

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Tuesday, Sept. 23

School Breakfast: Muffins.  
School Lunch: Chicken nuggets mashed potatoes.  
United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.  
JH/JV Football at Langford vs. Britton-Hecla. JH at 4:30, JV at 5:30  
Volleyball at Warner: (Welke: 7th-5:15, 8th-6:30; Arena: C-5:15, JV-6:30, V-7:45))

## Wednesday, Sept. 24

School Breakfast: Oatmeal.  
School Lunch: Pizza crunchers cooked carrots.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.; League 6:30 p.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.  
United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Confirmation, 5:30 p.m.  
Groton C&MA: Kid's Club, Youth Group, Adult Bible Study, 7 p.m.  
FFA Land and Range Contest at Webster

## Thursday Sept. 25

School Breakfast: Maple French Toast Bake.  
School Lunch: Chicken patty cooked broccoli.  
Cross Country at Sisseton, 10 a.m.

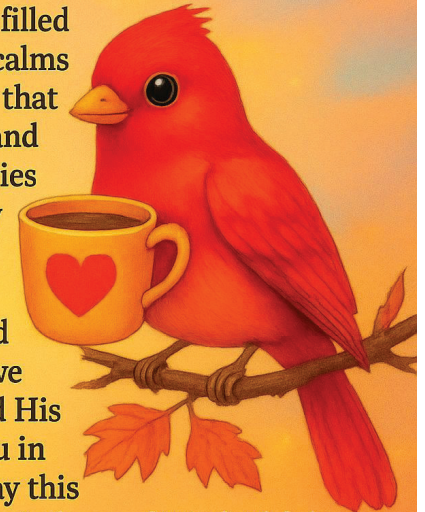
## Good Morning Happy Tuesday

May your day be filled with peace that calms every worry, joy that lifts your spirit, and strength that carries you through every challenge. ♥

I pray that God's blessings surround your home, His love fill your heart, and His favor go before you in all that you do, May this autumn season remind you of His faithfulness in every detail, in the changing leaves, the cool breezes, and the gift of each new morning. 🍂

Whatever you face today, may you know that you are not alone. The Lord is with you, guiding your steps and holding you in His care.

God's Spoken Word Ministries



Volleyball at Tiospa Zina ((7th-4, 8th-5; C-5, JV-6, V-7:15))

Boys Soccer hosts James Valley Christian, 4 p.m.

## Friday, Sept. 26

School Breakfast: Breakfast boats  
School Lunch: French bread pizza, green beans.  
Football hosts Clark/Willow Lake, 7 p.m.

## Saturday, Sept. 27

C Team/JH Volleyball at Matchbox Tournament, 9 a.m.  
Soccer at West Central (Boys at noon, Girls at 2 p.m.)

**Groton Daily Independent**  
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# 1440

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

## Autism Guidance Released

Federal officials yesterday announced a possible association between the development of autism and a pregnant individual's use of acetaminophen, the active ingredient in the common over-the-counter pain reliever Tylenol. They recommended pregnant individuals limit use of the drug to cases such as high fever or severe pain.

The Food and Drug Administration said it will update safety labels with the risks of acetaminophen. However, the agency added that while there may be an association between autism and the drug, current scientific evidence has not established a causal relationship. Scientists have researched a potential link between autism and acetaminophen for years, but studies have delivered mixed results. The FDA also approved leucovorin as a possible treatment for autism symptoms.

Autism is a developmental condition affecting how people communicate, interact socially, and process information. Reported autism diagnoses in the US (see CDC data) have risen since 2000, with about 1 in 31 children and 1 in 45 adults diagnosed today. Factors include improved diagnostic criteria and expanded screening.

## TikTok Deal Details

The White House yesterday outlined a preliminary deal to place TikTok's US operations under American control, with some of the country's largest tech and media companies at the helm. The move seeks to avert a ban on the Chinese-owned social media app over national security and privacy concerns.

Under the proposal, TikTok's parent company, ByteDance, would license its content recommendation algorithm to a US investor group that includes private equity firm Silver Lake and software giant Oracle. Oracle would also oversee platform security and the algorithm. Over the weekend, President Donald Trump said Dell CEO Michael Dell and Fox Corporation leaders Rupert and Lachlan Murdoch are likely involved in the deal, too. ByteDance would reportedly hold one seat on US TikTok's seven-member board.

Trump is expected this week to delay a TikTok ban for the fifth time as ByteDance and the US investors finalize the deal. See a timeline of TikTok's US history [here](#).

## NASA's New Class

NASA unveiled the 10 newest members of its astronaut corps yesterday, a group winnowed down from more than 8,000 applicants from across the US. The group, the first to include more female candidates than male, will now undergo two years of training before becoming flight-eligible.

While missions are not predetermined, the timeline of the agency's ambitious Artemis program may see the new class become the first to dock with the Lunar Gateway, a planned space station orbiting the moon. The outpost is a key step in NASA's plan to establish an ongoing presence on the lunar surface and a milestone toward a potential trip to Mars. Read a Reddit "Ask Me Anything" with the group posted yesterday.

The class is the 24th since the program's creation, bringing the total number of astronauts in NASA history to 370. Read about the first-ever class in 1959, known as the "Mercury Seven."



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## **Sports, Entertainment, & Culture**

"Jimmy Kimmel Live!" to return to ABC's airwaves today amid criticism of Kimmel's remarks about the assassination of Charlie Kirk; comes after 400 celebrities signed letter protesting Disney's decision to pull the show last week.

Barcelona's Aitana Bonmatí wins Ballon d'Or as soccer's best female player for third straight year; Paris Saint-Germain's Ousmane Dembélé takes honor for best male player.

Bruce Pearl to resign as head coach of Auburn's men's basketball team after 11 seasons amid speculation he may run for US Senate.

Christian Horner leaves Formula 1 racing team Red Bull after receiving reported \$100M payout.

## **Science & Technology**

Chipmaker Nvidia to invest up to \$100B in OpenAI as part of AI data center buildout estimated to consume roughly as much energy as 8 million homes.

Geoscientists find proof that an asteroid hit the North Sea over 43 million years ago, settling decades long debate about the origins of a nearly 2-mile-wide crater over 2,200 feet below the seabed.

Commonwealth Fusion Systems' first fusion reactor strikes deal to supply \$1B in nuclear power to energy company Eni.

## **Business & Markets**

US stock markets close up (S&P 500 +0.4%, Dow +0.1%, Nasdaq +0.7%), lifted by tech giants, including Nvidia (+4.0%), Oracle (+6.3%), and Apple (+4.3%).

Google in court to remedy advertising technology monopoly, weeks after judge spared company from selling Chrome browser to curb monopoly on search.

Amazon on trial over whether it tricked users into having Prime subscriptions.

Spirit Airlines to furlough 1,800—roughly one-third—of its flight attendants; bankrupt airline announced plans last week to reduce November flying capacity by 25%.

## **Politics & World Affairs**

France joins list of countries recognizing Palestinian statehood; announcement comes as world leaders gather for UN General Assembly in New York.

US Supreme Court allows firing of FTC commissioner, agrees to hear case on whether to overturn a 90-year-old ruling that prevents presidents from removing independent regulators without cause.

Typhoon Ragasa makes landfall in northern Philippines, with sustained wind gusts of 165 mph (equivalent to a Category 5 hurricane), prompting evacuation warnings and preparations in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China (More)



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## Groton Athlete Wins \$1,000 LATC Scholarship; Deuel Running Back Named MVP

WATERTOWN – Lake Area Technical College celebrated its fourth stop on its 60th Anniversary Tailgate Tour, Friday night at the Deuel vs. Groton football game. The evening featured a scholarship presentation, community fun and recognition of one outstanding student-athlete.

Tucker Hardy, a student at Langford High School, was awarded a \$1,000 scholarship to Lake Area Technical College in Watertown. Presenting the scholarship was Lead Admissions Representative April Simon.

On the field, Gavin Kloos, a junior running back for the Cardinals, was named the game's MVP. Kloos received a commemorative football from LATC Agriculture Instructor and former NFL player Spencer Waege.

Lake Area Technical College President Tiffany Sanderson said the tour is a celebration of the school's six decades of successfully preparing students for high-demand, high-value technical professions.

"At Lake Area Tech, we believe education extends beyond the classroom," Sanderson said. "This tour is a fun way to connect with communities in our area, support student-athletes and showcase the fast and focused education available to students interested in jumpstarting their careers."

To date, \$5,000 in scholarships have been awarded during Lake Area Tech's 60th Anniversary Tailgate Tour. The tour will continue with stops at high school football games across the region through October. Each stop includes scholarship awards, an MVP recognition and hands-on activities for fans of all ages. This week's stop will be at Madison High School, where the Bulldogs will host the Sioux Falls Christian Chargers.

Lake Area Technical College was established in 1965 in Watertown. It was South Dakota's first technical college and has grown to more than 30 programs and nearly 2,700 students. For more information on the Tailgate Tour or Lake Area Technical College, follow its social pages on Facebook and Instagram and/or visit [www.lakeareatech.edu](http://www.lakeareatech.edu).



**Lake Area Technical College President Tiffany Sanderson presented Tucker Hardy with the scholarship after the game on Friday.**



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Groton  
Area  
Tigers  
Groton, SD

## GDILIVE



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

Volleyball  
Varsity Match - 7:45  
at Warner



Groton  
Area  
Tigers  
Groton, SD

## GDILIVE



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Volleyball  
JV Match - 6:30  
at Warner

Sponsored by  
James Valley Thunder



Groton  
Area  
Tigers  
Groton, SD

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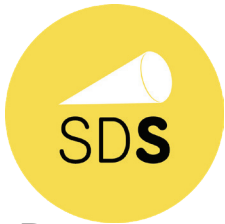
For more info: [GDILIVE.COM](http://GDILIVE.COM)

Volleyball  
C Match - 5:15  
at Warner

Sponsored by  
James Valley Thunder







## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### Democratic South Dakota lawmaker switches to Republican Party ahead of special session

**Rep. Peri Pourier will be invited to the House GOP caucus when Legislature convenes Tuesday**

**BY: MAKENZIE HUBER-SEPTEMBER 22, 2025 5:18 PM**

South Dakota state Rep. Peri Pourier has switched her political affiliation from Democratic to Republican. Pourier made the announcement on Monday, a day before lawmakers gather for a special session to vote on a state prison construction plan. South Dakota Searchlight confirmed Pourier's registration switch with a county election official.

The switch further tips the scales in Republicans' favor, with 97 Republicans and eight Democrats in the Legislature after Pourier's defection. That's the lowest number of Democrats in the Legislature since 1953, when there were two.

Pourier is an Oglala Lakota tribal member with a Rapid City address who represents District 27. It stretches from just east of Rapid City to the Pine Ridge Reservation and includes other rural areas. She is a former member of the Democratic House leadership team, but declined to caucus with her fellow Democrats during the most recent legislative session. So did her Senate district mate Red Dawn Foster, who did not immediately respond to a South Dakota Searchlight message Monday.

Pourier was minority whip in the House Democratic caucus in 2023 and 2024. She sat on the House Judiciary, Military and Veterans Affairs, and Taxation committees last legislative session.

In a Facebook post, Pourier said tribal sovereignty aligns with the Republican Party tenets of decentralized government, economic prosperity, lower energy costs, self-determination and public safety. "By contrast," she added, "well-intentioned Democratic reforms have too often undermined sovereignty."

"My decision reflects a strategic recalibration — one that strengthens my ability to advocate for our communities and deliver meaningful results," Pourier said. "I will not explain away poverty and violence with rhetoric. I remain committed to confronting these issues directly — not someday, not when it becomes politically convenient, but now."

House Majority Leader Scott Odenbach, R-Spearfish, said Pourier has been invited to the House Republican caucus meeting on Tuesday morning during the special session.

"We will benefit from her strong voice and unique perspective on issues, and her constituents will benefit from more exposure to Republican principles," Odenbach said in a text message. "It should be a win-win for everybody involved."

Pourier's Facebook post did not say whether she will participate in Republican caucus meetings or abstain from caucusing as she did during the last legislative session.

House Minority Leader Erin Healy, D-Sioux Falls, said she believes Pourier will continue to "act on her values and principles," and hopes she will continue to represent the best interests of her constituents in southwestern South Dakota and on the Pine Ridge Reservation.

Healy added that Pourier was the only Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee. Healy plans to discuss changing committee member assignments to ensure Democrats have a seat on the committee next session.

South Dakota Democratic Party Executive Director Dan Ahlers said he's "disappointed" by Pourier's announcement. He said South Dakota Democrats have addressed Native American issues more successfully than Republicans on the state and national level.



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Ahlers added that party affiliation switches among lawmakers “usually happen because of something other than a change in their values.” Sometimes lawmakers switch parties because it’s advantageous for the next election or to gain access to a task force or committee, he said.

Former Sen. Ryan Maher was the last Democratic lawmaker who switched to the Republican Party. He switched in 2011 after serving as a Democrat from 2007 to 2010, while representing a portion of north-western South Dakota and the Cheyenne River Reservation.

Other examples of lawmaker affiliation switches include former Sen. Jim Bradford, who switched from Democratic to Republican in 2009 and then back to Democratic in 2011, and former Sen. Jenna Netherton, who switched her affiliation from independent to Republican in 2013.

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

## Special session could resolve or inflame years of debate about SD’s pre-statehood penitentiary

**Lawmakers gather to consider \$650 million prison construction plan**

**BY: JOHN HULT-SEPTEMBER 22, 2025 9:38 AM**

When the South Dakota Legislature convenes for a special session Tuesday at the Capitol in Pierre, lawmakers will again be asked to answer a question that’s swirled for decades: Is it time to close the oldest parts of the state penitentiary?

A “yes” would mean a green light for the most expensive capital project ever funded by the state’s taxpayers.

A “no” could drag debate on the future of the 144-year-old building known as “the Hill” into another legislative session this winter.

Either answer will ripple through a state correctional apparatus that’s been subject to increasing scrutiny for the past four years.

### The stakes, the stage

Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden needs two-thirds of lawmakers in each legislative chamber to approve his plan for a 1,500-bed, \$650 million men’s prison in an industrial area in Sioux Falls. The state Constitution requires a two-thirds majority vote for spending bills.

Rhoden expects to have enough funding to build the prison without taking on any debt, due to money lawmakers have put into an incarceration construction fund the past several years and interest earned on that money.

On Labor Day, Corrections Secretary Kellie Wasko told Rhoden she’d resign on Oct. 20. Rhoden said he supported her, but also said he understood that her decision could help the prison win the support of the lawmakers who wanted her gone.

Since then, the governor has released the prison’s layout, added answers to a prison-focused Frequently Asked Questions page and held phone calls with lawmakers to make his case. Last week, he pledged to create a rehabilitation task force if lawmakers say yes to the prison legislation, released a plan that says the prison will cost \$154 million less than the one he couldn’t convince lawmakers to vote for in February, and released a letter from contractors guaranteeing a \$650 million maximum price.

Ryan Brunner, an adviser to Rhoden, wrote a column addressing what he called “myths” about the project that delved into some of the same areas.

A Democratic lawmaker, Rep. Kadyan Wittman of Sioux Falls, wrote a column urging lawmakers to consider rehabilitation and new models for corrections.

Meanwhile, a cadre of state lawmakers called The Freedom Caucus pledged to oppose the prison, and



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at least one 2026 gubernatorial candidate — Republican Aberdeen businessman Toby Doeden — has done the same.

On Friday, the Freedom Caucus said Rhoden's rehabilitation task force should do its work before lawmakers vote on a new prison.

Another lawmaker, former corrections secretary and Republican Rep. Tim Reisch of Howard, wrote a column backing Rhoden's plan. Three weeks ago, he was one of 19 House members who said they no longer trusted Wasko to lead the charge for a new prison.

## **Path to prison began with Noem, but discussion predates her**

Rhoden's Frequently Asked Questions page points to 2021 as the starting line for the current discussions.

That's the year former Gov. Kristi Noem terminated penitentiary leadership at the Department of Corrections for alleged nepotism and accusations of harassment. No one was charged criminally, but the move quickened discussions about staff shortages and operational inefficiencies at the penitentiary, which was built prior to South Dakota statehood in 1881.

Questions about the building's age, design deficiencies and capacity predate the Noem administration, however.

During his first stint in the governor's office in the 1980s, Bill Janklow successfully pushed to turn the former University of South Dakota campus in Springfield into the medium security facility now known as Mike Durfee State Prison. That decision was driven in part by an order from a federal judge to deal with overcrowding at the penitentiary, but also by the lack of suitable space for lower-risk inmates.

The state added maximum and minimum security units to the Sioux Falls penitentiary's footprint during Gov. George S. Mickelson's time in office. Those buildings would remain in service if lawmakers opt to build a new facility.

In 2013, then-Gov. Dennis Daugaard championed a criminal justice reform package designed, at least in part, to keep enough people out of prison and under community supervision to forestall a penitentiary replacement.

The state's prison population never hit the 4,500-inmate figure Daugaard warned it might without his reforms, but growth didn't cease. By the time Noem took office, the average daily population had hit highs of 3,900 — about 200 more than the 2013 average.

After the 2021 staff shakeup, the state commissioned a facilities assessment from a firm called the DLR Group. It concluded that the penitentiary was outdated, overcrowded and needed replacing. It also called for an additional women's prison and listed more than a dozen other facility-related needs.

Lawmakers voted to begin putting money into an incarceration construction fund in 2022, and the year after that agreed to build a medium-security women's prison in Rapid City.

## **Men's prison location sparks controversy**

The new women's prison saw little pushback. That project, with a price of \$87 million, broke ground in Rapid City on Oct. 16, 2023, and is still under construction.

One of the first whiffs of trouble for the men's prison came 10 days earlier. That's the day the Department of Corrections announced it would transfer \$8 million to the state's Office of School and Public Lands to secure title to 320 acres of agricultural land in southern Lincoln County for what it hoped would be a 1,500-bed facility.

The land's neighbors said they weren't notified and had no input before the announcement. They'd soon form a nonprofit organization called Neighbors Opposed to Prison Expansion and sue the state in an attempt to force it to comply with local zoning rules. Its members held public meetings and testified against the project in Pierre, where lawmakers in 2024 continued putting money into the incarceration construction fund and approved spending for water and sewer infrastructure for a men's prison.

The group of neighbors earned the backing of the lawmakers in their legislative district, including Sen. Kevin Jensen and Rep. Karla Lems, both Republicans from Canton. Lems voted against the 1,500-bed, \$825 million prison on the Lincoln County site in February, contributing to a 35-35 tie that sunk the bill in the state House before it could reach the Senate.



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Jensen has said publicly that he plans to vote against the \$650 million version on Tuesday.

## **Task force, consensus, remaining issues**

Jensen's the co-lead of a legislative summer study on recidivism, which aims to find ways to reduce the state's inmate population by reworking prison operations and rehabilitation programs.

Lems has said that building a new prison without knowing if the state can reduce its need for beds might be "putting the cart before the horse."

Lems, but not Jensen, served on Rhoden's Project Prison Reset task force. That group, convened by Rhoden in the wake of the February prison vote failure, set the wheels in motion for the \$650 million prison on the table this week.

The two Canton voices echo concerns raised by several other lawmakers. Among them are Wittman, the Democrat who penned an editorial about the need for a new approach to corrections.

When Rhoden announced his rehabilitation task force last Wednesday, Jensen called it overdue and poorly timed.

Others question the need to vote this week on a prison they could revisit in three months, during the regular legislative session. Rep. Marty Overweg, R-New Holland, put himself in that camp. Last week, while saying he hadn't made up his mind yet, he said most lawmakers are "pretty dug in" to their own positions in the run-up to the special session.

Those positions will be revealed Tuesday.

The special session begins when the Senate and House gavel in at 9 a.m. Central time. Rhoden is scheduled to deliver a speech to a joint session of both chambers at 9:30 a.m., after which debate is expected to begin.

## **Timeline of prison construction planning**

Following are some of the key developments in South Dakota's recent prison construction efforts.

2021: The state Department of Corrections hires a consultant, the DLR Group, to study prison needs, resulting in a focus on the potential construction of a women's prison to relieve overcrowding at the existing facility in Pierre, and a men's prison to replace the oldest parts of the Sioux Falls penitentiary, which dates to 1881.

March 28, 2022: Gov. Kristi Noem signs a bill into law that creates an incarceration construction fund. She also signs an annual state budget into law that mandates a transfer of \$70 million to the fund.

March 20, 2023: Noem signs a bill into law that authorizes construction of a 288-bed women's prison in Rapid City and appropriates \$60 million for it from the incarceration construction fund.

March 27, 2023: Noem signs a bill into law that authorizes planning and site preparation to build a men's prison, appropriates \$52 million for those purposes, and moves \$271 million into the incarceration construction fund for future construction costs.

Oct. 6, 2023: The Noem administration announces its selection of state-owned farmland in rural Lincoln County as the site for the men's prison, angering neighboring landowners.

Oct. 16, 2023: The state conducts a ceremonial groundbreaking for the women's prison in Rapid City.

