in Utah.

# Groton Daily Independent

**Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 60 of 64**

Kimmel made several remarks about the reaction to Kirk's death last week on "Jimmy Kimmel Live," including that "many in MAGA land are working very hard to capitalize on the murder of Charlie Kirk."

"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."

House Democratic leaders on Thursday called for Carr's resignation and accused him of "bullying" ABC into suspending Kimmel.

In a joint statement, the leaders — including House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries — said the move was part of Trump and Republicans' effort to wage a "war on the First Amendment."

## **RYDER CUP '25: Facts and figures for the 45th edition**

By The Associated Press undefined

FARMINGDALE, N.Y. (AP) — Facts and figures for the Ryder Cup:

Event: 45th Ryder Cup matches.

Dates: Sept. 26-28.

Course: Bethpage State Park (Black Course). Yardage: 7,352. Par: 70.

Format: Four matches of foursomes (alternate shot) and fourballs (better ball) on Friday and Saturday, 12 singles matches on Sunday.

Points: The United States needs 14½ points to win the cup. Europe needs 14 points to retain the cup.

All-time series: United States leads, 27-15-2.

U.S. vs. Europe series (from 1979): Europe leads, 12-9-1.

Last time: Europe swept the opening session at Marco Simone in Italy and the Americans never caught up. Europe had a five-point lead going into Sunday singles and Tommy Fleetwood clinched it for a 16½-11½ victory. Rory McIlroy led Europe with a 4-1 record.

Captains: Keegan Bradley (United States), Luke Donald (Europe).

U.S. roster: Sam Burns, Patrick Cantlay, Bryson DeChambeau, Harris English, Ben Griffin, Russell Henley, Collin Morikawa, Xander Schauffele, Scottie Scheffler, J.J. Spaun, Justin Thomas, Cameron Young.

European roster: Ludvig Aberg, Matt Fitzpatrick, Tommy Fleetwood, Tyrrell Hatton, Rasmus Hojgaard, Viktor Hovland, Shane Lowry, Robert MacIntyre, Rory McIlroy, Jon Rahm, Justin Rose, Sepp Straka.

Elite Company: Bethpage Black becomes the seventh course to host a Ryder Cup, PGA Championship and U.S. Open. The others are Scioto, Oakland Hills, Oak Hill, Hazeltine, Pinehurst No. 2 and Medinah.

Tale of the tape: The Americans have combined for 14 wins and three majors this year. Europe has combined for 12 wins and one major.

Play it back: Luke Donald will try to become the first captain to win consecutive Ryder Cups since Tony Jacklin in 1985 and 1987.

Key statistic: U.S. captain Keegan Bradley has a better world ranking than five players on his team.

Noteworthy: This is the first European team to return 11 of the 12 players from the previous Ryder Cup.

Quoteworthy: "We've got three days to see who's the better team and it's going to be a good battle." — Scottie Scheffler.

Television (all times EDT): Friday, 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. (USA Network); Saturday, 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. (NBC); Sunday, noon to 6 p.m. (NBC).

## **Uber Eats will soon launch US drone delivery in partnership with Flytrex**

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

Uber Eats will soon be making some meal deliveries with drones.

Uber Technologies said Thursday that it's partnering with drone company Flytrex Inc. The companies expect to begin deliveries in test markets by the end of this year. Uber didn't say where those markets

will be, but Flytrex is already operating in Texas and North Carolina.

It's the latest partnership in the fast-growing drone delivery space. Flytrex, which is based in Tel Aviv, Israel, also makes deliveries for Uber Eats' rival DoorDash.

Wing, a drone company owned by Google parent Alphabet, works with DoorDash and Walmart. Zipline, a drone company based in South San Francisco, works with Walmart and Panera Bread and also makes deliveries for hospitals. Amazon also making deliveries with its own Prime Air drones.

"Autonomous technology is transforming mobility and delivery faster than ever before," said Sarfraz Maredia, Uber's president of autonomous mobility and delivery, in a company statement. "With Flytrex, we're entering the next chapter—bringing the speed and sustainability of drone delivery to the Uber Eats platform, at scale, for the first time."

"The promise of autonomous vehicles is here, redefining logistics on the ground and in the air," said Noam Bardin, executive chairman of Flytrex. "Autonomous drones are the future of food delivery—fast, affordable, and hands-free. Flytrex has already delivered over 200,000 meals to suburban households in the past three years. Partnering with Uber—pioneers of ground-based mobility—brings together proven logistics expertise with aerial innovation. Together, we're building the infrastructure for a future where autonomous systems seamlessly move goods through our communities, making faster, safer, and more sustainable delivery the new standard."

San Francisco-based Uber is making an investment in Flytrex as part of the deal. Financial details of the partnership weren't shared Thursday.

