

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 1 of 65

[1- Upcoming Events](#)

[2- 1440 News Headlines](#)

[3- Today on GDILIVE.COM](#)

[4- SD News Watch Fact Brief: Fact brief: Is South Dakota home to the tallest grain elevator mural in the country?](#)

[5- SD SearchLight: Former state employee accused of falsifying records in child abuse cases](#)

[5- SD SearchLight: SD Education Department encounters criticism of proposed math standards](#)

[6- SD SearchLight: South Dakota's ACT score declines but outperforms similar states and national average](#)

[7- SD SearchLight: Trump threatens more crack-downs in Dem cities, prosecutions of his political enemies](#)

[8- SD SearchLight: South Dakota board approves funding for satellite voting centers in tribal areas](#)

[9- SD SearchLight: Survey finds many South Dakota parents unable to enroll children in afterschool programs](#)

[12- Weather Pages](#)

[17- Daily Devotional](#)

[18- Subscription Form](#)

[19- Lottery Numbers](#)

[20- Upcoming Groton Events](#)

[21- News from the Associated Press](#)



Thursday, Oct. 16

Senior Menu: Baked meatballs with gravy, mashed potatoes, California blend, mixed fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Maple French toast bake.

School Lunch: Chicken tacos, Fiesta beans.

Emmanuel Lutheran: WELCA: 1:30 p.m. Final Day of packing LWR kits. Hostess: Potluck.

Volleyball hosts Deuel: (Gym: 7th-5, 8th-6; Arena: C-5, JV-6, V-7:15)

4th Grade GBB, 4 p.m.

3rd Grade GBB, 5 p.m.

MS Football hosts Sisseton at Doney Field, 4 p.m.

Friday, Oct. 17

Senior Menu: Kielbasa with mac and cheese, Catalina blend, pears, dinner roll.

School Breakfast: Breakfast boats.

School Lunch: Garlic cheese bread, cooked carrots.

End of First Quarter

Football at Baltic, 7 p.m.

Saturday, Oct. 18

Boys and Girls Soccer Second Round Playoffs.

C and JV VB Tournament at Northwestern

Varsity VB Tournament at Milbank

United Methodist North Highland Coat Give A Way, 9 a.m.

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Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 2 of 65

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.

'Louisiana v. Callais'

The Supreme Court's conservative majority yesterday appeared poised to weaken a 1965 Voting Rights Act provision used to require states to consider racial makeup when drawing voting districts.

The court is weighing a challenge to a 2024 Louisiana congressional map that increased majority-Black districts from one to two out of six. The change followed a lawsuit alleging the earlier map violated Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act (read here) by limiting the voting power of Black constituents—roughly one-third of the state's population. In the case now before the Supreme Court, a group of self-described "non-African American voters" contend the redistricting was based too heavily on race.

The justices heard arguments last term but issued a rare order for a reargument to specifically examine whether the second majority-Black district violates the 14th and 15th Amendments—both enacted after the Civil War to ensure equal legal protections and voting rights regardless of race.

French Political Turmoil

French Prime Minister Sébastien Lecornu faces two no-confidence votes in Parliament today, putting President Emmanuel Macron's government at risk once again. The motions, filed by the nationalist-populist National Rally and the democratic-socialist France Unbowed parties, challenge Lecornu's leadership amid concern over government spending and the country's fiscal health.

Lecornu—reinstated by Macron after resigning last week—is France's third prime minister this year. He leads a centrist minority government that has struggled to advance an austerity budget and rein in the country's more than \$3.9T debt. His administration has proposed roughly \$35B in spending cuts, aiming to reduce the deficit to 4.7% of GDP (still above the European Union's 3% limit). See background on France's fiscal challenges here.

In an effort to gain support, Lecornu suspended an unpopular proposal to raise the retirement age from 62 to 64. If a no-confidence vote succeeds, it could trigger snap elections and further fragment the National Assembly.

Waymo Eyes London

Self-driving startup Waymo will begin offering driverless taxi service in London next year, the company announced yesterday. It marks the first international expansion for Waymo and would make London the first European city to have autonomous vehicles on the road.

Launched in 2009, the Alphabet-owned company is considered the frontrunner in the US autonomous ride-hailing market. It currently operates in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Phoenix, and partners with Uber in Atlanta and Austin. The company plans to expand to at least Dallas, Miami, and Washington, DC, in 2026. General Motors' robotaxi effort, Cruise, suspended operations in December, leaving only Tesla (currently operating as an invite-only pilot) as the lone major competitor.

The company says its fleet is roughly 90% less likely to get in an accident involving serious injuries than a human driver, and a recent review found many accidents involving its vehicles were not linked to driverless functions.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 3 of 65

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

President Donald Trump threatens to move 2026 World Cup matches from Boston over alleged safety concerns; Boston is set to host seven matches at the international event.