Nov. 3, 2023: A group calling itself Neighbors Opposed to Prison Expansion (NOPE) files a lawsuit in opposition to the men's prison site in Lincoln County, alleging the project should be subject to county zoning.

March 7, 2024: Noem signs a bill into law that appropriates \$2.42 million of federal funds to install water and sewer infrastructure for the construction of the women's prison in Rapid City, and appropriates \$20.89 million more for construction.

March 18, 2024: Noem signs a bill into law that appropriates \$10 million of federal funds to install water and sewer infrastructure for the proposed men's prison and transfers \$226 million into the incarceration construction fund for future construction costs.

Nov. 14, 2024: The Department of Corrections tells members of the legislative budget committee that the guaranteed maximum price to build the men's prison is \$825 million.

Feb. 24, 2025: Amid rising outcry from some lawmakers about the price and location of the proposed men's prison, a bill to authorize its construction, to transfer \$182 million to the incarceration construction



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fund, and to appropriate \$763 million from the fund for construction fails on a 35-35 vote in the state House of Representatives.

Feb. 27, 2025: Gov. Larry Rhoden, who was elevated in January 2025 when Gov. Noem departed to serve in the Trump Cabinet, appoints a Project Prison Reset task force, led by Lt. Gov. Tony Venhuizen, to restart a study of the need, potential locations and cost to build a men's prison.

July 8, 2025: The Project Prison Reset task force, after a series of public meetings, unanimously recommends construction of a men's prison with a \$650 million budget at one of two vacant plots of industrial land in northeast Sioux Falls.

July 9, 2025: The state Supreme Court rules against opponents to the Lincoln County prison site in their lawsuit, saying they can't force the state to abide by county zoning laws. The decision has no practical effect on the project since state officials have already ruled out the site in favor of two potential locations in Sioux Falls.

Aug. 8, 2025: Gov. Rhoden announces a potential \$17 million deal to acquire land for a new men's prison in northeast Sioux Falls and trade away the state-owned land 15 miles south of the city that was formerly selected as a prison site in Lincoln County.

Sept. 2, 2025: Kellie Wasko, secretary of the Department of Corrections, delivers a letter to Gov. Rhoden saying she'll resign Oct. 20. The move is viewed as potentially positive for the prison construction plan, because some lawmakers included complaints about Wasko's leadership in their opposition to the proposal.

Sept. 18, 2025: Gov. Rhoden's office releases information indicating that \$21 million of the money spent to acquire, study and prepare the Lincoln County site for construction is unrecoverable if legislators move on to the Sioux Falls site.

Sept. 23, 2025: The Legislature convenes for a special session at the Capitol in Pierre to consider a bill that would authorize the Department of Corrections to contract for construction of a men's prison, to trade away the former site in Lincoln County as part of a deal to buy the new site in Sioux Falls, to transfer \$78 million from the general fund to the incarceration construction fund, and to appropriate \$650 million from the incarceration construction fund for the purchase of the land and construction costs. The anticipated funding includes \$24 million in interest earned by the incarceration construction fund during the current fiscal year and \$42 million in projected future interest.

*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.*

## **COMMENTARY**

### **A pipeline, property taxes and a prison: Rhoden's audition continues with a third big swing**

**Special session is governor's latest attempt to build a case for keeping his job**

**by SETH TUPPER**

**SEPTEMBER 22, 2025 9:36 AM**

Larry Rhoden's opponents should probably hope he doesn't get his way Tuesday when he asks the Legislature to approve his \$650 million prison construction plan.

If the legislation passes, it'll be another big win for the Republican governor in only eight months on the job.

Whether you agree with Rhoden and his policies or not, he's proven surprisingly effective at resolving disputes and achieving his goals, and at making himself look like a contender in next year's election.

When Gov. Kristi Noem departed in January to join President Donald Trump's Cabinet and Lt. Gov. Rhoden



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was elevated to governor, Rhoden was viewed as a seat-warmer. U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson was expected to easily thwart him in the June 2026 primary.

That scenario would echo the history of 1993-1994, when Republican Gov. George Mickelson died in a plane crash and Lt. Gov. Walter Dale Miller took over, only to lose in the primary to the better-known Bill Janklow (who served four years as attorney general, 16 as governor and one in Congress).

Rhoden is perfectly cast as the new Miller, not only because of the situation both were thrust into and the subordinate role they were expected to play. Miller, who died in 2015, was also a former legislator like Rhoden, was from the same county as Rhoden, was a rancher like Rhoden, and wore a cowboy hat and boots like Rhoden.

Although Miller's political career ended with his loss to Janklow, being the next Miller might not be so bad, thanks to a bit of trivia that's been obscured by Janklow's outsized place in state history: Miller only lost to Janklow by 8 points in 1994.

When South Dakota News Watch and the Chiesman Center for Democracy released their poll about the 2026 governor's race in April, Johnson's lead over Rhoden was 1 point. Since then, Johnson has continued adding to his intimidating pile of campaign cash, which stood at about \$7 million as of the most recent filing deadlines for campaign finance reports. Rhoden hasn't had to file a new report since becoming governor, and there are questions about his ability to gain traction with donors.

Yet Rhoden keeps getting things done.

After taking over in January and applying a reset (his word) to every mess (my word) his predecessor left behind, Rhoden has been wrestling political problems to the ground like rodeo steers. The biggest of those are the three P's — a pipeline, property taxes and prison construction.

The controversial Summit Carbon Pipeline proposal was tearing the state Republican Party apart when Rhoden came into office. He signed a ban on eminent domain for carbon pipelines into law and put the issue to bed, at least for a while.

Rising homeowner property taxes bedeviled legislators for years before Rhoden became governor, but nobody had come up with a workable response. He needed less than two months to propose, shepherd through the legislative process and sign a bill designed to slow the increases.

Noem left behind a wreck of a prison construction plan, with a site under litigation and a revolt from legislators who didn't like the price or the location in rural Lincoln County. Rhoden appointed his lieutenant governor, Tony Venhuizen, to lead a task force that came up with a new plan, a lower price and a different location in Sioux Falls for legislators to consider Tuesday.

Rhoden hasn't declared himself a candidate to keep his job yet, but he has a campaign website and is traveling the state on an "Open for Opportunity" tour that's really an extended, state-funded campaign trip.

Johnson has won nine statewide races including primaries and general elections, and he's not likely to be outworked in a campaign. There are other announced Republican candidates — Aberdeen businessman Toby Doeden, who was at 4% in the April poll, and state House Speaker Jon Hansen, of Dell Rapids, at 2% — who could make up ground or play the role of spoiler in the primary.

A Trump endorsement for any of them would probably be a clincher. Failing that, Rhoden's best hope is completing a successful audition for the job.

Those are the stakes for Rhoden on Tuesday, when he could clean up another Noem mess and rack up another political and policy win, or suffer a setback of his own making.

*Seth is editor-in-chief of South Dakota Searchlight. He was previously a supervising senior producer for South Dakota Public Broadcasting and a newspaper journalist in Rapid City and Mitchell.*



## Trump ties autism to Tylenol use in pregnancy despite inconclusive scientific evidence

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT-SEPTEMBER 22, 2025 6:21 PM

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump announced Monday that his administration believes it's found one contributing factor of autism and a possible treatment, though experts have said such claims are inconclusive and not backed by scientific evidence.

Trump and officials from his administration said during a press conference the Food and Drug Administration will move to update the label on Tylenol, also called acetaminophen, to reflect their concerns that it could potentially be one of the environmental causes of autism. Numerous medical organizations and the manufacturer say there is no proven link.

The FDA will also publish a notice in the Federal Register to change the label on leucovorin, a pharmaceutical intended to counteract the negative effects of certain cancer medications, so that doctors can prescribe it as a potential treatment for autism.

"They are strongly recommending that women limit Tylenol use during pregnancy unless medically necessary," Trump said. "That's, for instance, in cases of extremely high fever that you feel you can't tough it out. You can't do it. I guess there's that."

Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. said the FDA "is responding to clinical and laboratory studies that suggest a potential association between acetaminophen use during pregnancy and adverse neurodevelopmental outcomes, including later diagnosis for ADHD and autism."

Kennedy noted, however, that the FDA recognizes that Tylenol "is often the only tool for fevers and pain in pregnancy, as other alternatives have well documented adverse effects.

"HHS wants, therefore, to encourage clinicians to exercise their best judgment in the use of acetaminophen for fevers and pain in pregnancy by prescribing the lowest effective dose for the shortest necessary duration and only when treatment is required."

Kennedy, an environmental lawyer with no medical or research training, said in April the department will shift its research into autism toward potential environmental causes, and pledged to have "some of the answers by September."

### 'Not a single reputable study'

Trump and Kennedy's announcement was met with deep skepticism.

Alison Singer, president of the Autism Science Foundation, wrote in a statement released Monday that she's "unsure why this announcement came today and how the conclusions were drawn."

"No new data or scientific studies were presented or shared. No new studies have been published in the literature. No new presentations on this topic were made at scientific or medical conferences," Singer wrote. "Instead, President Trump talked about what he thinks and feels without offering scientific evidence. He said 'tough it out,' meaning don't take tylenol or give it to your child. It took me straight back to when moms were blamed for autism. If you can't take the pain or deal with a fever, then it's your fault if your child has autism. That was shocking. Simply shocking."

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists President Dr. Steven J. Fleischman wrote in a statement the Trump administration's claim about Tylenol is "not backed by the full body of scientific evidence and dangerously simplifies the many and complex causes of neurologic challenges in children."

"In more than two decades of research on the use of acetaminophen in pregnancy, not a single reputable study has successfully concluded that the use of acetaminophen in any trimester of pregnancy causes neurodevelopmental disorders in children," Fleischman wrote. "In fact, the two highest-quality studies on this subject—one of which was published in JAMA last year—found no significant associations between use of acetaminophen during pregnancy and children's risk of autism, ADHD, or intellectual disability."

ACOG writes on its website that women who experience headaches during pregnancy can use over-the-counter medications like Advil, also called ibuprofen, and Aleve, also known as naproxen, "for migraines that don't get better with acetaminophen, but only in the second trimester and only for 48 hours or less



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at a time. It's not clear if NSAIDs are safe for a fetus during the first trimester. Taking NSAIDs during the third trimester may lead to birth defects."

## **Oz wants state Medicaid programs to cover prescriptions**

At the press conference, FDA Commissioner Dr. Marty Makary said leucovorin could possibly help alleviate low folate levels, which may be one potential factor in autism.

"Autism may also be due to an autoimmune reaction to a folate receptor on the brain not allowing that important vitamin to get into the brain cells," Makary said. "We have a duty to let doctors and the public know we are going to change the label to make it available. Hundreds of thousands of kids, in my opinion, will benefit."

Administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services Dr. Mehmet Oz said the agency will try to ensure anyone on a government health program can have a prescription for leucovorin covered.

"Over half of American children are covered by Medicaid and CHIP," Oz said. "Upon this label change, state Medicaid programs in partnership with CMS will cover prescription leucovorin around the country. It's yours, but you have to go to a doctor to get a prescription, because they know your child, they know you and they know the medication."

Oz said he believed that "private insurance companies will rapidly follow our lead if they have not already done so."

CMS, he said, is also contacting state governments to aid the Trump administration in studying the use of leucovorin as a possible treatment for autism.

"Collecting real-world data, which is what many of you have been asking us to do in the community, is fast, it is life-saving and we'll get answers based on what happens over the next few months with this approach," Oz said.

## **NIH research projects picked**

Director of the National Institutes of Health Jay Bhattacharya said his agency has selected 13 projects to receive a share of \$50 million to look for autism's root causes and therapies.

"The studies feature a new kind of science called exposomics, where scientists consider environmental and medical factors, nutrition, events during pregnancy in combination with biology and genetics to answer vital questions about autism," Bhattacharya said.

Bhattacharya also gave a brief description of autism spectrum disorder, noting it "encompasses a very wide range of symptoms, ranging from mild difficulties in social interactions to profoundly autistic children who experience severe disabilities in speech and behavior.

"Given this wide range of symptoms across the spectrum, it seems certain that there will be a wide range of biological contributors to explaining the cause."

## **'Findings are not entirely consistent'**

The Autism Science Foundation wrote in a statement released earlier this month that "low maternal folate levels during early pregnancy have been linked in several studies to an increased risk of autism in children, though findings are not entirely consistent."

"Data suggesting that leucovorin may be effective come from four small randomized controlled trials, all using different doses and different outcomes, and in one case, reliant on a specific genetic variant," the Autism Science Foundation notes. "This science is still in very early stages, and more studies are necessary before a definitive conclusion can be reached."

As for Tylenol, the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine released a statement earlier this month that it "continues to advise physicians and patients that acetaminophen is an appropriate medication to treat pain and fever during pregnancy."

"At this time, the weight of scientific evidence that acetaminophen use during pregnancy causes an increased risk for autism or ADHD is simply inconclusive," SMFM President Sindhu K. Srinivas wrote in the statement. "In maternal-fetal medicine, as in all of medicine, our recommendations are based on an evaluation of rigorous research and data, clinical expertise, and our patients' values and preferences."

The statement goes on to say that "untreated fever and pain during pregnancy carry significant maternal



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and infant health risks. Untreated fever, particularly in the first trimester, increases the risk of miscarriage, birth defects, and premature birth, and untreated pain can lead to maternal depression, anxiety, and high blood pressure."

Former Chief Medical Officer at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Dr. Debra Houry, who resigned from the agency earlier this year, said on a call with reporters before the announcement that she was concerned the conclusions will be premature and not based on solid science.

"As of three weeks ago, we hadn't seen evidence that acetaminophen was linked with autism, so it's curious to know how quickly that was developed," Houry said.

Tylenol has information on its website rebutting the assertion that its product has been conclusively linked as a contributor to autism diagnoses.

"Credible, independent scientific data continues to show no proven link between taking acetaminophen and autism," its website states.

The company adds that the best advice is for people to talk "to your healthcare professional before taking or administering acetaminophen."

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

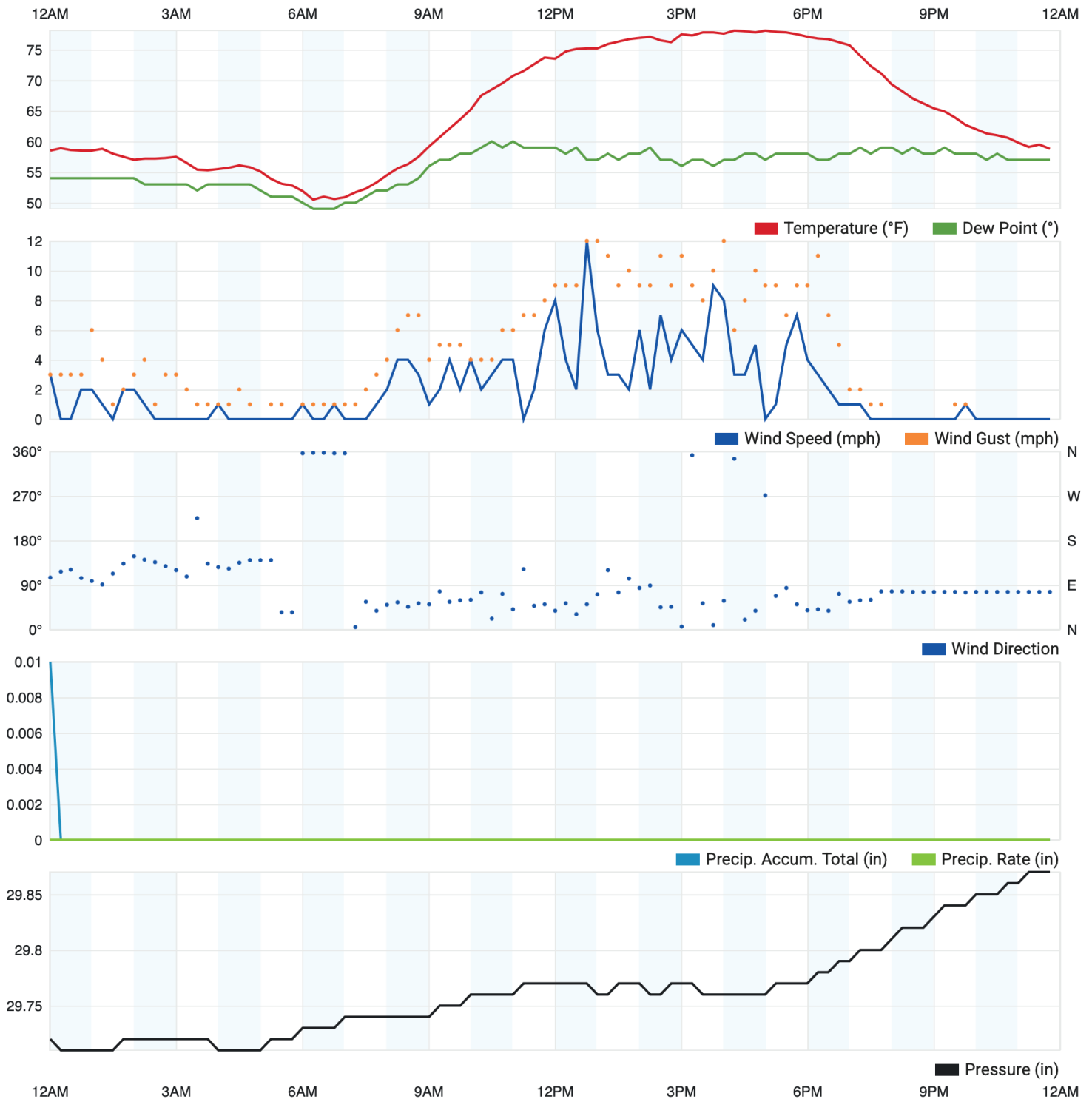


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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

September 22, 2025





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Today



High: 79 °F

Sunny

Tonight



Low: 54 °F

Mostly Clear

Wednesday



High: 77 °F

Mostly Sunny

Wednesday  
Night



Low: 52 °F

Mostly Clear

Thursday



High: 82 °F

Sunny



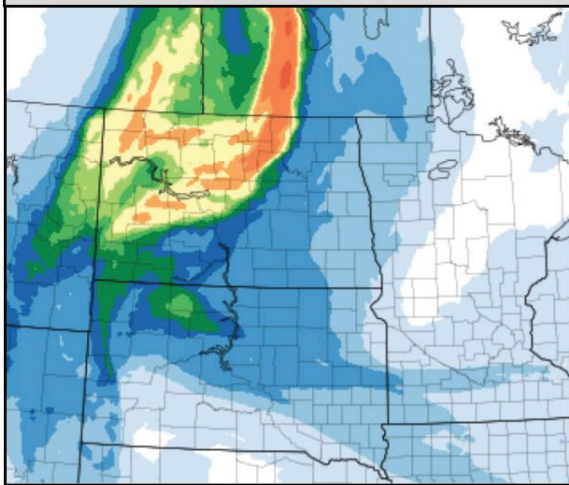
## Smoky Skies May Return

September 22, 2025  
2:23 PM

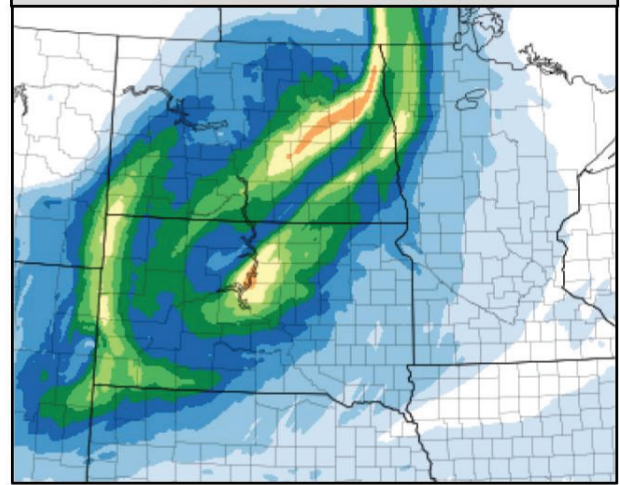
Smoke is expected to remain aloft, but hazy skies are still possible.

- Canadian wildfire smoke is expected to move into South Dakota over the next 24 hours.
- Smoke is expected to remain aloft, and air quality at the surface will remain at healthy levels.
- Main areas impacted will be west of the James River Valley. Areas to the east may still see a light haze due to the smoke.

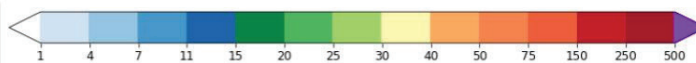
Surface Smoke 7PM Monday, September 22nd



Total Atmospheric Smoke 7PM Tuesday, September 23rd



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



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

Canadian wildfire smoke may make a return beginning this evening and continuing into tomorrow. Smoke is expected to remain elevated, and near-surface air quality will remain at healthy levels. However, hazy skies may be observed, particularly over central South Dakota.