Flytrex, which was founded in 2013, said it has made more than 200,000 deliveries across the U.S. Flytrex Executive Chairman Noam Bardin said the partnership combines Uber's logistics expertise with Flytrex's aerial innovation.

"Autonomous drones are the future of food delivery — fast, affordable and hands-free," Bardin said in a statement.

## Discovery of insects trapped in amber sheds light on ancient Amazon rainforest

By CHRISTINA LARSON AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Scientists have discovered prehistoric insects preserved in amber for the first time in South America, providing a fresh glimpse into life on Earth at a time when flowering plants were just beginning to diversify and spread around the world.

Many of the specimens found at a sandstone quarry in Ecuador date to 112 million years ago, said Fabiany Herrera, curator of fossil plants at the Field Museum in Chicago and co-author of the study published Thursday in the journal *Communications Earth and Environment*.

Almost all known amber deposits from the past 130 million years have been in the Northern Hemisphere, and it's long been "an enigma" that scientists have found few in southern regions that once comprised the supercontinent Gondwana, said David Grimaldi, an entomologist at the American Museum of Natural History who was not involved in the discovery.

This marks the first time researchers have identified ancient beetles, flies, ants and wasps in fossilized tree resin in South America, said Ricardo Pérez-de la Fuente, a paleoentomologist at the Oxford University Museum of Natural History, who also was not involved in the new study.

"Amber pieces are little windows into the past," Pérez-de la Fuente said, adding that the discovery will help researchers understand the evolving interactions between flowering plants and insects that lived during the era of the dinosaurs.

The researchers uncovered hundreds of fragments of amber, some containing ancient insects, pollen and tree leaves, at a sandstone quarry in Ecuador that's on the edge of what is today the Amazon basin.

But today's rainforest is much different from what dinosaurs roamed through, Herrera said. Based on an analysis of fossils in the amber, the ancient rainforest contained species of ferns and conifers, including the unusual Monkey Puzzle Tree, that no longer grow in Amazonia.

"It was a different kind of forest," said Herrera.

The amber deposits were previously known to geologists and miners who worked at the Genoveva quarry. Study co-author Carlos Jaramillo at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute first heard of them about a decade ago and set out to find the exact location, aided by geology field notes.

"I went there and realized this place is amazing," Jaramillo said. "There's so much amber in the mines," and it's more visible in the open quarry than it would be if hidden under dense layers of vegetation.

Researchers will continue to analyze the amber trove to learn more about Cretaceous-era biodiversity -- including the insects that contributed to evolution by feeding on flowering plants. "Amber tends to preserve things that are tiny," said Grimaldi.

"It's the time when the relationship between flowering plants and insects got started," said Pérez-de la Fuente. "And that turned out to be one of the most successful partnerships in nature."

## **UK, Lithuania and Latvia detain people over allegations of arson and spying for Russia**

By EMMA BURROWS AP European Security Correspondent

VILNIUS, Lithuania (AP) — British, Lithuanian and Latvian authorities have detained several people on suspicion of carrying out intelligence-related activities on behalf of Russia in the latest of a string of incidents to be linked to Moscow by Western officials.

London's Metropolitan Police force said Thursday that they arrested three people just east of London on suspicion of spying for Russia. On Wednesday, Lithuanian prosecutors said that they uncovered and detained a Russia-linked network of suspects who are alleged to have planned and organized arson attacks in various European countries. Meanwhile, Latvia's security service said it detained a man suspected of passing intelligence about the military to Russia.

British police said they arrested two men, ages 41 and 46, and a 35-year-old woman in the county of Essex. They searched two addresses and later released the suspects on bail.

Lithuania's prosecutor general office said that suspects in a separate case are accused of sending packages containing homemade explosive devices to other European Union countries and Britain via courier services, on behalf of Russia's military intelligence services. The highly flammable incendiary devices with timed detonators were hidden inside vibrating massage cushions and tubes of cosmetics.

European security officials have previously warned that a widespread sabotage campaign blamed on Russia is growing more dangerous. The alleged espionage and plots to use explosives are among around 80 incidents linked to Russia that The Associated Press has documented since Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022.

They include at least 18 incidents of espionage and 18 cases of arson or serious sabotage, including attacks on restaurants, warehouses and shopping centers as well as a plot to assassinate the CEO of a German arms company.

Dominic Murphy, head of the Counter Terrorism Command at the Metropolitan Police, said that the U.K. is seeing an "increasing number of who we would describe as 'proxies' being recruited by foreign intelligence services."

In July, British men recruited online by Russian intelligence were found guilty of setting fire to a warehouse containing supplies for Ukraine — part of a growing trend where Russia's security services hire people through messaging platforms such as Telegram.