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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 78 °F at 5:08 PM

Low Temp: 50 °F at 6:15 AM

Wind: 13 mph at 2:34 PM

Precip: : 0.00

## Today's Info

Record High: 94 in 1935

Record Low: 22 in 2012

Average High: 72

Average Low: 44

Average Precip in Sept.: 1.53

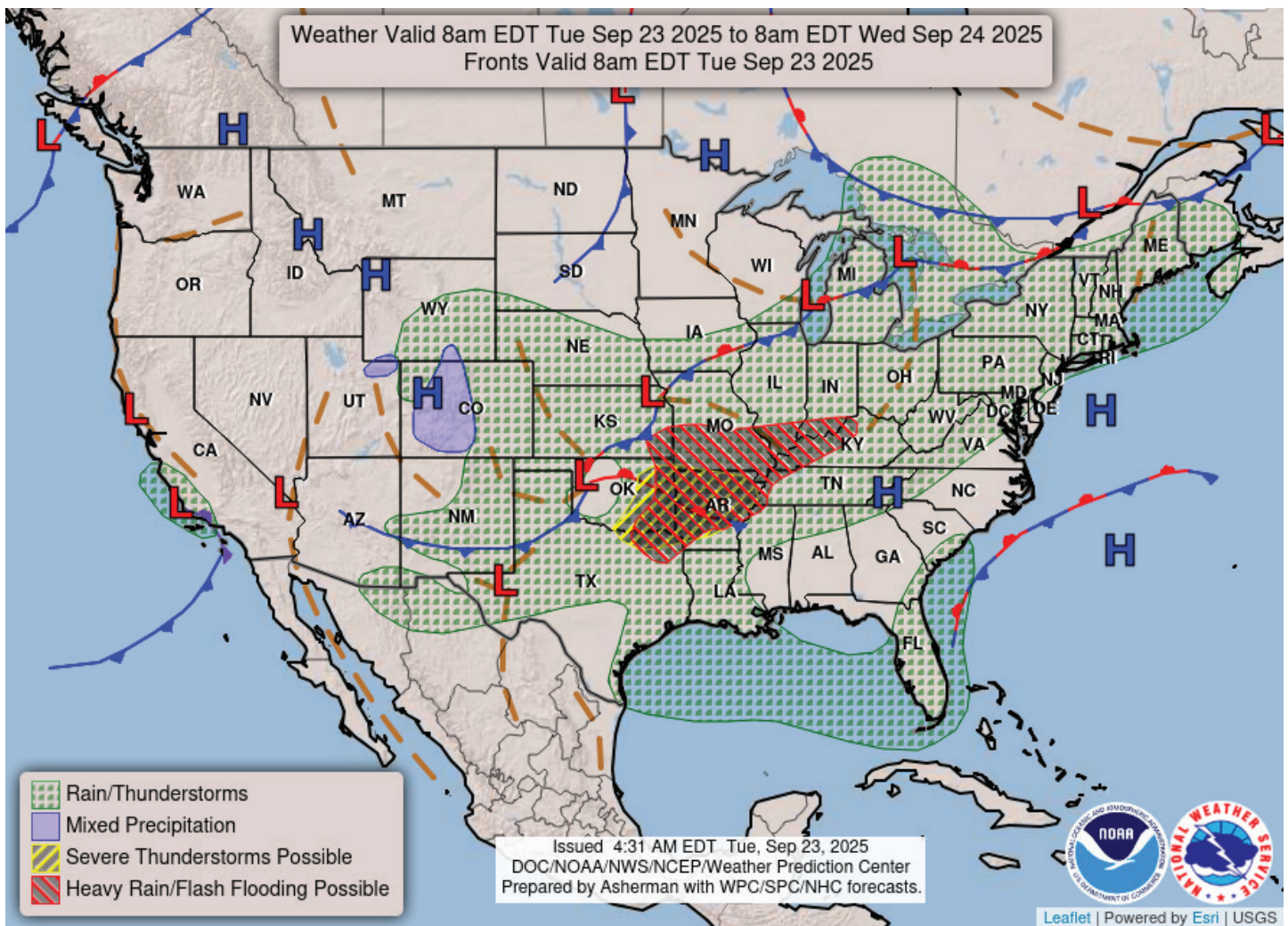
Precip to date in Sept.: 2.62

Average Precip to date: 17.87

Precip Year to Date: 22.92

Sunset Tonight: 7:28 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:22 am





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## Today in Weather History

September 23, 1984: Snow fell from the early morning to the late evening hours across northwest South Dakota bringing more than a foot of snow to some locations. Camp Crook in Harding County reported 14 inches. Amounts between six and twelve inches were common across Harding and Perkins Counties as well as parts of Meade and Butte Counties. Roads in these areas were slushy with icy bridges. The snow covered much of the western third of South Dakota with depths an inch or less.

September 23, 2004: A tornado touched down northeast of Browns Valley, MN during the late afternoon. This tornado traveled through a cornfield and a farmstead before dissipating. The tornado damaged several sheds and a trailer along with toppling a large grain bin. Another tornado touched down south and southwest of Rosholt in Roberts County in the late afternoon. This F2 tornado destroyed a house, a mobile home, and a travel trailer. The tornado also killed three cattle.

1551: The Grand Harbour at Valetta, Malta, was hit by a waterspout which then moved inland. This waterspout sunk four ships, killing at least 600 people. It should be noted, the year of the event could also be 1555, or 1556 as sources conflict.

1722: La Nouvelle-Orléans (New Orleans) was founded May 7, 1718, by the French Mississippi Company, under the direction of Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville, on land inhabited by the Chitimacha. Four years later, a hurricane destroys nearly every building in the village, including the only church and hospital.

1815 - One of the greatest hurricanes to strike New England made landfall at Long Island and crossed Massachusetts and New Hampshire. It was the worst tempest in nearly two hundred years, equal to the hurricane which struck in 1938, and one of a series of severe summer and autumn storms to affect shipping lanes that year. (David Ludlum)

1904 - The temperature at Charlotteburg, NJ, dipped to 23 degrees, the coldest reading of record for so early in the autumn for the state. (The Weather Channel)

1983 - A thunderstorm downburst caused a timber blowdown in the Kaibab National Forest north of the Grand Canyon. Two hundred acres were completely destroyed, and scattered destruction occurred across another 3300 acres. Many trees were snapped off 15 to 30 feet above ground level. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Autumn began on a rather pleasant note for much of the nation. Showers and thunderstorms were confined to Florida and the southwestern deserts. Warm weather continued in the western U.S., and began to spread into the Great Plains Region, but even in the southwestern deserts readings remained below 100 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thunderstorms developing along a cold front in the south central U.S. produced severe weather in Oklahoma during the afternoon and early evening hours. Thunderstorms produced softball size hail near Noble and Enterprise, and baseball size hail at Lequire and Kinta. A tornado near Noble OK destroyed a mobile home injuring one person. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Seventeen cities in the north central U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date, including Devils Lake ND with a reading of 22 degrees. Jackson KY reported a record low of 41 degrees during the late afternoon. Strong northwesterly winds ushering cold air into the central and northeastern U.S. gusted to 55 mph at Indianapolis IND. Winds along the cold front gusted to 65 mph at Norfolk VA, and thunderstorms along the cold front deluged Roseland NJ with 2.25 inches of rain in one hour. The temperature at Richmond VA plunged from 84 degrees to 54 degrees in two hours. Snow and sleet was reported at Binghamton NY. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

2005 - Hurricane Rita reached the Texas/Louisiana border area near Sabine Pass as a category-3 hurricane with maximum sustained winds near 120 mph. A storm surge of at least 15 feet flooded parts of Cameron, Jefferson Davis, Terrebonne and Vermilion parishes, where sugar cane crop losses were estimated near \$300 million. An 8-foot storm surge in New Orleans overtopped the provisionally-repaired levees (from Hurricane Katrina damage) and caused additional flooding. A total of 10 fatalities were reported, and preliminary damage estimates ranged between \$4-5 billion.

2009: A massive dust storm swept 725 miles across the outback to engulf Sydney, New South Wales producing a red hue across the region from the 22nd through the 24th. Wind gusts topped 60 mph as the storm transported an estimated 5,000 metric tons of dust, spreading it into the southern region of Queensland.



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## ONLY ONE KING IS ALL POWERFUL

Canute was the king of the Danes in the eleventh century. Under his leadership they overran Britain, the King of Denmark and then the King of Norway. He was recognized as the most powerful man of his time.

One day while standing at the seashore with the waves gently rolling back and forth over his feet, a group of his subjects stood before him and called out, "You are all powerful, O King! There is no one who dare disobey you and nothing can ever stop you."

As the waves lapped about his feet, he asked, "Will the sea obey me?"

"Command it, O King, and it will!" they responded.

"Sea," he shouted in a loud voice, "I command you to come no further. Waves, stop your rolling. Do not touch my feet!" Suddenly a large wave erupted from the sea and swept over him.

"Learn a lesson," he said as he took off his crown. "There is only one King who is all-powerful. It is He who rules the sea and holds the ocean. It is whom you ought to worship and praise and serve above all others."

How powerful is this "only one King?" The Psalmist wrote, "He stilled the storm to a whisper. The waves of the sea were hushed."

Often our lives are as troubled as an angry sea. Far too frequently the waves attack us and would wash us into the depths of the unknown. Thunder echoes in our ears and lightning strikes nearby filling our hearts with fear.

Then, just before we are swept under, He stills the storm.

Prayer: We thank You, Father, that the winds of life and the waves of disaster cannot destroy Your beloved. We praise You for Your power and attention. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: He stilled the storm to a whisper. The waves of the sea were hushed. Psalm 107:29

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



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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 09.19.25

2 22 27 42 58 8

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$451,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 28 Mins 34 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 09.22.25

2 5 34 41 44 10

All Star Bonus: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$3,390,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 15 Hrs 43 Mins 34 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 09.22.25

6 9 15 42 43 15

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 58 Mins 34 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 09.20.25

1 5 21 31 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$29,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 15 Hrs 58 Mins 34 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 09.22.25

32 49 50 56 63 19

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 27 Mins 34 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 09.22.25

3 29 42 46 59 15

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$127,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 27 Mins 34 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)



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## **Upcoming Groton Events**

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



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

### PREP VOLLEYBALL

Aberdeen Roncalli def. Aberdeen Christian, 19-25, 21-25, 25-20, 25-16, 15-9  
Edgemont def. Newell, 25-17, 25-20, 25-13  
Elkton-Lake Benton def. Great Plains Lutheran, 25-18, 25-16, 13-25, 26-24  
Ellendale, N.D. def. Leola-Frederick High School, 25-12, 28-26, 25-22  
Ethan def. Dell Rapids St Mary's, 25-18, 19-25, 25-8, 25-17  
Gregory def. White River, 25-23, 25-21, 25-23  
Little Wound def. Crazy Horse, 25-14, 25-15, 25-9  
Parkston def. McCook Central-Montrose, 25-21, 25-12, 25-20  
Pine Ridge def. Cheyenne-Eagle Butte, 25-21, 25-16, 25-21  
Tripp-Delmont-Armour def. Wessington Springs, 25-19, 25-22, 25-16  
Yankton def. Vermillion, 25-11, 25-18, 25-23

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

### **Russia and Ukraine fire drones, missiles and bombs as Zelenskyy seeks help at UN**

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia said that it shot down three dozen Ukrainian drones heading toward Moscow while Ukraine said that Russian missiles, drones and bombs killed at least two civilians, as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy persevered with efforts to bolster international support for his country at a U.N. gathering of world leaders on Tuesday.

With his troops under strain on the front line after more than three years of fighting Russia's bigger invading army, Zelensky was due to begin meetings with leaders gathered in New York this week for the U.N. General Assembly.

Peace efforts set in motion by U.S. President Donald Trump since he returned to office in January appear to have stalled. Trump's Alaska summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin and a White House meeting with Zelenskyy and key European leaders took place more than a month ago, but the war has continued unabated.

Zelenskyy said that he met late Monday in New York with Keith Kellogg, Trump's special envoy. Kellogg and Zelenskyy discussed cooperation agreements on the manufacturing of drones and Ukraine's purchase of American weaponry, the Ukrainian president said on Telegram.

European leaders have supported Zelenskyy's diplomatic efforts, even as the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza is expected to take center stage at the United Nations. Some European countries are alarmed by the possibility that the war could spread beyond Ukraine amid what they have called Russian provocations.

NATO allies will hold formal consultations at Estonia's request on Tuesday, after the Baltic country said that three Russian fighter jets entered its airspace last week without authorization.

Meanwhile, the full-scale war, which began on Feb. 24, 2022, continues to take a heavy toll on Ukrainian civilians.

The U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights said earlier this month that Ukrainian civilian casualties increased by 40% in the first eight months of this year compared to 2024, as Russia escalated its long-range missile and localized drone strikes.

Also, a U.N. Human Rights Office report released Tuesday described the dire situation of thousands of civilians detained by Russia in areas of Ukraine it has captured.

"Russian authorities have subjected Ukrainian civilian detainees in occupied territory to torture and ill-



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treatment, including sexual violence, in a widespread and systematic manner," the report said.

Russian aircraft dropped five glide bombs on the southern Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia during the night, killing a man, regional head Ivan Fedorov said Tuesday.

In the Odesa region of southern Ukraine, Russian ballistic missiles struck the town center of Tatarbunary, killing a woman, regional head Oleh Kiper said Tuesday morning.

Overall, Russian forces launched three Iskander ballistic missiles and 115 strike and decoy drones at Ukraine overnight, the Ukrainian air force said. It said that 103 drones were intercepted or jammed, but 12 drones and three missiles reached their targets at six locations.

Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin said that more than 40 Ukrainian drones flying toward the Russian capital were shot down between Monday evening and midday Tuesday.

Flights were temporarily halted overnight in and out of Moscow's Sheremetyevo airport, causing delays and cancellations, because of the attack.

The Russian Defense Ministry reported Tuesday that it intercepted 69 Ukrainian drones over a number of Russian regions and the annexed Crimean Peninsula.

## **More experts see genocide in Israel's wartime conduct in Gaza**

By MIKE CORDER and MOLLY QUELL Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — A growing number of experts, including those commissioned by a U.N. body, have said Israel's offensive in the Gaza Strip amounts to genocide, deepening Israel's isolation and risking untold damage to the country's standing even among allies.

The accusation is vehemently denied by Israel, which was established in part as a refuge for Jews after the Holocaust. Others have rejected it or said only a court can make that determination.

Even so, global outrage over Israel's wartime conduct has mounted in recent months, as images of starving children emerged, adding to the humanitarian catastrophe of a 23-month war that has killed tens of thousands of Palestinians and laid waste to much of Gaza.

A current offensive in the territory's largest city further raised concern, with some of Israel's European allies condemning it.

But the genocide accusation goes further, raising the question of whether a state forged in the aftermath of the crime is now committing it.

Israeli leaders brand the argument as veiled antisemitism, saying the country abides by international law and urges Gaza's civilians to evacuate ahead of major military operations. They say Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack that sparked the war was itself a genocidal act.

In that attack, Hamas-led militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted 251. Forty-eight hostages remain in Gaza, around 20 of whom Israel believes are alive.

Israel's ensuing operation has reduced much of Gaza to rubble and led to famine in parts. Israeli leaders have also expressed support for the mass relocation of Palestinians from Gaza, a move Palestinians and others say would amount to forcible expulsion.

Gaza's Health Ministry says over 65,000 Palestinians have been killed. The ministry — part of the Hamas-run government and staffed by medical professionals — doesn't say how many were civilians or combatants, but says women and children make up around half.

The definition of genocide

Genocide was codified in a 1948 convention drawn up after the horrors of the Holocaust that defines it as acts "committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group."

According to the convention, genocidal acts include: killing; causing serious bodily or mental harm; and deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about the group's physical destruction in whole or in part.

Experts and rights groups increasingly use the genocide label

In a report last week, a team of independent experts commissioned by the U.N. Human Rights Council concluded the war has become an attempt by Israel to destroy the Palestinian population in Gaza and



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constitutes genocide.

The group, which doesn't speak for the U.N., said its determination was based on a pattern of behavior, including Israel's "total siege" of Gaza, killing or wounding vast numbers of Palestinians, and the destruction of health and educational facilities. Israel says Hamas uses such facilities for military purposes. It lifted a complete 2 1/2 month blockade in May.

Many of the world's leading experts on genocide have reached the same conclusion, with at least two dozen using the term publicly in the past year. Among them is Omer Bartov, a professor of Holocaust and genocide studies at Brown University.

Early in the war, Bartov, who grew up in Israel and served in its military, argued Israel's actions didn't amount to genocide.

He changed his mind when Israel took over the city of Rafah, driving out most of its population. He now considers Israel's actions "a genocidal operation."

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez called Israel's conduct genocide this month. "This is not self-defense, it's not even an attack — it's the extermination of a defenseless people," he said.

Two Israeli rights groups have also said it's genocide. While the groups are respected internationally, their views are not representative of the vast majority of Israelis.

In December, Amnesty International used the term, citing similar findings as the U.N.-commissioned experts. "Looking at the broader picture of Israel's military campaign and the cumulative impact of its policies and acts, genocidal intent is the only reasonable conclusion," it said.

Two weeks later, Human Rights Watch accused Israel of intentionally depriving Gaza of water, saying that amounted to "an act of genocide."

Others do not see genocide — or say it's for a court to decide

Israel — where the Holocaust plays a critical role in national identity — casts such allegations as an assault on its very legitimacy. It says Hamas — which doesn't accept Israel's right to exist — is prolonging the war by not surrendering and releasing the hostages.

The Foreign Ministry dismissed the report by the U.N.-commissioned experts as "distorted and false."

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said that Israel could have committed genocide "in one afternoon" if it wanted, implying it has acted with restraint. Experts say there's no numerical threshold for the crime.

Responding to a question in August, U.S. President Donald Trump, whose country is Israel's staunchest backer, said he didn't think he'd seen evidence to support the accusation.

The Elie Wiesel Foundation, established by the Nobel laureate and Holocaust survivor, also rejected the characterization.

"Israel's actions in Gaza do not constitute genocide — they are legitimate acts of self-defense against an organization that seeks Israel's destruction," it said in a statement.

Norman Goda, a professor of Holocaust studies at the University of Florida, sees the use of the word as part of "a long-standing effort to delegitimize Israel," saying the accusations are "laced with antisemitic tropes."

U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres and others say it's not for politicians or scholars to make the determination.

"We have always been clear that that is a decision for international courts," then-British Foreign Secretary David Lammy told Sky News in May.

The European Union has made a similar argument, as has the Auschwitz memorial, dedicated to the victims at the largest Nazi concentration camp, most of them Jews.

The top U.N. court has been asked to rule

In late 2023, South Africa accused Israel of genocide at the U.N.'s top court, the International Court of Justice. About a dozen countries have joined the case. A final ruling could take years.

To prove its case, South Africa must establish intent.

Lawyers for the country have already pointed to comments by Israeli leaders, including then-Defense Minister Yoav Gallant saying Israel was "fighting human animals," and Deputy Knesset Speaker Nissim



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Vaturi saying that Israelis shared the goal of "erasing the Gaza Strip from the face of the Earth."

Israeli leaders have downplayed the comments and argued they were taken out of context or directed at Hamas.

Even if it rules for South Africa, the court has no way to stop any genocide or punish perpetrators. Only the U.N. Security Council can do that — including through sanctions or authorizing military action. The U.S. has a long history of using its veto power there to block resolutions against Israel.

The International Criminal Court, meanwhile, has issued arrest warrants for Netanyahu and Gallant, but neither faces genocide charges. They are accused of using starvation as a method of warfare, allegations they deny.

Israel faces increasing pressure

Israel faces increasing pressure, even from countries not calling its actions genocide. There have been calls for exclusion in the cultural and sports sectors, and protests in several European cities.

The European Commission's president, Ursula von der Leyen, one of Israel's staunchest backers, has called for partially suspending trade ties with the country. Germany and the U.K., both strong supporters of Israel, have suspended or restricted some military exports.

Goda, the academic who doesn't think Israel is committing genocide, acknowledged the term has ramifications beyond the legal realm.

"Genocide" is a legal term, but it also carries a very heavy political and cultural weight," he said. "A country committing genocide can never outrun the legacy of that crime."

## **Crimes against humanity charges against former Philippine President Duterte detailed by court**

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — The crimes against humanity charges against former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte allege his involvement in the killings of at least 76 people while he was president and earlier a southern mayor, the International Criminal Court has revealed.

The redacted charges were made public Monday after prosecutors submitted a 15-page charge sheet to the court on July 4. Among other things, they allege Duterte instructed and authorized "violent acts including murder to be committed against alleged criminals, including alleged drug dealers and users."

The first charge cites 19 victims killed while Duterte was mayor of Davao City between 2013 and around 2016. The second involves 14 who died in targeted killings between 2016 and 2017 when Duterte was president. The third cited the killings of 43 people during so-called "clearance operations" between 2016 and 2018.

Duterte, his lawyer and family did not immediately react to the detailed charges. Even when he was president, he denied authorizing extrajudicial killings although he openly threatened drug suspects with death and encouraged police to open fire if suspects violently resisted arrest and threaten law enforcers.

Duterte was arrested in March by Philippine authorities on a warrant issued by the ICC. He is now being held at an ICC facility in the Netherlands.