Packages contained thermite

Lithuanian authorities said a total of 15 people — citizens of Russia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Ukraine — are suspected of organizing and carrying out the alleged arson attacks. Their statement said an international arrest warrant has been issued for three people, but didn't make clear if and how many people had been arrested.

The investigation found that the packages contained thermite — a highly explosive substance used for



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 63 of 64

industrial and military purposes.

Prosecutors say the packages were sent by a Lithuanian citizen on July, 19 2024. Two shipments were sent from Vilnius to the U.K. by DHL cargo planes, and the other two were sent to Poland by DPD trucks.

One of them caught fire at the DHL logistics center in Leipzig on July 20, just before it was loaded onto a DHL cargo plane to the U.K. Another shipment to Britain caught fire in the early hours of July 22 at a DHL warehouse in the city of Birmingham, England.

In Poland, a shipment caught fire on a DPD freight truck on July 21, while another DPD shipment didn't ignite because of a technical failure, which prevented the explosive device from detonating.

The Lithuanian prosecutor general's office said that two of the people detained were also involved in an arson attack on an IKEA store in the capital, Vilnius, on May 9, 2024. It said one of the men is a Ukrainian citizen who also uses the identity of a Russian citizen, while the other is a dual Lithuanian-Russian national.

Joint investigation team

During the investigation, more than 30 searches were carried out in Lithuania, Poland, Latvia, and Estonia, during which further incendiary devices were found. The authorities suspect that the devices could have been used to plan and carry out further attacks.

Lithuanian authorities said that because of the "extremely dangerous" acts, a joint investigation team was created, with the cooperation of law enforcement and intelligence officers from nine countries, including the U.S. and Canada.

Also on Wednesday, the Latvian State Security Service said that it had detained a man on suspicion of collecting information about Latvian military sites and passing the information to Russia's intelligence services.

In a statement, it said the man provided Russian intelligence with information about NATO troops based in the country, training exercises and the construction of "new military objects."

## Today in History: September 19 State funeral of Queen Elizabeth II

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Friday, Sept. 19, the 262nd day of 2025. There are 103 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Sept. 19, 2022, Great Britain and the world said a final goodbye to Queen Elizabeth II at a state funeral that drew presidents and kings, princes and prime ministers — and crowds who thronged the streets of London.

Also on this date:

In 1796, President George Washington's farewell address was published. In it, America's first chief executive advised, "Observe good faith and justice toward all nations. Cultivate peace and harmony with all."

In 1881, the 20th president of the United States, James A. Garfield, died 2 1/2 months after being shot by Charles Guiteau; he was succeeded by Vice President Chester A. Arthur.

In 1955, President Juan Peron of Argentina was ousted after a revolt by the army and navy.

In 1957, the United States conducted its first contained underground nuclear test, code-named "Rainier," in the Nevada desert.

In 1985, the Mexico City area was struck by a devastating earthquake that killed at least 9,500 people.

In 1988, Olympic diver Greg Louganis suffered a concussion after striking his head on the diving board during the preliminary round of the 3-meter springboard diving competition at the Seoul Summer Games; Louganis would recover from the injury and win a gold medal in the event the following day.

In 1995, The New York Times and The Washington Post published the manifesto of Unabomber Ted Kaczynski (kah-ZIHN'-skee), which proved instrumental in identifying and capturing him.

In 2004, Hu Jintao (hoo jin-tow) became the undisputed leader of China with the departure of former President Jiang Zemin (jahng zuh-MEEN') from his top military post.

# Groton Daily Independent

**Friday, Sept. 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 107 ~ 64 of 64**

In 2008, struggling to stave off financial catastrophe, the Bush administration laid out a radical bailout plan calling for a takeover of a half-trillion dollars or more in worthless mortgages and other bad debt held by tottering institutions. Relieved investors sent stocks soaring on Wall Street and around the globe.

In 2011, Mariano Rivera of the New York Yankees recorded his 602nd save, making him baseball's all-time leader in the category.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Rosemary Harris is 98. Singer-songwriter Paul Williams is 85. Singer Bill Medley (The Righteous Brothers) is 85. Singer Sylvia Tyson (Ian and Sylvia) is 85. R&B singer Freda Payne is 83. Actor Jeremy Irons is 77. Model-actor Twiggy Lawson is 76. TV personality Joan Lunden is 75. Musician-producer Nile Rodgers is 73. Rock singer Lita Ford is 67. Musician Jarvis Cocker (Pulp) is 63. Country singer Trisha Yearwood is 61. Republican Sen. Tim Scott of South Carolina is 60. News anchor Soledad O'Brien is 59. Actor Sanaa Lathan (suh-NAH' LAY'-thun) is 54. "Tonight Show" host Jimmy Fallon is 51. Actor Columbus Short is 43.