Supporters of Duterte criticized the administration of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., Duterte's political rival, for arresting and surrendering the former leader to a court whose jurisdiction his supporters dispute.

A court hearing had been scheduled to begin Tuesday but was postponed to give judges time to evaluate arguments from Duterte's attorneys that he is not fit to stand trial.

## **Defense tells judge Sean 'Diddy' Combs has served enough time behind bars**

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Lawyers for music mogul Sean "Diddy" Combs urged a New York federal judge Monday to sentence him early next month to no more than 14 months in prison for his conviction on two prostitution-related charges, meaning he'd go free almost immediately if the judge agreed.



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The lawyers made their arguments in a written submission to Judge Arun Subramanian, who has already rejected a proposed \$50 million bail package, signaling that he doesn't believe the Grammy-winning artist is close to being released.

"Mr. Combs's celebrity status in the realms of music, fashion, spirits, media, and finance has been shattered and Mr. Combs's legacy has been destroyed," the lawyers wrote, saying their client has been punished enough.

The submission provided new information about what life behind bars for nearly 13 months has been like for Combs, what's happened to his businesses and other interests and explains why he turned down a plea-deal offer from prosecutors prior to his trial.

Combs will learn his sentencing fate on Oct. 3

Combs faces an Oct. 3 sentencing after his July conviction by a Manhattan jury on two Mann Act charges that outlaw interstate commerce related to prostitution. Each charge carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison.

The Bad Boy Records founder was exonerated on more serious racketeering conspiracy and sex trafficking charges that would have required a minimum of 15 years in prison and the possibility of a life sentence.

In their submission, Combs' lawyers argued that a jury sent a loud message to the judge by exonerating him of the most serious charges.

"Put simply, the jury has spoken. Its verdict represents an 'affirmative indication of innocence,'" the lawyers said.

"He has served over a year in one of the most notorious jails in America — yet has made the most of that punishment. It is time for Mr. Combs to go home to his family, so he can continue his treatment and try to make the most of the next chapter of his extraordinary life," they added.

Prosecutors, who will submit their recommendations prior to the Oct. 3 sentencing, have already said they'll urge Combs stay imprisoned substantially longer than the four to five years they originally thought.

Defense lawyers, though, wrote in their submission Monday that prosecutors "have lost all perspective."

Lawyers say Combs's career and reputation are ruined

"Mr. Combs's career and reputation have been destroyed," they wrote. "His life outside of jail has been systematically dismantled."

Among other things, they noted that he had to let go over 100 employees from his businesses and many of them have been unable to get new jobs because of their past association with Combs.

His seven children, they said, have faced "devastating consequences," including lost business opportunities in acting, television, fashion and concerts, with some of them being included in some of the nearly 100 civil lawsuits filed against Combs since his arrest.

The lawyers also noted that Combs and his family were set to star in a Hulu show about their lives, but the show was cancelled once the allegations against him became public.

Combs was removed from the boards at three charter schools he created in Harlem, the Bronx and Connecticut and was stripped of an honorary doctorate degree from Howard University, which plans to return his prior donations, they said.

Inmate approached Combs with a shiv, lawyers say

Meanwhile, Combs's life in prison has been harrowing at times, even as it has allowed him to become sober for the first time in 25 years, his lawyers said.

On one occasion, another inmate approached Combs with a shiv, accusing Combs of sitting on a chair that the inmate wanted to sit on, before Combs defused the situation and calmed the man and his makeshift weapon down, the lawyers said.

They said he has been under constant suicide watch, meaning every two hours he must present his identification card to guards to show he is alive and well and is awakened from sleep in a brightly lighted cell by a guard to ensure he is well.

He also has limited access to clean water, leaving him to heat the water that he drinks to ensure it won't make him sick and he must sleep within two feet of other inmates in a dorm-style room containing a



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bathroom and no door, the lawyers wrote.

"Mr. Combs has not breathed fresh air in nearly 13 months, or felt sunlight on his skin, often walking with a limp due to a painful knee injury that requires surgery," they said. And the food, they added, sometimes contains maggots.

Lawyers say Combs had no choice to face trial after plea offer

Prior to trial, the lawyers said, prosecutors offered Combs a plea deal that would have recommended a prison sentence of at least 25 years and required him to plead guilty to crimes of which he was acquitted.

They portrayed their client as a changed man, who had realized that his overuse of drugs, including some prescribed by doctors, had contributed to violent acts he participated in.

"Without minimizing Mr. Combs's conduct, this is in many ways a 'sex, drugs, and rock n' roll' story," they said. "Mr. Combs had severe substance abuse problems throughout the entirety of the offense conduct and participated in a high-octane celebrity lifestyle."

The music maven's trial featured lengthy testimony from two former girlfriends of Combs who said they felt forced to participate in drug-fueled sex marathons with male sex workers as Combs watched and sometimes filmed the dayslong encounters.

R&B singer Cassandra "Cassie" Ventura testified that she participated in hundreds of the meetups that were referred to as "freak-offs" while she was his most frequent girlfriend from 2007 to 2018.

Another ex-girlfriend, testifying under the pseudonym "Jane," said she also felt pressured to perform sexually with male sex workers while she dated Combs from 2021 until his arrest at a New York hotel a year ago.

Lawyers say a sober Combs looks to a new future unlike his past

There was also extensive testimony during the trial about Combs beating his girlfriends and using violence and the fears of it to control those around him.

Defense lawyers at trial conceded there was domestic abuse but said the charges brought by prosecutors were not proven.

While he was once so depressed in jail that "there were days when he was unable to get out of his bed or even talk to the psychology department," his lawyers said he looks forward to the future.

They said he has begun teaching other inmates essential skills in business management, entrepreneurship and personal development.

The lawyers wrote that the education program has become "one of the most impactful and important endeavors of his life" and he hopes to expand it to state-run facilities once he is released.

"He is a humbled man who understands that the most important things in life are his devotion to and quality time with his family and his contributions for the benefit of others," they said.

## **What you will and won't see at this year's UN General Assembly**

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The annual high-level gathering at the U.N. General Assembly this week will see more than 140 world leaders descend upon New York City in an effort to secure global peace and security despite growing divides on how to do that.

Nearly 90 heads of state, 43 heads of government and one crown prince are among the dignitaries to appear on the U.N. stage beginning on Tuesday to make their case for how to bring an end to regional conflicts in Europe and the Middle East, while addressing the growing climate crisis and the dangers posed by the rapid development and use of artificial intelligence.

Looming over the weeklong summit is the internal financial turmoil plaguing the United Nations as it celebrates the 80th anniversary of its founding, which emerged from the rubble of World War II.

Questions about the U.N.'s relevancy and efficiency have sharpened from supporters and critics alike. Recent U.S. cuts to foreign assistance and the reevaluation of humanitarian contributions by other countries have forced a reckoning for the world body.

Here are five things to look out for this week:



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Outcome of the two-state solution conference

The week began with a high-profile meeting chaired by France and Saudi Arabia focused on garnering support for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The hours-long conference ended late Monday with several countries, including France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Malta, and Monaco, announcing or confirming their recognition of a Palestinian state, a day after the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and Portugal did. Germany, Italy and Japan took part in the conference but did not recognize such a state.

The U.S. and Israel boycotted the event, saying the international push for a Palestinian state rewards Hamas and makes it harder to reach a deal to halt the war and return the remaining hostages.

It came as several U.S. allies, including Canada and the United Kingdom, announced recognition of an independent Palestinian state over the weekend. The meeting and expanded recognition of Palestinian statehood will likely have little if any actual impact on the ground, where Israel is waging another major offensive in the Gaza Strip and expanding settlements in the occupied West Bank.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has long opposed Palestinian statehood, has threatened to take even further unilateral action in response. But proponents of the effort, including top U.N. officials, remain unpersuaded that recognition of Palestine is crucial at this stage of the conflict.

As the US isolates, other world powers reaffirm climate pledges

More than 110 world leaders will speak at a special U.N. climate summit on Wednesday, designed to get nations to strengthen their required but already late plans to wean themselves from coal, oil and natural gas that cause climate change. Dozens of business leaders are in New York networking in various conferences aimed at greener and cleaner energy.

"Don't believe the doomsters and the gloomsters and the naysayers who say that somehow the world is moving away from climate action, clean energy," United Kingdom climate chief Ed Milliband said.

The nations of the world were all supposed to come up with new five-year plans for curbing carbon emissions by February, leading into the Brazil negotiations. But only 47 of the 195 nations — responsible for less than a quarter of global emissions — have done so. U.N. officials said they really need to be submitted by the end of this month so experts can calculate how the world is doing in its emission reduction efforts.

The world's biggest emitter, China, and another top polluter, the European Union, are expected to announce their plans or rough sketches of their plans this week. The United Nations session this week is designed to cajole countries to do more.

Trump returns to UN after retreating US from world stage

President Donald Trump will be the second leader to speak when the General Assembly kicks off its debate Tuesday morning. Trump will be returning to the U.N. for the first time since beginning his second term in January.

His speech will be among the most anticipated as America's allies and adversaries wait to see what the president will say about ongoing efforts to end the wars in Gaza and Ukraine. U.N. officials will be holding their breath to see if more funding cuts from the U.S. — their largest donor — are on the horizon after Trump and his allies spent the first few months in office slashing international aid spending.

He issued a first-day executive order withdrawing the U.S. from the U.N.'s World Health Organization. That was followed by ending U.S. participation in the UN Human Rights Council, and ordering up a review of U.S. membership in hundreds of intergovernmental organizations aimed at determining whether they align with the priorities of his "America First" agenda.

"There are great hopes for it, but it's not being well run, to be honest," Trump told reporters last week as he prepared for his address to the General Assembly.

Eyes on Syria and Iran's presidents at high-stakes moment

Following Trump's remarks, the two other headline speakers come from the Middle East, where various conflicts have thrown the region into further tumult over the last several years. On Wednesday, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian will appear on the U.N. stage at a moment of great magnitude for his country, as a 30-day window to stop the reimposition of sanctions on Tehran is closing at the end of this week.

The clock started when France, Germany and the United Kingdom on Aug. 28 declared Iran wasn't com-



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plying with its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers. It also comes after a series of last-ditch diplomatic talks to avoid reimposing U.N. sanctions appeared to break down in recent days, with European leaders accusing Iran of not being serious about the conditions outlined.

Pezeshkian and his foreign minister, Abbas Araghchi, have the next few days to meet with their European counterparts in New York to come to a resolution that would avoid the series of financial penalties that would push the already crippling Iranian economy into further disarray.

A few hours later, Iran's once strategic ally, Syria, will debut its new leader, the first head of state to represent the war-torn country at the U.N. in nearly six decades. Ahmad al-Sharaa will officially represent the new Syria on the world stage for the first time since the ousting of then-President Bashar Assad in December by a lightning insurgent offensive led by al-Sharaa.

Al-Sharaa has spent nine months seeking to restore ties with Arab countries and the West, where officials were initially wary of his past ties with the al-Qaida militant group. His speech on Wednesday will also be watched closely by the U.S., which previously designated Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the rebel group al-Sharaa formerly led, as a terrorist group.

All the meetings you won't see

Some of the most tantalizing and impactful diplomacy conducted during the U.N. General Assembly will likely happen behind the scenes during embassy receptions and at private dinners and drinks at some of Manhattan's most exclusive restaurants and clubs.

The high-level week, noted by some U.N. watchers as the World Cup of diplomacy, is jam-packed with official and unofficial gatherings between heads of state and government, where complex trade deals, sensitive peace negotiations, and even normalization efforts between allies and adversaries alike could see breakthroughs.

Officials state that more than 1,600 bilateral meetings are scheduled to take place inside the sprawling U.N. campus that oversees the East River.

## **Ukraine faces a new test as Russia steps up its drive to seize Donetsk's fortress belt**

By HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

SLOVIANSK, Ukraine (AP) — Fall is expected to bring another grueling test for Ukraine's armed forces as Russia intensifies its campaign to seize an eastern region, once Ukraine's industrial heartland and a territory it has long sought to conquer.

Russia now controls about 70% of the Donetsk region. Ukraine's forces have been pushed back to a string of four cities that analysts have dubbed its "fortress belt," where they've repelled Moscow's efforts to seize the region for years.

But shortages of troops, supplies and chaotic management are making it increasingly hard to resist Russia's relentless pressure in the region.

As the more-than-3-year-old invasion continues despite months of U.S.-led peace efforts, analysts and the military say the country could struggle to resist an intensified push to seize the last cities in the region under Ukrainian control.

Moscow is taking the territory piecemeal

Analysts and Ukrainian officers say that Russia is unlikely to engage in protracted urban battles and avoid costly fights like the storming of Bakhmut, which dragged on for months with staggering losses on both sides.

"After Bakhmut and Chasiv Yar, the Russians clearly understood that large cities turn into vast cemeteries for their army, where they lose thousands upon thousands," said Col. Pavlo Yurchuk, whose troops are defending a small city at the northern end of the fortress belt.

To skirt the cities, Russian forces are pushing on the flanks and increasingly using infiltration tactics, sending small groups of soldiers through gaps between Ukrainian units.

Some of these groups have achieved tactical gains, slipping behind the front line to hide in tree lines or



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basements, occasionally occupying abandoned positions or cutting off supply routes. But the human cost is heavy: of a five-man unit, Ukrainian commanders estimate, two are usually killed, one is wounded, one goes missing, and only one survives to call for a drone to drop water or medicine.

"These are tactical successes, not strategic ones," Yurchuk said. "This tactic is very slow and does not solve the tasks of encirclement or control of large settlements."

Drones and glide bombs are also playing a crucial role, allowing Russia to hit troops and supplies headed for the front and to weaken Ukraine's strongholds without head-on fighting.

Russia is moving around the ends of the fortress belt

This summer, Russian forces stepped up attacks at the northern and southern ends of the Donetsk belt. Their strategy, Ukrainian officers say, is to sever supply lines and surround the region's cities rather than storming them directly.

The region — one of four that Russia illegally annexed in 2022, though it did not control any of them — became the epicenter of the fighting since the start of the full-scale invasion.

In northern Donetsk, Yurchuk's 63rd Brigade is fighting to hold the town of Lyman, a key logistics hub on the way to Sloviansk.

With a prewar population of 20,000, Lyman has rail connections, dozens of basements and bomb shelters, solid infrastructure and strong buildings where command posts or supply depots could be set up. It was occupied during part of the first year of the full-scale invasion but liberated in Ukraine's autumn 2022 lightning counteroffensive.

If Russian forces manage to take Lyman, Yurchuk said, they could use it to build up troops and attempt to cross the Siverskyi Donets River, a natural obstacle that helps protect Sloviansk.

But the commander says he's confident Russia's latest offensive won't work.

"From a military point of view it looks correct — on the map it looks neat — but after nearly three and a half years of war we all know that such deep maneuvers and wide flanking operations are not Russia's forte," said Yurchuk. "They simply won't be able to control and supply those penetrations, so I'm sure that they will fail."

In southern Donetsk, Russia has made advances near Pokrovsk, taking them further around the fortress belt's southern stronghold of Kostiantynivka, once home to 67,000 people but today all but deserted.

It's hard to predict how the fighting will unfold: Russia's advances could turn into a breakthrough that allows it to seize much of the region, or the battles could drag on for months or years.

Ukraine's army is being ground down

While Russia achieves tactical gains without sparing sentiment for human life, Ukraine faces the grinding reality of troop shortages.

Exhaustion and a lack of regular rotations could also weaken Ukraine's defenses.

"People are obviously one of the key problems," said Taras Chmut, director of the Come Back Alive Foundation, which has raised more than \$388 million over the past decade to equip Ukraine's forces. "Not only the quantity, but their dispersion on the battlefield, the inefficiency of command, and the shortcomings in training and management."

On paper, he said, some brigades list thousands of soldiers but can only field hundreds in combat, a gap he attributed not to Russian superiority but to mismanagement. He said the chaos means too many soldiers are sometimes doubled up on the same tasks and targets while others are left uncovered.

"It's a systemic flaw we can neither admit nor fix," he said. "Until we do, we have to make up for it with technology, with manpower, with the enemy's weaknesses on the battlefield, and with the courage of people and volunteers who step in where they can."

But he and others warned that these measures are temporary stopgaps unless broader changes come.

"The overall trend, measured over years, looks unfavorable for Ukraine," Chmut said, adding that unless changes are made in the rear — such as fixing management failures in the army — and no new technology or geopolitical shift emerges, the outlook will remain grim. "The longer this drags on, the worse it will get — and without fresh resources the Russians will simply outmatch us in quantity and means."



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"Just because the Russians moved slowly in the past doesn't mean they won't accelerate," warned Nick Reynolds, a research fellow in land warfare at the Royal United Services Institute. "Sadly, the Ukrainian Armed Forces have been under enormous pressure for a very long time."

The fall of the fortress belt, he cautioned, would displace thousands of civilians and cause further economic damage. And even after capturing the whole region, the invasion is unlikely to end.

"I see absolutely no reason, no indication why the Russian Federation or the Russian Armed Forces would stop" with the Donetsk region Reynolds said.

## **At UN, world leaders meet to try to make a troubled planet 'better together.' But can they?**

By EDITH M. LEDERER, JENNIFER PELTZ and FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — With global support for a Palestinian state growing, Israel's devastating war in Gaza is expected to take center stage as the U.N.'s gathering of world leaders gets into full gear Tuesday. But humanity's myriad conflicts, rising poverty and heating planet will also be in the spotlight.

The General Assembly's big week of meetings began Monday with events including a conference on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Tuesday kicks off the "General Debate" in which presidents, prime ministers, monarchs and cabinet members give their annual take on the state of the world and their own nations.

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, U.S. President Donald Trump, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Jordan's King Abdullah II, French President Emmanuel Macron, South Korea's President Lee Jae Myung and South African President Cyril Ramaphosa are among those scheduled to speak Tuesday. Brazil leads off in a decades-long tradition dating to when it was the only nation that volunteered to speak first.

Previewing a likely emphasis of the debate, General Assembly President Annalena Baerbock said Monday that the U.N. is at a crossroads.

"We cannot take the easy path and simply give up," she said at an event marking the world body's 80th anniversary. "We have to choose the right path, to show the world that we can be better together — not because the last 80 years were perfect, but because for 80 years, we have tried."

While the debate's theme is "Better Together," observers can expect a rundown of ways in which the world is falling apart.

"As we meet, civilians are targeted and international law trampled in Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan and beyond," Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said at Monday's anniversary commemoration. "Poverty and hunger are on the rise ... the planet burns, with fires, floods and record heat raging through climate chaos."

Born on the rubble of World War II to bring nations together to solve problems they couldn't tackle alone, the U.N. is seeing its principles "under assault as never before," he said.

Gaza already has seized attention at the General Assembly. Monday's conference, co-chaired by France and Saudi Arabia, focused on garnering support for the longstanding idea of a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The hours-long meeting ended with several countries, including France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Malta, and Monaco, announcing or confirming their recognition of a Palestinian state, a day after the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and Portugal did. Others, such as Germany, Italy and Japan, took part in the conference but did not recognize such a state. Around three-fourths of the U.N.'s 193 member countries now do.

Notably absent were Israel and the U.S. They boycotted the event, saying the international push for a Palestinian state rewards Hamas, the militant group that still controls parts of Gaza, and makes it harder to reach a deal to halt the war and return the remaining hostages held in the enclave.

On Tuesday, many eyes will be on Trump, who returns to the Assembly rostrum five years after he last addressed the gathering by video. The 2020 event was held virtually because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The U.S. president's "America First" credo has always been a tricky fit with the U.N.'s commitment to global-scale shared decision-making, and his current administration has slashed Washington's direct spending on international aid, pulled his country out of some U.N. bodies and pulled some of the funding for the world organization itself.



Almost all U.N. member nations have signed up to take their turn during the Assembly's six-day-long speechfest. The speakers' list so far includes 89 heads of state, 43 heads of government, 10 people who are vice presidents or deputy prime ministers and 45 foreign ministers and other ministerial-level officials.

## **Dr. Trump? The president reprises his COVID era, this time sharing unproven medical advice on autism**

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump isn't a doctor. But he played one on TV Monday, offering copious amounts of unproven medical advice that he suggested -- often without providing evidence -- might help reduce autism rates.

Trump repeatedly implored pregnant women to avoid taking the painkiller Tylenol, the bestselling form of acetaminophen. That's despite the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists long recommending acetaminophen as a safe option during pregnancy. He even weighed in on when children should be given painkillers.

Speaking alongside Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., himself a vaccine skeptic, Trump stopped short of opposing all vaccines. But he said key immunizations should be delayed, or combination shots should be given separately — even though it has been proven that vaccines have no link to autism.

"Don't let them pump your baby up with the largest pile of stuff you've ever seen in your life," he said.

Trump also wildly overstated how such shots — some of which protect against four diseases — are given.

"I think it's very bad. They're pumping, it looks like they're pumping into a horse," Trump said. "You have a little child. A little fragile child. And you've got a vat of 80 different vaccines, I guess, 80 different blends, and they pump it in."

Dr. Trump redux

The presentation recalled the early days of the coronavirus pandemic during Trump's first term, when the president stood for daily White House briefings and tossed out grossly inaccurate claims — including famously suggesting that injecting disinfectants could help people.

"I see the disinfectant that knocks it out in a minute, one minute. And is there a way we can do something like that by injection inside, or almost a cleaning?" Trump asked in April 2020. "As you see, it gets in the lungs, it does a tremendous number on the lungs, so it would be interesting to check that."

He later claimed he'd been joking, but those briefings soon stopped. His tone stayed serious Monday.

The president suggested unspecified problems with the the safe and effective MMR — measles, mumps and rubella — vaccine and advised parents to wait years later than now, until age 12, for hepatitis B vaccines to be given to children.

The theme he hit harder than any other, though, was declaring a supposed link between autism and acetaminophen, which is known in most countries outside the U.S. as paracetamol. Trump repeated, "Don't take Tylenol," with increasing urgency and eventually shouted it.

Tylenol maker Kenvue disputed any link between the drug and autism and said in a statement that if pregnant mothers don't use Tylenol when in need, they could face a choice between suffering potentially dangerous fevers or using riskier painkiller alternatives.

Trump, Kennedy and many of the administration's top health officials all spoke, but largely repeated known statistics rather than new research findings. Trump appeared to acknowledge that science might not be on his side, saying at one point, "I'm just making these statements from me."

"I'm not making them from these doctors," the president conceded. "Cause when they, uh, talk about, you know, different results, different studies, I talk about a lot of common sense. And they have that, too. They have that too, a lot."

But then he later insisted he'd "spoken to many doctors about everything we're talking about."

Many scientists were appalled



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"The announcement on autism was the saddest display of a lack of evidence, rumors, recycling old myths, lousy advice, outright lies, and dangerous advice I have ever witnessed by anyone in authority in the world claiming to know anything about science," Arthur Caplan, of the New York University School of Medicine's Division of Medical Ethics, said in a statement. "What was said was not only unsupported and wrong but flat out malpractice in managing pregnancy and protecting fetal life."

Ahead of the autism event, Trump had suggested that his administration had discovered new medical links that would dramatically explain why its rates have risen. But his preparation didn't include learning how to pronounce acetaminophen, which tripped him up.

"Asedo ... well, let's see how we say that. Acid em ... menophin," Trump stammered before continuing, "Acetaminophen? Is that OK?"

Trump also insisted there was "no downside" to Americans heeding his advice "other than a mother will have to, as I say, tough it out a little bit" and avoid Tylenol for pain while pregnant.

"Everything I said, there's no downside to doing it," Trump said. "It can only be good." Still, untreated fevers in pregnancy, particularly the first trimester, increase the risk for miscarriages, preterm birth and other problems, according to the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine.

The president tried to head off such criticism by blaming pharmaceutical companies and "maybe doctors" for having suppressed critical medical information previously. He said his statements were based on "the information that we have."

"I'm making them out front, and I'm making them loud," Trump said. "And I'm making them strongly."

## **What we know about autism's causes and any potential link to Tylenol**

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Many doctors and scientists were reeling Monday after President Donald Trump went on TV to insist that pregnant women should never take Tylenol and revive debunked theories about vaccines and autism.

Trump went beyond his own Food and Drug Administration's more modest advice that doctors "should consider minimizing" the painkiller acetaminophen's use in pregnancy — amid inconclusive evidence about whether too much could be linked to autism. His comments came as the administration also moved to make more available a possible but unproven autism treatment — and also announced more research into the disorder.

Dr. Steven Fleischman, president of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, worried that the Tylenol claims would terrify mothers-to-be and parents of children with autism.

"I don't want you going back and looking and saying to yourself, 'I shouldn't have done this, I shouldn't have done that.' It's nothing you did. It really is not," he said. "Not treating the fever probably has more adverse effects that you need to worry about than taking the medication."

As for vaccines, "studies have repeatedly found no credible link between life-saving childhood vaccines and autism," said American Academy of Pediatrics president Dr. Susan Kressly. "Any effort to misrepresent sound, strong science poses a threat to the health of children."

Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. promised earlier this year to determine the cause of autism by September. That baffled brain experts who say there is no single cause and that the rhetoric appears to ignore decades of science into the genetic and environmental factors that can play a role.

Here's what we know about autism and the Trump administration's new steps to address it.

What is autism?

Autism isn't a disease. It's a complex developmental condition better known as autism spectrum disorder that affects different people in different ways.

It can include delays in language, learning or social and emotional skills. For some people, profound autism means being nonverbal and having intellectual disabilities, but the vast majority of people experience far milder effects.



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Autism rates have been going up for decades

There are two main reasons. First, the definition of autism broadened as scientists expanded their understanding of its wide range of traits and symptoms. That led to changes in the criteria doctors use to diagnose autism and improvements in screening.

At the same time, parents increasingly sought a diagnosis as autism became better known and schools began offering educational services they hoped could help their kids.

As late as the 1990s, only children with the most profound symptoms were considered to have autism. In the early 2000s, as the definition began changing, the autism rate was estimated to be 1 in 150 children. The latest count found 1 in about 31 children are affected by autism spectrum disorder.

The increase isn't among the profound cases; it's an increase in the milder cases that weren't historically considered autism, said expert Helen Tager-Flusberg of Boston University.

There is no single test for autism, which is diagnosed mostly through developmental and behavioral assessments.

It's hard to tell if there may be additional factors behind the increase.

What's the state of autism research?

Science has shown autism is mostly rooted in genetics, with the discovery of several hundred genes that play a role. Those genes can be inherited, even if the parent shows no signs of autism, or mutations can occur as the brain is developing and its rapidly dividing cells make mistakes.

Experts say different combinations of genes and other factors can all affect how a fetal brain develops. They include such factors as the age of a child's father, preterm birth and whether the mother had health problems during pregnancy such as fevers, infections or diabetes.

What about Tylenol?

Some studies have raised the possibility that taking the over-the-counter painkiller in pregnancy might be associated with a risk of autism — but many others haven't found a connection. In addition, the Coalition of Autism Scientists said Monday that acetaminophen use during pregnancy hadn't increased in recent decades like autism rates have. Acetaminophen is known in most countries outside the U.S. as paracetamol.

But untreated fevers in pregnancy, particularly the first trimester, increase the risk for miscarriages, preterm birth and other problems, according to the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine.

Part of the difficulty in settling the question is that studies using medical records can't tell if the fever, or a drug to lower the fever, might be connected to later health.

The FDA wrote doctors on Monday advising them to minimize acetaminophen's use during pregnancy but acknowledged uncertainty: "To be clear, while an association between acetaminophen and autism has been described in many studies, a causal relationship has not been established and there are contrary studies in the scientific literature."

Tylenol's label already advises women to ask their doctor about use in pregnancy, and the society continues to advise that it's an appropriate option.

What is the possible new autism treatment?

Also Monday, the FDA announced it was taking initial steps to try to approve a folic acid metabolite called leucovorin as a treatment option for some people with autism. It's based on a theory that some people have too little folate, a form of vitamin B, in the brain and that giving them more could alleviate some symptoms.

Women already are told to take folic acid before conception and during pregnancy because it reduces the chances of certain birth defects, advice that possibly could help lower autism risk as well, Tager-Flusberg said.

Leucovorin is sold for other health conditions and already used by some families in hopes of helping autism. But Tager-Flusberg cautioned that only a few small, first-step studies have been done so far.

"Is this something worth pursuing? Yes, it is in potentially a subset of individuals," she said. But there needs to be a large, very rigorous study to prove if it really works.

What about vaccines?



Any concern that vaccines could be linked to autism has been long debunked, stress scientists and leading advocacy groups for people with autism.

Childhood vaccines — and how and when to give them in combination — go through rigorous studies, and safety tracking continues for years as the shots are used.

"No doubt children will suffer" from Monday's claims, said Dr. Paul Offit, a pediatrician and vaccine expert at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

## **Trump makes unfounded claims about Tylenol and repeats discredited link between vaccines and autism**

By ALI SWENSON and LAURAN NEERGAARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Monday used the platform of the presidency to promote unproven and in some cases discredited ties between Tylenol, vaccines and autism as his administration announced a wide-ranging effort to study the causes of the complex brain disorder.

"Don't take Tylenol," Trump instructed pregnant women around a dozen times during the unwieldy White House news conference, also urging mothers not to give their infants the drug, known by the generic name acetaminophen in the U.S. or paracetamol in most other countries. He also fueled long-debunked claims that ingredients in vaccines or timing shots close together could contribute to rising rates of autism in the U.S., without providing any medical evidence.

The rambling announcement, which appeared to rely on existing studies rather than significant new research, comes as the Make America Healthy Again movement has been pushing for answers on the causes of autism. The diverse coalition of supporters of Health Secretary Robert Kennedy Jr. includes several anti-vaccine activists who have long spread debunked claims that immunizations are responsible.

The announcement also sheds light on Trump's own long-held fascination with autism and his trepidation about the childhood vaccine schedule, even as the president has taken pride in his work to disseminate COVID-19 vaccines during his first term.

Medical experts said Trump's remarks were irresponsible. New York University bioethicist Art Caplan said it was "the saddest display of a lack of evidence, rumors, recycling old myths, lousy advice, outright lies, and dangerous advice I have ever witnessed by anyone in authority."

Trump announced during the event that the Food and Drug Administration would begin notifying doctors that the use of acetaminophen "can be associated" with an increased risk of autism, but did not immediately provide justification for the new recommendation.

Evidence for potential link between Tylenol and autism is not conclusive

Some studies have raised the possibility that taking acetaminophen during pregnancy might increase the risk of autism — but many others haven't found that concern, said autism expert David Mandell of the University of Pennsylvania.

One challenge is that it's hard to disentangle the effects of Tylenol use from the effects of high fevers during pregnancy. Fevers, especially in the first trimester, can increase the risk for miscarriages, preterm birth and other problems, according to the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine.

Trump also urged not giving Tylenol to young children, but scientists say that research indicates autism develops in the fetal brain.

Responding to Trump's warnings, the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine said they still recommend Tylenol as an appropriate option to treat fever and pain during pregnancy. The president of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists said Monday that suggestions that Tylenol use in pregnancy causes autism are "irresponsible when considering the harmful and confusing message they send to pregnant patients."

Trump press secretary Karoline Leavitt said in a statement Monday evening that the administration "does not believe popping more pills is always the answer for better health" and that it "will not be deterred in these efforts as we know millions across America are grateful."



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Kennedy announced during the news conference that at Trump's urging, he was launching a new all-agency effort to uncover all the factors that could be contributing to autism, a question scientists have been researching for decades.

Trump administration explores the potential role of folate

FDA Commissioner Dr. Marty Makary also took the stage to announce it was taking the first steps to try to approve a folic acid metabolite called leucovorin as a treatment option for patients believed to have low levels of folate in the brain. That may include some people with autism.

Leucovorin is used to counteract the side effects of various prescription drugs, including chemotherapy and other high-dose medications that can negatively impact the immune system. It works by boosting folate levels, a form of vitamin B that's critical to the body's production of healthy red blood cells.

Women already are told to take folic acid before conception and during pregnancy because it reduces the chances of certain birth defects known as neural tube defects.

In recent years a handful of studies have suggested positive results when high-dose folic acid is used to treat children with autism, with researchers in China and other countries reporting improvements in social skills and other metrics. Those small studies have been quickly embraced by some parts of the autism community online.

The theory is that some, not all, children with autism may not properly metabolize folate, Mandell said. But the recent studies "are really tiny," he said. To prove an effect, "we would need an independent, large, rigorously controlled randomized trial."

Decades of studies show no link between vaccines and autism

During the press conference, Trump said he's a believer in vaccines but claimed without evidence that giving vaccinations close together at the recommended ages has a link to autism. Spacing out shots as he suggests can lead to an increased risk that children become infected with a vaccine-preventable disease before returning for another visit.

Though anti-vaccine activists, including Kennedy, have long suggested a link between vaccines and autism, widespread scientific consensus and decades of studies have firmly concluded there isn't one.

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The announcement is the latest step the administration, driven by Kennedy and his supporters, has taken to reshape America's public health landscape.

Beyond cutbacks at federal health agencies, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has been roiled by disagreements over Kennedy's vaccine policies. An influential immunization panel stocked by Kennedy with figures who have been critical of vaccines last week changed shot guidance for COVID-19 and other diseases.



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The rambling announcement, which appeared to rely on existing studies rather than significant new research, comes as the Make America Healthy Again movement has been pushing for answers on the causes of autism. The diverse coalition of supporters of Health Secretary Robert Kennedy Jr. includes several anti-vaccine activists who have long spread debunked claims that immunizations are responsible.

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One challenge is that it's hard to disentangle the effects of Tylenol use from the effects of high fevers during pregnancy. Fevers, especially in the first trimester, can increase the risk for miscarriages, preterm birth and other problems, according to the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine.

Trump also urged not giving Tylenol to young children, but scientists say that research indicates autism develops in the fetal brain.

Responding to Trump's warnings, the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine said they still recommend Tylenol as an appropriate option to treat fever and pain during pregnancy. The president of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists said Monday that suggestions that Tylenol use in pregnancy causes autism are "irresponsible when considering the harmful and confusing message they send to pregnant patients."

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## **What to know after Trump classifies decentralized antifa movement as a domestic terror organization**

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Monday signed an order designating a decentralized movement known as antifa as a domestic terrorist organization, though whether he can actually do that remained unclear. Trump blames antifa for political violence.

The Republican president said on social media last week during a state visit to the United Kingdom that he would be making such a designation. He called antifa a “SICK, DANGEROUS, RADICAL LEFT DISASTER” and said he will be “strongly recommending” that its funders be investigated.

The White House released Trump’s executive order shortly after he departed for New York, where he was addressing the annual meeting of the U.N. General Assembly on Tuesday.

Here are a few things to know about Trump and antifa:

What is antifa?

Short for “anti-fascists,” antifa is not a single organization but rather an umbrella term for far-left-leaning militant groups that confront or resist neo-Nazis and white supremacists at demonstrations.

Can Trump designate it as a domestic terrorist organization?

Antifa is a domestic entity and, as such, is not a candidate for inclusion on the State Department’s list of foreign terror organizations. Dozens of groups, including extremist organizations like the Islamic State and al-Qaida, are included on that list. The designation matters in part because it enables the Justice Department to prosecute those who give material support to entities on that list even if that support does not result in violence.

But there is no domestic equivalent to that list in part because of broad First Amendment protections enjoyed by organizations operating within the United States. And despite periodic calls, particularly after mass shootings by white supremacists, to establish a domestic terrorism law, no singular statute now exists.



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The executive order did not specify how Trump he would go about designating antifa as a domestic terrorist organization.

What does antifa do exactly?

Literature from the antifa movement encourages followers to pursue lawful protest activity as well as more confrontational acts, according to a 2018 Congressional Research Service report.

The literature suggests that followers monitor the activities of white supremacist groups, publicize online the personal information of perceived enemies, develop self-defense training regimens and compel outside organizations to cancel any speakers or events with "a fascist bent," the report said.

People associated with antifa have been present for significant demonstrations and counter-demonstrations in recent years, including mobilizing against a white supremacist march in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August 2017. They were also present during clashes with far-right groups in Portland, Oregon.

Why did Trump label antifa as domestic terrorists?

He says it's a very bad and "sick" group. The executive order says antifa "uses illegal means to organize and execute a campaign of violence and terrorism nationwide" to accomplish its goal of overthrowing the U.S. government. The order calls on relevant government departments and agencies to use every authority to investigate, disrupt and dismantle any and all illegal operations, including terrorist actions conducted by antifa or anyone claiming to act on its behalf.

Trump's history with antifa

In Trump's first term, he and members of his administration singled out antifa as being responsible for the violence at protests triggered by the killing of George Floyd, a Black man who died after a white Minneapolis police officer pressed his knee into Floyd's neck for several minutes and held it there even after Floyd stopped moving and pleading for air.

Then-Attorney General William Barr described "antifa-like tactics" by out-of-state agitators and said antifa was instigating violence and engaging in "domestic terrorism" and would be dealt with accordingly.

At the time, Trump blamed antifa by name for the violence, along with violent mobs, arsonists and looters.

He recently began singling out antifa again by name following the Sept. 10 assassination of conservative youth activist Charlie Kirk, who was a big supporter of the president.

In an exchange with reporters in the Oval Office last week, Trump said he would pursue a domestic terrorism designation for antifa if such a move had the support of Pam Bondi, the current attorney general, and other Cabinet members.

"It's something I would do, yeah," Trump said. "I would do that 100%. Antifa is terrible."

He previously had called for antifa to be designated as a terror organization after skirmishes in Portland, Oregon, during his first term.

## **Super typhoon blowing by northern Philippines and Taiwan forces evacuations and closures**

By JIM GOMEZ Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — Thousands of people were evacuated from northern Philippine villages and schools and offices were closed Monday in the archipelago and neighboring Taiwan as one of this year's strongest typhoons threatened to cause flooding and landslides on its way to southeastern China.

Super Typhoon Ragasa had sustained winds of 215 kph (134 mph) with gusts of up to 295 kph (183 mph) when it slammed into Panuitan island off Cagayan province on mid-afternoon Monday, Philippine forecasters said.

Tropical cyclones with sustained winds of 185 kph (115 mph) or higher are categorized in the Philippines as a super typhoon, a designation adopted years ago to underscore the urgency tied to such extreme weather disturbances.

Ragasa was heading west and forecast to remain in the South China Sea at least into Wednesday while passing south of Taiwan and Hong Kong before landfall on the Chinese mainland.



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The Philippines' weather agency warned of coastal inundation, saying "there is a high risk of life-threatening storm surge with peak heights exceeding 3 meters (nearly 10 feet) within the next 24 hours over the low-lying or exposed coastal localities" of the northern provinces of Cagayan, Batanes, Ilocos Norte and Ilocos Sur.

Power was knocked out on Calayan island and in the entire northern mountain province of Apayao, west of Cagayan, disaster-response officials said. There were no immediate reports of casualties or further damage from Ragasa, which is locally called Nando.

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. suspended government work and all classes Monday in the capital and 29 provinces in the main northern Luzon region.

More than 8,200 people were evacuated to safety in Cagayan while 1,220 fled to emergency shelters in Apayao, which is prone to flash floods and landslides. Domestic flights were suspended in northern provinces lashed by the typhoon while fishing boats and inter-island ferries were prohibited from leaving ports due to rough seas.

Ragasa, the 14th weather disturbance to batter the Philippines this year, comes while authorities and both chambers of Congress investigate a corruption scandal involving alleged kickbacks that resulted in substandard or non-existent flood control projects.

Taiwan's southern Taitung and Pingtung counties ordered closures in some coastal and mountainous areas as well as on the outlying Orchid and Green islands. Ragasa also forced the cancellation of afternoon flights to outlying islands and suspended various ferry services, the Central News Agency reported.

In Fujian province, on China's southeast coast, 50 ferry routes were suspended. Officials in Shenzhen, the southern Chinese tech hub, planned to relocate about 400,000 people, including residents living in low-lying and flood-prone areas. Shenzhen's airport said it will halt flights, starting Tuesday night.

China's National Meteorological Center forecast the typhoon would make landfall in the coastal area between Shenzhen city and Xuwen county in Guangdong province on Wednesday.

China's ruling Communist Party chief in Guangdong, Huang Kunming, urged departments across the region to minimize harm and "fully enter emergency state and war-ready state."

Ragasa is expected to sweep south of Hong Kong and Macao. While Hong Kong's airport is expected to remain open, the city's airport authority said flights would be significantly reduced after 6 p.m. Tuesday and most flight operations would be affected on Wednesday.

Hong Kong's flag carrier Cathay Pacific Airways said passenger flights scheduled to depart and arrive in the city after 6 p.m. Tuesday will be suspended, with more than 500 flight cancellations expected.

Other Hong Kong-based airlines announced their flights would be disrupted, including budget airline HK Express, which reported a cancellation of over 100 flights between Tuesday and Thursday.

All schools in Hong Kong and Macao will be closed for the next two days. More than the usual number of sandbags have been provided to flood-prone areas in Hong Kong, while Macao police urged people living in low-lying areas to prepare for possible evacuation.

Ragasa is expected to bring torrential rains and heavy winds to China's mainland coastal areas, starting Tuesday. Multiple cities such as Jiangmen, Yangjiang, Zhongshan and Zhuhai in southern Guangdong province ordered the suspension of schools, offices, factories and means of transportation.

The typhoon could make landfall in Guangdong more than once, China's weather agency said.

Authorities urged residents to stockpile emergency supplies, reinforce doors and windows, and evacuate underground areas.

## **TikTok's algorithm to be licensed to US joint venture led by Oracle and Silver Lake**

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Tech giant Oracle will spearhead U.S. oversight of the algorithm and security underlying TikTok's video popular platform under the terms of a deal laid out Monday by President Donald Trump's administration.



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All the final details still need to be nailed down among several joint venture partners that will include Oracle, investment firm Silver Lake Partners and possibly two billionaires — media mogul Rupert Murdoch and personal computer pioneer Michael Dell. The U.S. administration would not have a stake in the joint venture nor be part of its board, according to a senior White House official.

President Trump is expected to issue an executive order later this week that declares that the terms of the deal meet the security concerns laid out by the law, the senior White House official said. China still needs to sign off on the framework proposal, and any final deal would still require regulatory approval.

The proposal is aimed at resolving a long-running effort to wrest TikTok's U.S. operations from its Beijing-based parent company, ByteDance, because of national security concerns. TikTok has become a high-profile topic during conversations between Trump and China President Xi Jinping as they continue to spar in a trade war that's roiled the global economy for much of the year.

For now, the two sides are progressing on a framework deal that calls for a consortium of investors, including Oracle and Silver Lake, to take over the U.S. operations of TikTok in a process that might not be completed until early next year under a timeline laid out Monday by the Trump administration. That could mean TikTok's divestment might not be completed until a year after it was supposed to be banned under a law that had bipartisan support but was repeatedly bypassed by Trump.

Under the current terms of the proposal, the new U.S. joint venture would receive a licensed copy of the recommendation algorithm that keeps TikTok users endlessly scrolling through clips on their smartphones. Oracle would review, monitor and secure U.S. data flowing through the service.

American officials have previously warned that ByteDance's algorithm is vulnerable to manipulation by Chinese authorities, who can use it to shape content on the platform in a way that's difficult to detect.

"It wouldn't be in compliance if the algorithm is Chinese. There can't be any shared algorithm with ByteDance," said a spokesperson for the House Select Committee on China.

The algorithm has been a central issue in the security debate over TikTok. China previously maintained the algorithm must remain under Chinese control by law. But a U.S. regulation passed with bipartisan support said any divestment of TikTok must mean the platform cuts ties — specifically the algorithm — with ByteDance.

Although the details remain sketchy, a Trump administration official said that the licensed copy will be "retrained" with U.S. data to make sure the system is "behaving appropriately."

That makes it unclear if the U.S. version of TikTok will look different from what users are seeing in the rest of the world. Any noticeable changes made to a social media platform's service raises the risk of alienating its audience, said Jasmine Enberg, an analyst for the research firm eMarketer.

"Social media is just as much about the culture as it is the technology, and how users will take to new ownership and potentially a new version of the app is still an open question," Enberg said.

In a Monday briefing, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said the change in control won't change the experience. "TikTok users in the U.S. will be able to see videos posted by users in other countries and vice versa," Leavitt said.

In a prime example of how a change of control can reshape a once-popular social media platform, billionaire Elon Musk triggered an almost immediate backlash after he completed his \$44 billion takeover of Twitter nearly three years ago.

But Musk made extremely visible changes, including eventually dropping the Twitter brand and changing its name to X. The changes that gradually occur while different data is fed into the U.S. copy of TikTok's algorithm could be subtle and unnoticeable to most of its audience.

What's clear, for now, is that both Oracle and Silver Lake will be major players in TikTok's future in the U.S. if the deal is finalized by the Trump administration.

Founded nearly 50 years ago, Oracle's success was built on database software that helps manage a wide variety of information crucial to business, and has since expanded into hardware, including data centers that help power artificial intelligence.

Although he no longer runs Oracle as its CEO, company co-founder Larry Ellison remains a top executive



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while also overseeing an estimated personal fortune of \$390 billion. Ellison, 81, now could be in line to become a behind-the-scenes power player in the media, having already helped finance Skydance's recently completed \$8 billion merger with Paramount, a deal engineered by his son, David.

Silver Lake has long focused on tech deals, including past buyouts of Dell Computer and the now-defunct video calling service Skype. Michael Dell, who founded Dell Computer, may now be one of investors in the U.S. joint venture overseeing TikTok, according to what Trump told Fox News in a recent interview. Trump also mentioned Murdoch, whose company owns Fox News, as a potential investor in the joint venture.

Other media outlets have reported that another billionaire, venture capitalist Marc Andreessen, is vying to become involved in the investor group. Andreessen was also involved in Silver Lake's 2009 buyout of Skype.

ByteDance is expected to have a 20%, or smaller, stake in the U.S. joint venture, whose board will be controlled by the U.S. investors. ByteDance will be represented by one person on the board, but that individual will be excluded from TikTok's security committee.

## **France recognizes Palestinian statehood at UN meeting to revive peace efforts**

By JOSEPH KRAUSS and FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — As the Gaza war rages on, France recognized Palestinian statehood on Monday at the start of a high-profile meeting at the United Nations aimed at galvanizing support for a two-state solution to the Mideast conflict. More nations are expected to follow, in defiance of Israel and the United States.

French President Emmanuel Macron's announcement in the U.N. General Assembly hall received loud applause from the more than 140 leaders in attendance. The Palestinian delegation, including its U.N. ambassador, Riyad Mansour, could be seen standing and applauding as the declaration was made.

"True to the historic commitment of my country to the Middle East, to peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians, this is why I declare that today, France recognizes the state of Palestine," Macron said.

Andorra, Belgium, Luxembourg, Malta, and Monaco also announced or confirmed their recognition of a Palestinian state, a day after the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and Portugal did. Germany, Italy and Japan took part in the conference but did not recognize such a state.

The meeting and expanded recognition of Palestinian statehood are expected to have little if any actual impact on the ground, where Israel is waging another major offensive in the Gaza Strip and expanding settlements in the occupied West Bank.

U.N. secretary-general Antonio Guterres said "statehood for the Palestinians is a right, not a reward." That appeared to push back against the Israeli government, which says recognizing statehood rewards Hamas after its Oct. 7 attack that set off the war in Gaza two years ago.

Abbas says 'enough violence and war'

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, forced to address the meeting by video after the U.S. revoked his visa, again condemned the "killing and detention of civilians, including Hamas' actions on Oct. 7, 2023."

He said the Palestinian Authority is establishing a new social welfare system after abolishing payments to the families of Palestinians killed or imprisoned by Israel, a decision taken months ago that had been a longstanding demand from Israel and the U.S.

Addressing the Israeli people, he said "enough violence and war," and he wished Jews around the world a happy new year on the occasion of Rosh Hashana.

Abbas' internationally recognized Palestinian Authority is led by rivals of Hamas and administers parts of the West Bank. It recognizes Israel, cooperates with it on security matters, and is committed to a two-state solution. Israel accuses the Palestinian Authority of incitement to militancy and has ruled out any role for it in postwar Gaza. Many Palestinians view the leadership in the West Bank as corrupt and increasingly autocratic.

International community widely backs a Palestinian state



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Around three-fourths of the 193-member United Nations recognizes Palestine, but major Western nations had until recently declined to, saying one could only come about through negotiations with Israel.

Palestinians have welcomed the moves toward recognition, hoping they might someday lead to independence. "This is a beginning, or a glimmer of hope, for the Palestinian people," Fawzi Nour al-Deen said Sunday as he held a bag on his head, joining thousands of people fleeing south from Gaza City. "We are a people who deserve to have a state."

The creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel in the West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem — territories seized by Israel in the 1967 Mideast war — is widely seen internationally as the only way to resolve the conflict, which began more than a century before Hamas' Oct. 7 attack.

Israeli government is opposed to statehood

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government opposed Palestinian statehood even before the war and now says such a move would reward Hamas, the militant group that still controls parts of Gaza. He has hinted Israel might take unilateral steps in response, including annexing parts of the West Bank, which would put a viable Palestinian state even further out of reach.

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric brushed off such threats, saying efforts to bring about a two-state solution should continue regardless of Israel's actions. "I think we have to be determined in achieving the goal that we want to achieve, and we cannot be distracted by threats and intimidation," he said.

Netanyahu is under pressure from his far-right coalition to move ahead with annexation, but the United Arab Emirates — the driving force behind the 2020 Abraham Accords, in which the UAE and three other Arab states forged ties with Israel — has called it a "red line," without saying how it could affect the two countries' now close ties.

Netanyahu said he would decide on Israel's response to the Palestinian statehood push after meeting with President Donald Trump at the White House next week, their fourth meeting since Trump returned to office. The Israeli leader is set to address world leaders at the U.N. on Friday.

The Trump administration is also opposed to growing recognition of a Palestinian state and blames it for the derailment of ceasefire talks with Hamas. Trump's envoy, Steve Witkoff, walked away from the talks in July, and earlier this month an Israeli strike targeted Hamas negotiators in Qatar, a key mediator.

The Palestinians are politically fragmented

France and Saudi Arabia have advanced a phased plan in which a reformed Palestinian Authority would eventually govern the West Bank and Gaza with international assistance. It was overwhelmingly supported by the General Assembly on Sept. 12 by a vote of 142-10. Twelve members abstained.

Hamas, which won the last Palestinian national elections in 2006, has at times hinted it might accept a state on the 1967 lines but remains formally committed to a Palestinian state in all of the territory between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, including Israel.

Israelis and Palestinians held U.S.-brokered peace talks beginning in the early 1990s, but those efforts repeatedly stalled because of outbreaks of violence and Israel's expansion of settlements aimed at cementing its control over the West Bank. There have been no substantive peace talks since Netanyahu returned to office in 2009.

Advocates of the two-state solution say that without a Palestinian state, Israel will have to decide between the status quo, in which millions of Palestinians live under military occupation without equal rights, or a binational state that might not have a Jewish majority.

## **Residents of San Francisco Bay Area jolted awake by 4.3 magnitude earthquake**

BERKELEY, Calif. (AP) — Residents across the San Francisco Bay Area were jolted awake early Monday by a moderate earthquake that was felt widely across the region.

The 4.3 magnitude quake hit shortly before 3 a.m. just east-southeast of Berkeley, across the bay from San Francisco, according to the U.S. Geological Survey, or USGS.

No injuries or major damage was reported, but some businesses said windows were broken and mer-



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chandise tumbled from shelves.

"Things were shaking in our newsroom," posted Dave Clark, a news anchor for KTVU-TV. "It caught everyone off guard."

Bay Area Rapid Transit trains ran with delays for several hours as crews made safety inspections of the tracks systemwide. BART said trains returned to regular service around midday.

People reported feeling shaking as far away as Salinas, about 100 miles (161 kilometers) to the south, according to media reports.

"As far as earthquakes go, this is kind of the ones where people feel them, but there's not a whole lot of impacts to them," said Brayden Murdock of the National Weather Service in Monterey.

The USGS said the last quake of a similar size near Berkeley was a magnitude 4.4 that hit on Jan. 4, 2018.

## Supreme Court will weigh expanding Trump's power to shape agencies by overturning 90-year-old ruling

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court said Monday it will consider expanding President Donald Trump's power to shape independent agencies by overturning a nearly century-old decision limiting when presidents can fire board members.

In a 6-3 decision, the high court also allowed the Republican president to carry out the firing of Rebecca Slaughter, a Democratic member of the Federal Trade Commission, while the case plays out.

It's the latest high-profile firing the court has allowed in recent months, signaling the conservative majority could be poised to overturn or narrow a 1935 Supreme Court decision that found commissioners can only be removed for misconduct or neglect of duty. The majority has previously indicated that the president likely has the power to remove board members at will, with some exceptions, because those agencies exercise executive power.

They have suggested the Federal Reserve might be different, however, a prospect expected to be tested by the case of fired Fed Governor Lisa Cook.

Justice Elena Kagan, joined by Sonia Sotomayor and Ketanji Brown Jackson, dissented from the decision allowing Slaughter's firing. It comes after similar decisions affecting three other independent agencies.

"Congress, as everyone agrees, prohibited each of those presidential removals," Kagan wrote. "Yet the majority, stay order by stay order, has handed full control of all those agencies to the President."

The justices are expected to hear arguments in December over whether to overturn a 90-year-old ruling known as *Humphrey's Executor*.

In that case, the court sided with another FTC commissioner who was fired by Franklin D. Roosevelt as the president worked to implement the New Deal. The justices unanimously found commissioners can be removed only for misconduct or neglect of duty.

That decision ushered in an era of powerful independent federal agencies charged with regulating labor relations, employment discrimination and public airwaves. But it has long rankled conservative legal theorists who argue such agencies should answer to the president.

The Justice Department argues Trump can fire board members for any reason as he works to carry out his agenda. "The President and the government suffer irreparable harm when courts transfer even some of that executive power to officers beyond the President's control," Solicitor General D. John Sauer wrote.

He also argued that judges don't have the power to reinstate people. Justice Neil Gorsuch struck a similar note in February, writing that fired employees who win in court can likely get back pay, but not reinstatement.

But Slaughter's attorneys say that if the president can fire congressionally confirmed board members at will, regulatory decisions will be based more on politics than their expertise.

"Congress gave independent regulators removal protections to preserve the integrity of our economy," her attorneys said in a statement. "Giving the executive branch unchecked power over who sits on these boards and commissions would have seismic implications for our economy that will harm ordinary Ameri-



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cans.”

The court will hear arguments unusually early in the process, before the case has fully worked its way through lower courts.

The court rejected a push from two other board members of independent agencies who had asked the justices to also hear their cases if they took up the Slaughter case: Gwynne Wilcox, of the National Labor Relations Board, and Cathy Harris, of the Merit Systems Protection Board. Those cases will continue to work their way through the lower courts.

The FTC is a regulator enforcing consumer protection measures and antitrust legislation. The NLRB investigates unfair labor practices and oversees union elections, while the MSPB reviews disputes from federal workers.

## US stocks set more records as Wall Street's relentless rally keeps rolling

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The seemingly relentless rally on Wall Street drove U.S. stocks to more records on Monday.

The S&P 500 rose 0.4% after erasing a modest loss from the morning. The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 66 points, or 0.1%, and the Nasdaq composite climbed 0.7%. It's the third straight day where all three indexes set an all-time high.

“Every time the market seems to be running out of momentum, it fools most of us by pushing to higher heights,” said Jay Woods, chief market strategist at Freedom Capital Markets.

A familiar face was again the strongest force lifting the market, Nvidia. Wall Street's most valuable company rose 3.9% after announcing a partnership to train and run OpenAI's next generation of artificial-intelligence models. As part of the deal, Nvidia will invest up to \$100 billion in OpenAI.

Oracle also pushed the market higher after climbing 6.3%. A senior official in President Donald Trump's administration said the tech giant will receive a copy of TikTok's algorithm to operate for U.S. users, part of the deal to keep the popular platform running in the country.

Oracle also named Clay Magouyrk and Mike Sicilia as its CEOs, with current CEO Safra Catz becoming executive vice chair of the technology company's board.

Some of the market's sharpest action was among companies agreeing to buy one another.

Pfizer said it would buy Metsera and its pipeline of medicines to potentially treat obesity in a deal initially valuing it at \$4.9 billion. The payout for Metsera investors could go up sharply if its candidates win approval from federal regulators and achieve other milestones.

Metsera's stock jumped 60.7%, and Pfizer's edged up by less than 0.1%.

ODP, which runs Office Depot and Office Max, leaped 32.9% after Atlas Holdings agreed to buy it in a deal valued at roughly \$1 billion.

Anywhere Real Estate soared 45.5% after Compass said it would buy the company behind the Coldwell Banker and Corcoran brands in an all-stock deal. They said the combined company is expected to have a total enterprise value of roughly \$10 billion, including debt. Compass shares sank 15.7%.

Also on the losing end of Wall Street was Coinbase Global, which fell 3.1% as stocks sank across the crypto industry following a pullback for cryptocurrency prices.

But Coinbase is still up 33.7% for the year so far thanks to interest in crypto, whose prices have soared to records recently on expectations for cuts to interest rates by the Federal Reserve.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 29.39 points to 6,693.75. The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 66.27 to 46,381.54, and the Nasdaq composite climbed 157.50 to 22,788.98.

Stocks have surged since April on hopes that Trump's tariffs won't derail global trade and that the Fed will deliver several cuts to interest rates to boost the economy. The Fed made its first cut of the year last week, and officials indicated more could arrive through the end of this year and into next.

The U.S. stock market still faces challenges, though. Chief among them is if the Fed does not cut inter-



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est rates as many times as investors expect. The Fed is wary because lower rates can give inflation more fuel, and inflation has stubbornly remained above its 2% target.

An update on Friday will show how much prices are rising for U.S. households based on the Fed's preferred measure of inflation, and economists expect it to show a slight acceleration for last month.

Plus, stocks already look too expensive to many professional investors after their prices surged so much.

In stock markets abroad, indexes were mixed in Europe and Asia.

Japan's Nikkei 225 jumped 1%, and Hong Kong's Hang Seng fell 0.8% for two of the world's bigger moves.

In the bond market, Treasury yields held relatively steady. The yield on the 10-year Treasury remained at 4.14%, where it was on Friday.

## **The Latest: Israeli army orders evacuation of a Gaza City hospital as world leaders gather at the UN**

By The Associated Press undefined

Israeli forces showed no signs of relenting on their new ground offensive in Gaza City on Monday as world leaders gathered in New York for the United Nations General Assembly and more countries prepared to join the surge of nations recognizing a Palestinian state.

Hundreds of thousands have remained in the city, the territory's largest and already in ruins from nearly two years of war and struggling with famine. The Israeli military ordered the evacuation on Monday of the Jordanian Hospital, a key health clinic, a Palestinian health official said.

The latest Israeli operation, which started last Tuesday, further escalates a conflict that has roiled the Middle East and likely pushes any ceasefire farther out of reach. The Israeli military, which says it wants to "destroy Hamas' military infrastructure," hasn't given a timeline for the offensive, but there were indications it could take months.

Many have been attempting to relocate from the city, where 1 million people once lived, to the southern Gaza Strip, following Israeli military calls for a full evacuation.

Here's the latest:

France recognizes the state of Palestine at the UN

France has recognized Palestinian statehood at the start of a high-profile meeting at the United Nations aimed at galvanizing support for a two-state solution to the Mideast conflict. More nations are expected to follow, in defiance of Israel and the United States.

French President Emmanuel Macron's announcement in the U.N. General Assembly hall received loud applause from the more than 140 leaders in attendance.

The Palestinian delegation, including its U.N. ambassador, Riyad Mansour, could be seen standing and applauding as the declaration was made.

"True to the historic commitment of my country to the Middle East, to peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians, this is why I declare that today, France recognizes the state of Palestine," Macron said.

Around three-fourths of the 193-member United Nations recognize Palestine, but major Western nations had until recently declined to, saying one could only come about through negotiations with Israel.

Gaza field hospital to be relocated due to shelling

Jordan's Armed Forces say they have decided to relocate their field hospital from the Tal al-Hawa area in Gaza to Khan Yunis to keep its staff safe because it had previously come under continuous shelling and bombing.

The Armed Forces said in a statement Monday that the hospital and some of its equipment had sustained damage as a result of the shelling and bombing, resulting in a disruption of services.

According to the statement, the hospital had become "isolated and non-functional" with the number of patients dropping sharply in recent weeks. Access had become difficult and dangerous for area residents, while putting resupply at risk.

The Armed Forces said the hospital's relocation to Khan Yunis will benefit the "maximum number of residents" in Gaza, helping to alleviate overcrowding in other medical facilities.



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The hospital had been operating at Tal al-Hawa for 16 years and may return there "if circumstances permit."

Israeli hostage's parents 'shaken' by appearance in video

The parents of an Israeli hostage who appears in a new video released by his Hamas captors say they are "shaken and in pain."

Idit and Kobi Ohel said in a statement that their 24-year-old son, Alon, appears thin and distressed, and to be losing vision in his right eye.

Ohel was taken from a bomb shelter near a music festival during Hamas' Oct. 7. attack that sparked the ongoing war in the Gaza Strip nearly two years ago.

The release of the video coincided with the start of Rosh Hashana, the Jewish new year.

Long-running negotiations aimed at a ceasefire and hostage release ground to a halt after Israel carried out a strike earlier this month targeting Hamas leaders in Qatar, a key mediator.

Palestinian Mission to the UK marks recognition of state

About 400 people gathered at the Palestinian Mission to the U.K. on Monday to mark Britain's recognition of the Palestinian state.

A crowd clapped and cheered as the Palestinian flag was raised in front of the building during a ceremony.

Husam Zomlot, the Palestinian head of mission in the U.K., thanked the people of Britain for supporting their cause.

"We will always remember how you stood by our sides, on the right side of history," he said.

Zomlot also held up a plaque made for the newly inaugurated embassy, though he didn't give details about when the mission would formally transition to an embassy.

He also said Sunday that recognition must be followed by action, including sanctioning Israel and reversing the expansion of illegal Israeli settlements.

Coalition of aid groups says 300,000 Palestinians have left Gaza City since August

Site Management Cluster, whose figures are widely trusted by the U.N. and humanitarian groups, said its teams counted about 297,597 "movements" from Gaza City toward the south between August 14 and Sept. 20.

The organization uses the term "movements" in case the same displaced person moves more than once. But in reality, field monitoring teams say nearly all movements are people fleeing the city.

They monitor the number of people moving during daytime hours through four locations in Gaza, meaning the figure could be an undercount.

Israel's military claims that over 500,000 Palestinians have left the city.

Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians are still sheltering in the city as troops move in.

Mixed feelings among people fleeing Gaza City about recognition of a Palestinian state

Some Palestinians fleeing Gaza City said they see the flurry of recognitions as "a glimmer of hope" and urged other countries to join the move.

"This is a beginning, or a glimmer of hope for the Palestinian people," said Fawzi Nour al-Deen, a displaced Palestinian, said late on Sunday. "We are a people who deserve to have a state."

Naser Asaliya, another displaced Palestinian from Gaza City, said it was a "positive" move.

"No matter how simple, anything that supports us, strengthens our resolve in light of this unjust blockade," he said.

Others downplayed the impact of the recognition in the face of the devastation of the territory.

"All of this is worthless," said Huda Masawabi, a displaced woman. "We just hope to God that someone outside would acknowledge us or even deal with us as mere human beings."

Italian workers and students join general strike and protest in support of Gaza

Thousands of workers and students across Italy have joined a general strike and demonstrations in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza.

Italy's grassroots unions called for the 24-hour strike on Monday, affecting both public and private sectors, including transportation, schools and ports.

The strike caused disruptions nationwide, with delays for trains and limited public transport in cities like



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Rome and Milan.

More than 20,000 people gathered in front of Rome's central station to protest the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Unions and student organizations have criticized the Italian and EU governments for their inaction.

France says ties with a Palestinian state will be conditional on Hamas' release of hostages

French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot linked France's gradual establishment of diplomatic relations with a Palestinian state on the release of hostages held by Hamas and other militant groups in Gaza, following their Oct. 7, 2023 attack on Israel that sparked the war.

The comments come as French President Emmanuel Macron is to formally recognize a Palestinian state later on Monday at the United Nations.

This is "a symbolic, immediate, political decision that shows France's commitment to the two-state solution," Barrot said, speaking on TF1 television on Monday.

He added that its "implementation, the establishment of diplomatic relations, will be gradual and under condition of a number of factors on the ground, including the release of hostages."

Israeli military orders evacuation of a key Gaza City hospital

The Jordanian field hospital in the city's southwestern neighborhood of Tal al-Hawa received orders to evacuate on Monday morning, according to a senior health official.

The military has already ordered all Palestinians in Gaza City to head south, to central and southern Gaza Strip. It has told aid workers in private messages that all humanitarian sites — except hospitals — must evacuate.

The military didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

Dr. Muneer al-Boush, director general of the Gaza Health Ministry, told The Associated Press that the hospital has at least 300 patients, as well as medical staff and family members of the patients.

The order came as residents reported that troops were approaching the facility, with dozens of families trapped in their homes and shelters around the hospital.

A surge in recognitions

Britain, Canada and Australia formally recognized a Palestinian state on Sunday, joining nearly 150 countries that have already done so, and France was expected to do the same at the General Assembly.

Portugal also joined the group, announcing its recognition later Sunday from New York.

France and Saudi Arabia hope to use this year's gathering of world leaders and the increasingly horrific war in the Gaza Strip to inject new urgency into the quest for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

But the efforts to push a two-state solution face major obstacles, beginning with vehement opposition from the United States and Israel. The U.S. has blocked Palestinian officials from even attending the General Assembly.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is opposed to Palestinian statehood, has threatened to take unilateral action in response — possibly including the annexation of parts of the West Bank.

Paris' famed Eiffel Tower projects both Palestinian and Israeli flags

The two flags and a dove with an olive branch have been projected onto a giant screen on the Eiffel Tower on Sunday evening, ahead of France's recognition of a Palestinian State.

The city's mayor, Anne Hidalgo, said on Bluesky social media that it was meant to show Paris' support for French President Emmanuel Macron's initiative, to be formalized at a United Nations conference later on Monday.

"Paris reaffirms its commitment to peace, which more than ever requires a two-state solution" and expressed "its solidarity toward all Palestinian and Israeli civilian victims," Hidalgo wrote.

A Paris suburb and others across France raise Palestinian flags

The mayor of Saint-Denis, in Paris' northern suburbs, raised the Palestinian flag on the town hall on Monday morning as a "testament of solidarity" toward the people in Gaza.

France's Interior Ministry said at least 21 municipalities across the country have made a similar move, defying a government order not to display of Palestinian flags on town halls in line with the principle of



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neutrality in public services.

Saint-Denis' mayor Mathieu Hanotin said that at "this terrible moment that we live through every day in Gaza," the flag was a "testament to international solidarity in the face of the ongoing massacres."

Cities such as Nantes and Rennes in western France and several suburban towns around Paris also raised the Palestinian flag, echoing a call launched by Socialist leader Olivier Faure.

Faure said France's recognition of a Palestinian state, alongside other Western nations, was "a major step towards the possibility tomorrow of a peace with two states."

## Google faces antitrust déjà vu as US seeks to break up its digital advertising business

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

After deflecting the U.S. Justice Department's attack on its illegal monopoly in online search, Google is facing another attempt to dismantle its internet empire in a trial focused on its abusive tactics in digital advertising.

The trial that opened Monday in an Alexandria, Virginia, federal court revolves around the harmful conduct that resulted in U.S. District Judge Leonie Brinkema declaring parts of Google's digital advertising technology to be an illegal monopoly. The judge found that Google has been engaging in behavior that stifles competition to the detriment of online publishers that depend on the system for revenue.

Google and the Justice Department will spend the next two weeks in court presenting evidence in a "remedy" trial that will culminate in Brinkema issuing a ruling on how to restore fair market conditions.

"The purpose of a remedy is doing what is necessary to restore competition," said Julia Tarver Wood as part of Monday's opening statement for the Justice Department's antitrust division.

Wood asserted Google is manipulating the market in a way that is antithetical to free market competition.

"The means to cheat are buried in computer codes and algorithms," Wood said.

An attorney for Google, Karen Dunn, countered that the remedy proposed by the government is reckless and radical, and that the government is attempting to remove Google entirely from the competition.

No matter how the judge rules, Google says it will appeal the earlier decision labeling the ad network as a monopoly. Appeals can't be filed until the remedy is determined.

The case, filed in 2023 under President Joe Biden's administration, threatens the complex network that Google has spent the past 17 years building to power its dominant digital advertising business. Besides accounting for most of the \$305 billion in revenue that Google's services division generates for its corporate parent Alphabet Inc., digital advertising sales provide the lifeblood that keeps thousands of websites alive.

If the Justice Department gets its way, Brinkema will order Google to sell parts of its ad technology — a proposal that the company's lawyers warned would "invite disruption and damage" to consumers and the internet's ecosystem. The Justice Department contends a breakup would be the most effective and quickest way to undercut a monopoly that has been stifling competition and innovation for years.

Google believes it has already made enough changes to its "Ad Manager" system, including providing more options and pricing options, to resolve the issues the Brinkema flagged in her monopoly ruling.

The legal battle over Google's advertising technology mirrors another showdown that the company recently navigated after another federal judge condemned its dominant search engine as an illegal monopoly and then held remedy hearings earlier this year to consider how to stop the misconduct.

In that case, the Justice Department also proposed a severe crackdown that would have required Google to sell its popular Chrome browser, but U.S. District Judge Amit Mehta decided a less dramatic shake-up was needed amid a search market being reshaped by artificial intelligence technology in a decision issued earlier this month.

Even though Google didn't agree with all aspects of Mehta's decision, the ruling was widely seen as a slap on the wrist — a sentiment that has helped propel Alphabet's stock price to new highs. The 20% gain since Mehta's decision helped make Alphabet only the fourth publicly traded company to reach a market value of \$3 trillion — an increase of more than \$1 trillion since Brinkema branded Google's ad technology



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as a monopoly in April. Alphabet's shares dipped by about 1% Monday to close at \$252.53.

In an indication that the outcome of the search monopoly case might sway things in the advertising technology proceedings, Brinkema asked both Google and the Justice Department to address Mehta's decision during the upcoming trial.

As they did in the search case, Google's lawyers already have been asserting in court papers that AI technology being used by ad network rivals like Meta Platforms is reshaping the way the market works and overriding the need for the Justice Department's "radical" proposals.

The Justice Department is "fighting for a remedy that would vanquish a past that has been overtaken by technological and market transformations in the way digital ads are consumed," Google's lawyers argued leading up to the trial.

## **Some admirers of Charlie Kirk hope response to his death signals start of a religious revival**

By DAVID CRARY, PETER SMITH, DEEPA BHARATH and HOLLY MEYER Associated Press

With Vice President JD Vance calling Charlie Kirk "a martyr for Christianity," and a Catholic cardinal calling him "a modern-day St. Paul," some Kirk admirers suggest his assassination will galvanize throngs of people — notably young conservatives — to become more engaged in evangelical and Catholic churches.

Evocations of Kirk-inspired religious fervor surfaced almost immediately after his death on Sept. 10, and continued to swell as much of Sunday's VIP-studded memorial service for the conservative activist resembled a massive megachurch service. There have been widespread reports of attendance surging at some evangelical churches.

"Charlie had big plans, but God had even bigger plans," Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said at the service in Arizona. "Charlie started a political movement but unleashed a spiritual revival."

The Rev. Robert Jeffress, a longtime ally of President Donald Trump who leads a Southern Baptist megachurch in Dallas, said via email, "The short-term impact of Kirk's murder is astounding."

"The outpouring of emotion rivals that of September 11 and President Kennedy's assassination," Jeffress added. "Whether this genuine emotion translates into long-term change is yet to be determined, but I pray that it does."

What the trends tell us about revival

A sustained surge would run counter to trends. Political scientist Ryan Burge of Washington University in St. Louis, a leading researcher into religious trends and a pastor, said recent history shows no examples of an enduring religious revival after a civic trauma.

Attendance only briefly spiked after the 9/11 attacks before settling back into typical levels, and neither the pandemic nor its aftermath saw any long-term increases as a whole.

"For there to be a noticeable impact on church attendance, this would require a massive shift in behavior of millions of Americans," Burge said. "In a country of 340 million people, even a 5% increase would mean 17 million more people going to church on a weekly basis."

Even if a long-term upswing occurred, "we'd need at least 18 months of data to demonstrate a lasting effect," Burge said.

Some individuals and churches may indeed undergo spiritual revivals, but "the plural of anecdote is not data," he added.

Reports of new faces and crowded pews

Whether it's a blip or not, conservative Christian congregations say they are seeing new faces among their ranks.

Gina Gleason, director of the political engagement team at Calvary Chapel Chino Hills, said she is already seeing more people coming back to church in the wake of Kirk's death and expects the wave of engagement to grow.

The Southern California megachurch's pastor, Jack Hibbs, was a friend of Kirk's and a well-known Trump supporter. Kirk has spoken at Calvary Chapel at least 10 times and each time, thousands attended, pack-



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ing the sanctuary as well as overflow rooms, Gleason said.

"I think we're going to see an increase particularly in youth engagement because they listened to Charlie," Gleason said. "He talked about politics and issues, but at the heart of his message was the Gospel, the truth about eternal salvation in Jesus Christ."

Mark Francey, lead pastor of Oceans Church, a 4,500-strong congregation based in Irvine, California, said Kirk's death is having a "9/11 type effect." He said his congregation saw up to 30% attendance increases the weekend after the assassination.

"After such trauma or tragedy, people who normally don't pray begin to pray," he said. "Death awakens people to what is really important about life and funerals remind all of us about our own mortality."

Testimonies shared by 'The Charlie Kirk Show'

The possibility of a revival was conveyed in a widely circulated montage that appeared on "The Charlie Kirk Show" on Sept. 17, showing several TikTok users saying they went to church for the first time in years after the assassination.

In it, one man said he bought a suit to go to church and will "try to be a better father, husband and leader for my family." A woman says she and her husband returned to church after 20 years and wants their three boys to grow "as strong in their convictions as Charlie Kirk was."

That was the message stressed by Andrew Kolvet, executive producer of "The Charlie Kirk Show," in an interview with Fox News after Kirk's death.

"If you want to honor Charlie ... go back to church. Open your Bible; pray. Ask God to lead you. That's what he wanted," Kolvet said.

What the local church can do

The founder of Communio, an evangelism ministry working with nearly 400 U.S. churches on marriage programs, said he had received reports of increased worship attendance at evangelical and Catholic services in Colorado, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas and elsewhere since Kirk's death.

"Pastors need to see this as an authentic move of the Holy Spirit," said J.P. De Gance said. "The Holy Spirit's moving in the hearts and minds of men and women, causing them to want to seek something and they're showing back up."

De Gance encouraged Christians to make a special effort to introduce themselves to new faces at church or those who've returned after a long lapse. Building trust is key.

"Once someone knows that you care, at that point, they're going to care about what you know," he said.

Catholics and critics join the conversation

Though Kirk identified as a Protestant evangelical, his admirers included prominent Catholic clergy.

"This guy is a modern day St. Paul," said Cardinal Timothy Dolan, the archbishop of New York, on "Fox & Friends." "He was a missionary, he's an evangelist, he's a hero. He's one I think that knows what Jesus meant when he said, 'The truth will set you free.'"

Dolan's comment was criticized by some left-of-center Catholics.

"Any reflection on the legacy of Kirk cannot gloss over the pain and suffering that Kirk inflicted on innumerable people through his harsh, divisive and combative rhetoric," wrote John Grosso, digital editor for The National Catholic Reporter.

David Gibson of the Center on Religion and Culture at Fordham University, a Catholic school in New York, noted that some people suggest that the response to Kirk's death could presage a religious revival in the U.S. "akin to one of the previous 'Great Awakenings' that have periodically stirred the national soul."

"Past and current data show that revival is not really happening, and if there is any uptick it likely will not last," Gibson added in an email.

"What the response to Kirk's killing and memorial will likely do is to continue to change the nature of American Christianity by making it more conservative politically and more friendly to the kind of brash young men who Kirk inspired, and who his followers are increasingly trying to mobilize with martial images and crusader rhetoric."

Pastor Frederick Brown, who leads a mostly Black congregation at The Faith Center Church in Bluefield,



West Virginia, also questioned the staying power of any short-term, Kirk-inspired revival.

"It would appear that this is causing conservative younger people to become more conservative," Brown said. "But that's not the way of the world today. That's going to die out. ... And it's going shift to a place of rebellion among teenagers against the evangelical church."

## **Putin says Russia is willing to abide by nuclear arms deal with the US for 1 year after it expires**

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday declared his readiness to adhere to nuclear arms limits for one more year under the last remaining nuclear pact with the United States that expires in February, and he urged Washington to follow suit.

Putin said allowing the New START agreement signed in 2010 to expire would be destabilizing and could fuel proliferation of nuclear weapons. His televised remarks came at a time of heightened tensions between Russia and the West, and with concerns rising that fighting in Ukraine could spread beyond its borders.

"To avoid provoking a further strategic arms race and to ensure an acceptable level of predictability and restraint, we believe it is justified to try to maintain the status quo established by the New START Treaty during the current, rather turbulent period," Putin said while speaking from the Kremlin. He said Russia is prepared to stick by the treaty's limits for one more year after it expires on Feb. 5, 2026.

Arms control advocates long have voiced concern about the treaty's looming expiration and the lack of dialogue to secure a successor deal, warning about the possibility of a new nuclear arms race and increased risk of a nuclear conflict.

Putin said maintaining limits on nuclear weapons could also be an important step in "creating an atmosphere conducive to substantive strategic dialogue with the U.S."

The New START, signed by then U.S. President Barack Obama and Russian counterpart Dmitry Medvedev, limits each country to no more than 1,550 deployed nuclear warheads and 700 deployed missiles and bombers. The pact also stipulates the need for on-site inspections to verify compliance, although inspections were halted in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic and never resumed.

The treaty was originally supposed to expire in 2021, but was extended for five more years.

Putin urges the U.S. to reciprocate

Putin emphasized that Russia expected the U.S. to follow its example and stick to the treaty's limits.

"We believe this measure will only be viable if the United States acts in a similar manner," Putin said.

Daryl G. Kimball, the director of the Washington-based Arms Control Association, welcomed Putin's statement on X as "an important and positive move."

He and other arms control experts long have prodded Moscow and Washington to quickly reach an interim deal to maintain existing nuclear weapons limits.

"More nuclear weapons will not make anyone safer," Kimball said in a commentary earlier this month. "By agreeing not to exceed the current strategic nuclear limits, they could reduce tensions, forestall a costly arms race that no one can win, create diplomatic leverage to curb the buildup of China's arsenal, and buy time for talks on a broader, more durable, treaty."

U.S. President Donald Trump has said that he and Putin talked about nuclear weapons during their summit in Alaska last month. Asked to comment in July on a looming expiration of the New START, Trump noted "that is a big problem for the world, when you take off nuclear restrictions."

In his televised comments, Putin instructed Russian agencies to "closely monitor relevant American activities, particularly with regard to the strategic offensive arms arsenal." Among the concerns he cited were any preparations by the U.S. to deploy missile interceptors in space.

Such a move would compel Russia to "respond accordingly," he said.

The pivotal pact

In February 2023, Putin suspended Moscow's participation in the New START treaty, saying Russia



couldn't allow U.S. inspections of its nuclear sites at a time when Washington and its NATO allies have openly declared Moscow's defeat in Ukraine as their goal.

At the same time, Russia has emphasized that it wasn't withdrawing from the pact altogether and pledged to respect the caps on nuclear weapons set under the treaty and keep notifying the U.S. about test launches of ballistic missiles.

Another key U.S.-Russian nuclear arms pact was terminated in 2019. That was the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty, which was signed in 1987 and banned land-based missiles with a range between 500-5,500 kilometers (310-3,400 miles).

As tensions between Russia and the West have escalated over the conflict in Ukraine, NATO allies in Europe have recently accused Russia of what they said are provocations, including Russian drones in Polish airspace and fighter jets in Estonian airspace.

## Defense in Vatican 'trial of the century' asks prosecutor to recuse himself for questionable conduct

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Defense lawyers in the Holy See's "trial of the century" asked the Vatican prosecutor to recuse himself from the appeals trial Monday, arguing he was implicated in questionable behavior according to years of private WhatsApp messages that have shaken the proceedings.

The chats show Prosecutor Alessandro Diddi has a personal interest in the outcome that should preclude him from heading the prosecution, the lawyers said in separate motions on the opening day of the appeals trial.

The tribunal president, Archbishop Alejandro Arellano Cedillo, accepted the motions and ordered Diddi to respond within three days, underscoring how the chats have shifted the ground under the Vatican's most ambitious and high-profile prosecution of alleged financial misconduct.

The trial concerning the Vatican's 350 million euro (\$412 million) investment in a London property resulted in the 2023 conviction of nine people on a host of finance-related charges. The star defendant was Cardinal Angelo Becciu, once a close confidante of Pope Francis and a future papal contender.

The investigation took a crucial turn in August 2020 when the prime suspect in the London deal, Monsignor Alberto Perlasca, changed his story and turned on his onetime boss, Becciu. Perlasca escaped indictment and became a prime prosecution witness; Becciu was convicted of embezzlement and sentenced to 5 1/2 years.

Recently, thousands of pages of WhatsApp texts and audio messages have provided the backstory to Perlasca's change of heart. They suggest questionable behavior by Vatican police, Diddi and Francis himself.

They document a behind-the-scenes effort by two women, Francesca Chaouqui and Genevieve Ciferri, to target the cardinal by persuading Perlasca to turn on him. While the claims are unverified, the defense has seized on them as evidence that the investigation was contaminated from the start and the defendants couldn't get a fair trial in the Vatican, an absolute monarchy where Francis intervened on behalf of prosecutors.

The chats "demonstrate a disturbing activity of evidence tampering," the lawyers wrote, citing various instances in which it appeared Chaouqui was in close contact with Diddi's office and provided Perlasca with advice purportedly from investigators.

The existence of the messages first jolted the trial in 2022 when Diddi told the court that Ciferri had forwarded him 126 chats she exchanged with Chaouqui. Diddi entered the messages into evidence but redacted all but eight, prompting defense complaints that he was withholding crucial evidence.

The additional chats now circulating show Diddi had more than 126 chats in 2022 and that Ciferri continued forwarding him content for four days. Diddi had said he blocked her after the first night. Diddi also said he didn't know either Ciferri or Chaouqui.

The defense lawyers also cited an audio file suggesting Vatican Police Commissioner Stefano De Santis gave Chaouqui advice for Perlasca about how to implicate others when he was still a suspect. After Per-



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lasca changed his story, he not only escaped prosecution but was listed as an injured party in the trial and became a prosecutor in another Vatican court.

"We do not yet know whether what emerges from the chats and audio recordings is true, but it is certain that they seem to reveal — except for possible boasts, which must be verified — a disturbing direct or indirect involvement of the investigators," in conditioning Perlasca's testimony, lawyers wrote in a motion demanding Diddi recuse himself.

During Monday's hearing in a frescoed courtroom in the Apostolic Palace, Diddi thanked the defense for providing the opportunity to respond to the allegations and said he would take the three days to "express my thoughts calmly, in order to dispel the doubts that have arisen in recent months about the conduct of the investigation."

He then left the tribunal and other prosecutors took over.

If Diddi doesn't recuse himself, the matter will go before the Vatican high Court of Cassation headed by American Cardinal Kevin Farrell, a Francis protege and appointee.

In his role as camerlengo, Farrell reportedly produced a letter from Francis after his death making clear the late pope didn't want Becciu to participate in the conclave to elect his successor.

Chaouqui is now under investigation by Italian and Vatican prosecutors for alleged influence-peddling for her role in Perlasca's changed testimony. The investigation considers Diddi a victim of the scheme, which is the basis for the defense argument that Diddi has a personal stake in the related appeals case and shouldn't prosecute it.

## **Russia and Ukraine trade deadly drone strikes as Zelenskyy anticipates intense diplomacy at UN**

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia and Ukraine swapped accusations of deadly drone strikes on civilian areas of their countries Monday as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy anticipated "a very intense week" of diplomacy at the U.N. General Assembly in New York, where the Security Council was due to discuss the more than three-year war.

Zelenskyy has tried to give momentum to a U.S.-led peace effort, offering a ceasefire and a summit meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Moscow has taken issue with some of the proposals, however, and an end to the bloodshed appears no closer.

Additionally, international concerns have mounted recently that the fighting could spread beyond Ukraine's borders as European countries rebuked Russia for what they said were provocations. The incidents have included Russian drones landing on Polish soil and Russian fighter aircraft entering Estonian airspace, which prompted an emergency U.N. Security Council meeting Monday.

Estonian Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna called the airspace intrusion a "dangerous escalation," in comments to the Security Council, adding that "Russia's dangerous behavior cannot be tolerated."

Russia's Defense Ministry denied any Estonian airspace violation by its planes. Russia's deputy U.N. Ambassador, Dmitry Polyanskiy, dismissed the outcry, telling the Security Council it was part of an effort to "blame Russia for everything."

The Security Council was to discuss the war in a scheduled session on Tuesday.

Latvian President Edgars Rinkevics said on social media that Russia was testing NATO's political and military response and aiming to reduce Western support for Ukraine by compelling countries to redirect resources toward the defense of alliance countries.

Calibrating how to respond to Russia was not easy, Rinkevics said Sunday. Russia was doing just enough not to cross a red line, but things could still spiral, he added.

Zelenskyy was due to attend the annual high-level gathering at the U.N. General Assembly, where he planned to recruit support for efforts to stop Russia's invasion.

"The schedule already includes nearly two dozen meetings with leaders from different countries, from



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all parts of the world," Zelenskyy said on Telegram late Sunday.

Zelenskyy said he also planned to meet with U.S. President Donald Trump, whose drive for a peace deal after taking office in January has yielded no progress.

"It is vital that this week strengthen the world's resolve for robust action — for without strength, peace will not prevail," Zelenskyy said.

He said that over the past week Russia fired more than 1,500 strike drones, 1,280 glide bombs and 50 missiles of various types at Ukraine. More than 132,000 foreign components were found in those weapons from dozens of countries, he said.

Ukraine has campaigned for tighter sanctions on Russia.

Meanwhile, at least seven Russian aircraft bombarded the southern Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia overnight, killing three people and wounding two others, according to regional administration head Ivan Fedorov.

The attack started around 4:20 a.m. and lasted about 40 minutes, Fedorov said. Residential buildings, shopping malls, a parking lot and "critical infrastructure" were targeted, he said.

"None of the sites had anything to do with military infrastructure," Fedorov said.

The Ukrainian air force said it stopped 132 out of 141 strike and decoy drones launched by Russian forces overnight.

Russia made similar claims. The Moscow-appointed head of Ukraine's Russia-occupied Crimea peninsula, Sergei Aksyonov, said three people were killed and 16 others were wounded late Sunday by Ukrainian drones that struck the popular vacation resort of Foros.

The Russian Defense Ministry said there are no military facilities there.

In Russia's Belgorod border region, three people were killed and another 10 were wounded by Ukrainian drone attacks on Sunday, according to the regional governor, Vyacheslav Gladkov.

The Defense Ministry said 114 Ukrainian drones were downed early Monday over several Russian regions.

## **Moldova detains 74 people over an alleged Russia-backed unrest plot around key election**

CHISINAU, Moldova (AP) — Moldovan authorities said they carried out 250 raids and detained dozens on Monday as part of an investigation into an alleged Russia-backed plan to incite "mass riots" and destabilize the country around a critical parliamentary election.

The raids targeted more than 100 people and took place in multiple localities across the country, police said. Seventy-four people were detained for up to 72 hours, said Victor Furtuna, Moldova's chief prosecutor from the Office for Combating Organized Crime and Special Cases.

Moldovans will vote to choose a new 101-seat legislature on Sunday, in an election many view as a choice between Moldova's continued path toward European Union membership or closer ties with Russia.

Moldova's police said that the unrest plot was "coordinated from the Russian Federation, through criminal elements."

Furtuna said that most of the suspects "systematically traveled" to Serbia, where they received training and that they were aged between 19 and 45 years old.

The head of Moldova's police, Viorel Cernauteanu, said that some of the suspects didn't know the real purpose of their trips, which were presented as pilgrimages, and only later became involved in "training for disorder and destabilization."

He added that the investigation was "not aimed at political entities, despite interpretations. Rather, it was aimed at documenting the criminal intent and organization of these individuals who traveled to Serbia for training."

Moldova's pro-Western President Maia Sandu said in a statement after the raids on Monday that the Kremlin is spending "hundreds of millions of euros" to try to sway the election.

"People are intoxicated daily with lies," she said. "Hundreds of individuals are paid to provoke disorder, violence, and spread fear. ... I appeal to all citizens: we must not allow our country to be handed over to foreign interests."



She added that the Kremlin “has accomplices here in Moldova,” describing them as people “willing to sell out their country for money.”

Moldovan authorities have long accused Russia of conducting a hybrid war — meddling in elections, disinformation campaigns, illicitly funding pro-Russian parties — to try to derail the country’s path toward European Union membership.

Moscow has repeatedly denied meddling in Moldova.

In the wake of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Moldova applied to join the EU and was granted candidate status that year. Brussels agreed to open accession negotiations last year. Moldova’s westward shift further irked Moscow and tensions between the two nations skyrocketed.

## Ukrainian refugee’s train stabbing death becomes early flashpoint in 2026 North Carolina Senate race

By GARY D. ROBERTSON Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — Republicans in North Carolina and beyond are making a concerted effort to turn the stabbing death of a Ukrainian woman on a Charlotte commuter train into a political liability for Democratic former Gov. Roy Cooper in his bid to win a key U.S. Senate race that is still more than a year away.

GOP candidate Michael Whatley has said Cooper bears “direct responsibility” for the deadly Aug. 22 attack on Iryna Zarutskya because of a commission he created in June 2020 to address racial inequity in the criminal justice system. The panel’s unveiling occurred weeks following the death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police.

But Cooper’s campaign said Whatley, a recent Republican National Committee chairman, was lying about the task force. Cooper “knows North Carolinians need to be safe in their communities,” the campaign wrote in a statement, and his career has included “keeping thousands of criminals off the streets and behind bars.” It cites Cooper signing a 2023 law that toughened pretrial release rules.

The clash has sent early signals of just how heated the North Carolina Senate race will be. It already was anticipated to be a key 2026 Senate race for Democrats seeking to claim a Senate majority in next year’s midterm elections and now could be among the most expensive Senate campaigns in U.S. history.

Democrats see the popular former governor’s bid for the open North Carolina seat as one of their best pickup opportunities in a landscape that largely favors Republicans. They need four Senate seats to claim a majority.

A tragic flashpoint emerges

Both candidates have expressed sorrow over the death of the 23-year-old Zarutskya, whose horrific attack was caught on camera. But public outrage that suspect Decarlos Brown Jr. had been previously arrested more than a dozen times and had been recently released on a charge without bond prompted accusations by Whatley and allies that Cooper has pushed soft-on-crime policies.

“It’s pretty simple: A vote for Roy Cooper is a vote for more crime, more violence, more criminals,” Whatley said in the first days after the release of the surveillance video.

Cooper pushed back hard.

“I’ve been Attorney General and Governor, dedicating my career to putting violent criminals behind bars and keeping them there,” Cooper, who was the state attorney general for 16 years before eight as governor, wrote on X. In turn, he accused Whatley, also a recent state GOP chairman whom President Donald Trump encouraged to enter the race, of looking to take advantage of Zarutskya’s death.

“Only a cynical DC insider would think it’s acceptable to use her death for political points,” he said on X.

More Republicans soon chimed in on social media, including Vice President JD Vance and Trump, who posted that “her blood is on the hands of the Democrats” and named Cooper specifically.

The killing, which fit neatly into Trump’s tough-on-crime agenda in big cities, gave Whatley a clear opening, said Chris Cooper, a political science professor at Western Carolina University.

“People don’t know who he is. He doesn’t have high name recognition,” said Cooper, who is not related to the former governor. “So he is trying to define himself for North Carolinians, and he’s trying to redefine



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Roy Cooper.”

2 high-profile candidates square off

Both Cooper and Whatley got in the race this summer, within weeks of GOP Sen. Thom Tillis announcing that he would not seek reelection. Cooper had always been considered a potential Senate candidate in 2026. Whatley announced when Lara Trump, the president’s daughter-in-law, declined to jump in.

With no other high-profile candidates currently in the race, the parties’ primaries seem unlikely to head off a Cooper-Whatley general election battle.

Some pundits think spending in next year’s race could reach \$1 billion, blowing past the \$515.5 million spent overall on a U.S. Senate race in Georgia in 2020 won by Democrat Jon Ossoff in a runoff, according to data from Open Secrets, which tracks political spending.

The campaign pits Cooper, a proven winner for Democrats in a Southern state, against first-time candidate Whatley. Whatley’s deep loyalty to Trump — who won the state’s electoral votes all three times he ran for president — and fundraising skills make him a formidable opponent in the closely divided state.

Suspect’s criminal history and release ignite criticism

Brown, who was indicted for first-degree murder this month in state criminal court, also faces a federal charge in Zarutsky’s death. He could face the death penalty if convicted. Calls to the Mecklenburg County public defender’s office, seeking someone who could comment on Brown’s behalf, previously were unanswered.

A magistrate earlier this year allowed Brown, who in September 2020 completed more than five years in prison for robbery with a dangerous weapon, to be released without bond on a nonviolent misdemeanor charge, according to court records. Brown was ordered to undergo a mental health evaluation after his latest arrest.

The panel then-Gov. Cooper established in June 2020, the Task Force for Racial Equity in Criminal Justice, offered dozens of recommendations, including eliminating the need for people accused of most misdemeanors to post a cash bond unless doing so would endanger someone else.

But Cooper wasn’t a task force member, and the panel had no authority to enact cash bail recommendations or release people from prison. And the task force’s December 2020 recommendations — most of which were ignored by Republican lawmakers — were released after Brown left prison.

State Senate leader Phil Berger said at a news conference with Whatley earlier this month that task force recommendations reflected “an attitude on criminal justice” that informs magistrates to make bond decisions like the one Brown received. The GOP-controlled General Assembly is expected to take up criminal justice reform this week.

Whatley also criticized Cooper for a 2021 lawsuit settlement that required his administration to release 3,500 offenders within state custody over several months. The state NAACP, the American Civil Liberties Union of North Carolina and others had sued to address prison conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cooper pushes back on canceled federal grants

Fighting back, Cooper’s campaign has tried to link Whatley to April’s cancellation of hundreds of U.S. Department of Justice grants for programs supporting violence reduction and crime victims. Whatley has expressed broad support for government efficiency efforts in the Trump administration, although there’s nothing to indicate he actively backed these cancellations.

Chris Cooper, the Western Carolina professor, said Whatley’s strategy on crime is likely to be repeated — attempting to connect any order or action in Roy Cooper’s long career to a negative outcome.

It should make for a long, drawn-out contest.

“We live in a time of essentially a constant campaign,” Chris Cooper said. “And if anything, the temperature is only going to rise between now and next November.”



## Trump reveals Murdochs and Dell could potentially take part in TikTok deal

By ALAN SUDERMAN AP Business Writer

President Donald Trump said prominent billionaires – including media mogul Rupert Murdoch and tech founder Michael Dell – could be part of a deal in which the U.S. will take control of the social video platform TikTok.

Trump namedropped the 94-year-old Murdoch and his son Lachlan Murdoch, the head of Fox News and News Corp, as part of a group of possible participants in a deal during an interview recorded Friday and aired Sunday on Fox News.

"I think they're going to be in the group. A couple of others. Really great people, very prominent people," Trump said. "And they're also American patriots, you know, they love this country. I think they're going to do a really good job."

Trump's disclosure of the potential involvement of the Murdochs and Dell, the founder and CEO of Dell Technologies, is the latest twist in a fast-moving potential deal to keep TikTok operating in the U.S.

Trump also said Sunday that tech giant Oracle founder and Chairman Larry Ellison was part of the same group. His involvement had been previously disclosed. On Saturday, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said Oracle would be responsible for the app's data and security and that Americans will control six of the seven seats for a planned board.

Much is still unknown about the actual deal in the works. Trump discussed the TikTok deal with China's Xi Jinping in a lengthy phone call on Friday. Chinese and U.S. officials have until Dec. 16 to hash out the details, following the latest deadline extension by the Trump administration.

TikTok is a hugely popular app currently owned by a Chinese company, ByteDance. American officials have warned the algorithm TikTok uses to shape what users see is vulnerable to manipulation by Chinese authorities, who can use it to push content on the platform in a way that's difficult to detect.

Congress passed legislation calling for a TikTok ban to go into effect in January, but Trump has repeatedly signed orders that have allowed TikTok to keep operating in the United States as his administration tries to reach an agreement for the social media company's parent company to sell its U.S. operations.

On Sunday, Trump said that he was "a little prejudiced" about TikTok because he credited the app for helping him connect with young voters. Trump said slain conservative activist Charlie Kirk encouraged the president to use the app.

Representatives for Ellison, Dell and the Murdochs could not immediately be reached for comment.

Trump filed a lawsuit against Murdoch and one of his newspapers, The Wall Street Journal, in July after it published a story reporting on the president's ties to wealthy financier and convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

## How Israel could retaliate against the growing push for recognition of a Palestinian state

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

France and Saudi Arabia hope to use this year's gathering of world leaders at the United Nations General Assembly and the increasingly horrific war in the Gaza Strip to inject new urgency into the quest for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Those efforts include a new road map for eventual Palestinian statehood in territories Israel seized in the 1967 Mideast war, and moves by several Western countries to join a global majority in recognizing such a state before it has been established.

Britain, Canada and Australia formally recognized a Palestinian state on Sunday, joining nearly 150 countries that have already done so, and France is expected to follow suit at this week's General Assembly.

But the efforts to push a two-state solution face major obstacles, beginning with vehement opposition from the United States and Israel. The U.S. has blocked Palestinian officials from even attending the General



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Assembly. And Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is opposed to Palestinian statehood, has threatened to take unilateral action in response — possibly including the annexation of parts of the West Bank. That would put the Palestinians' dream of independence even further out of reach.

Prospects have never been dimmer

The creation of a Palestinian state in east Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza has long been seen internationally as the only way to resolve the conflict, which began more than a century before Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack sparked the ongoing war in Gaza.

Proponents say this would allow Israel to exist as a democracy with a Jewish majority. The alternative, they say, is the status quo in which Jewish Israelis have full rights and Palestinians live under varying degrees of Israeli control, something major rights groups say amounts to apartheid.

"Israel must understand that the one state solution, with the subjugation of the Palestinian people without rights -- that is absolutely intolerable," U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres said last week. "Without a two-state solution, there will be no peace in the Middle East."

Peace talks launched in the early 1990s repeatedly faltered amid violence and the expansion of Israeli settlements aimed at preventing a Palestinian state. No substantive negotiations have been held since Netanyahu returned to office in 2009.

Israel annexed east Jerusalem, considers it part of its capital, and has long encouraged the growth of Jewish settlements in and around Palestinian neighborhoods.

The occupied West Bank is home to over 500,000 settlers with Israeli citizenship and some 3 million Palestinians who live under Israeli military rule, with the Palestinian Authority exercising limited autonomy in scattered enclaves.

In Gaza, Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed tens of thousands of Palestinians, displaced some 90% of the population of 2 million, left much of the territory uninhabitable and pushed some areas into famine. A new offensive threatens to empty and flatten the largest Palestinian city.

Netanyahu's government and most of Israel's political class were opposed to Palestinian statehood even before the war. The Trump administration has shown no interest in reviving peace talks, instead calling for the relocation of much of Gaza's population to other countries, a plan Israel has eagerly adopted even as critics say it would amount to ethnic cleansing.

The French-Saudi plan

Perhaps hoping this is a darkest-before-dawn moment, France and Saudi Arabia have advanced a phased plan to end the conflict by establishing a demilitarized state governed by the Palestinian Authority with international assistance.

The plan calls for an immediate end to the war in Gaza, the return of all hostages and a complete Israeli withdrawal. Hamas would hand power to a politically independent committee under the auspices of the Palestinian Authority — something it has already agreed to — and lay down its arms, which it has not.

The international community would help the Palestinian Authority rebuild Gaza and govern the territories, possibly with the help of foreign peacekeepers. Regional peace and integration, likely including Saudi normalization of ties with Israel, would follow.

The 193-member world body approved a nonbinding resolution endorsing the so-called "New York Declaration" earlier this month.

American and Israeli opposition

The United States and Israel say the international push for a Palestinian state rewards Hamas and makes it harder to reach a deal to halt the war and return the remaining hostages.

The Gaza ceasefire talks broke down again when Israel carried out a Sept. 9 strike targeting Hamas' negotiators in Qatar, one of the main mediators. The U.S. had walked away from the talks in July, blaming Hamas, and Israel unilaterally ended an earlier ceasefire in March.

Israel also says that creating a Palestinian state would allow Hamas to carry out another Oct. 7-style attack on an even wider scale. Hamas leaders have at times indicated they would accept a state on the 1967 lines, but the group remains formally committed to Israel's destruction.

Netanyahu portrays international recognition of Palestinian statehood as an attack on Israel. During a



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meeting with Secretary of State Marco Rubio last week, Netanyahu said "it is clear that if unilateral actions are taken against us, it simply invites unilateral actions on our part."

Netanyahu and his far-right coalition partners have long wanted to annex large parts of the West Bank, which would make it virtually impossible to establish a viable Palestinian state.

The U.S. has not taken a public position on the issue, but in an interview with Fox News, Rubio linked "this conversation about annexation" to the issue of statehood recognition.

The United Arab Emirates has called annexation a "red line," without saying what effect it might have on the 2020 Abraham Accords, in which the country normalized ties with Israel.

There are other obstacles

The French-Saudi plan sidesteps the most divisive issues in the conflict: final borders, the fate of the settlements, the return of Palestinian refugees from past wars, security arrangements, the status of Jerusalem and recognition of Israel as a Jewish state.

It also relies heavily on the Palestinian Authority, the current leadership of which is despised by many Palestinians who view them as corrupt and autocratic. Israel says they are not fully committed to peace and accuses the Palestinian Authority of incitement despite recent reforms.

The plan calls for Palestinian elections to be held within a year, but President Mahmoud Abbas has delayed previous votes when it looked like his party would lose, blaming Israeli restrictions. Hamas, which won the last national elections in 2006, would be excluded unless it gives up its weapons and recognizes Israel.

All of which means the plan is likely to end up on the mound of past Mideast accords, parameters and road maps, leaving Israel in full control of the land from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, ruling millions of Palestinians who are denied basic rights.

## **Today in History: September 23, Nixon's 'Checkers' speech**

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Tuesday, Sept. 23, the 266th day of 2025. There are 99 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Sept. 23, 1952, Sen. Richard M. Nixon, R-Calif., salvaged his vice presidential nomination by appearing on television from Los Angeles to refute allegations of improper campaign fundraising in what became known as the "Checkers" speech for its reference to his family's cocker spaniel.

Also on this date:

In 1780, British spy John Andre was captured along with papers revealing Benedict Arnold's plot to surrender West Point to the British.

In 1806, the Lewis and Clark expedition returned to St. Louis, more than two years after setting out for the Pacific Northwest.

In 1955, a jury in Sumner, Mississippi, acquitted two white men, Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam, of killing Black teenager Emmett Till. (The two later admitted to the crime in an interview with Look magazine.)

In 1957, nine Black students who entered Little Rock Central High School in Arkansas were forced to withdraw because of a white mob outside.

In 2002, Gov. Gray Davis signed a law making California the first state to offer workers paid family leave.

In 2018, capping a comeback from four back surgeries, Tiger Woods won the Tour Championship in Atlanta, the 80th victory of his PGA Tour career and his first in more than five years.

In 2022, Roger Federer played his final professional match after an illustrious career that included 20 Grand Slam titles.

Today's Birthdays: Singer Julio Iglesias is 82. Actor/singer Mary Kay Place is 78. Rock star Bruce Springsteen is 76. Director/playwright George C. Wolfe is 71. Actor Rosalind Chao is 68. Actor Jason Alexander is 66. Actor Chi McBride is 64. Singer Ani (AH'-nee) DiFranco is 55. Producer-rapper Jermaine Dupri is 53. Filmmaker Yorgos Lanthimos is 52. Actor Anthony Mackie is 47. Actor Skylar Astin is 38. Tennis player Juan Martín del Potro is 37.