Penelope Milford, Oscar-nominated actress known for "Coming Home," dies at age 77.

Drew Struzan, artist behind iconic movie posters like "Star Wars" and "Indiana Jones," dies at age 78.

MLB championship series continues tonight with NLCS Game 3 (6 pm ET, TBS) and ALCS Game 4 (8:30 pm ET, FS1); see latest scores and schedule.

Science & Technology

Apple unveils series of products powered by faster M5 chip, designed to enhance performance of artificial intelligence-driven workloads.

Researchers hypothesize early lead exposure damaged hominid brains, stunting language and social development; modern humans may have carried gene mutation that protected their brains, enabling higher intelligence.

Physicists accidentally produce shortest X-ray pulses ever observed, a breakthrough that could allow scientists to examine atomic bonds in greater detail and observe the fastest processes within materials.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 +0.4%, Dow -0.0%, Nasdaq +0.7%) amid ongoing concerns over US-China trade relations and a government shutdown.

Investor group, including BlackRock, Nvidia, Microsoft, and xAI, agrees to buy Aligned Data Centers in \$40B deal to secure computing capacity for AI; purchase is largest-ever global data center deal.

Morgan Stanley tops Wall Street earnings and revenue estimates by the largest margin in nearly five years, posts record Q3 revenue of roughly \$18B.

Politics & World Affairs

Federal judge temporarily blocks Trump administration from firing federal workers during the government shutdown, following a lawsuit filed earlier this month by several unions.

Dozens of journalists turn in Pentagon access badges after refusing to comply with government-imposed reporting restrictions.

President Donald Trump authorizes CIA operations in Venezuela, considering military strikes.

Bodies of at least 19 Israeli hostages still unaccounted for, as Hamas claims it has returned all remains recoverable without extensive effort or specialized equipment; Israel maintains that peace deal hinges on return of all remains.



Varsity Volleyball

Deuel at Groton Area
Thursday., Oct. 16, 7:15 p.m.



Groton
Area
Tigers
Groton, SD

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No

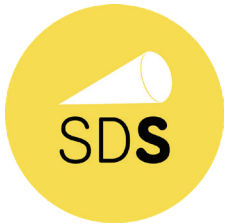
by Michael Klinski
investigative reporter

Faulkton's 110-foot tall grain elevator mural is the tallest in South Dakota, but a 135-foot tall mural in Toledo, Ohio, is the largest in the country.

The South Dakota town of about 800 people in the north-central part of the state commissioned Australian Guido van Helten to paint the mural in 2018. It came to be after another Australian who lived in Faulkton showed town leaders the murals van Helten – his friend – had completed.

The mural, which took two years to complete from idea to execution, features a girl and a boy exchanging a cowboy hat across three sides of the elevator. It is among the largest in the country.

The Toledo grain storage mural is the biggest in the country. It spans 170,000 square feet — 100,000 square feet more than the next biggest mural — and features sunflowers and Native American portraits.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Former state employee accused of falsifying records in child abuse cases

BY: JOHN HULT-OCTOBER 15, 2025 4:38 PM

A longtime South Dakota state employee from Spearfish was indicted this week in Lawrence County for allegedly falsifying child abuse reports.

Attorney General Marty Jackley, who announced the charges against 56-year-old Nova J. Collins in a Wednesday press release, said the charges were the first to be filed under a new state law that requires all state employees to disclose suspected "improper conduct" by their coworkers.

The legislation came in response to a crush of state employee criminal cases in 2024 across multiple state agencies. The most costly to taxpayers involved the misappropriation of \$1.78 million by a former Department of Social Services employee.

The press release on Collins' indictment says the charges are related to "falsifying reports related to a child abuse investigation," but does not include further details on the alleged behavior.

Tony Mangan, spokesman for Jackley, said he could confirm that Collins was reported by a "fellow state employee." Mangan said he couldn't offer more details during an ongoing investigation.

As of Wednesday afternoon, Collins referred to herself as a supervisor with the state of South Dakota on her LinkedIn profile. It says she's worked for the state for 25 years. Jackley's press release referred to Collins as a "former state employee."

Collins' indictment lists four felony charges related to forgery and falsified evidence, as well as a misdemeanor charge for falsification of public records by a public officer or employee. If convicted on all counts, she could be incarcerated for up to 15 years.

According to the indictment, each charge relates to Collins' alleged falsification of a document called a DSS Initial Family Assessment and Child Safety Determination report for a minor child, identified only by initials, between January and June of this year.

Such a document is completed by a Department of Social Services employee following a report of abuse and neglect, according to the department website.

The indictment provides no further details, and it's so far the only public court document filed in the case.

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.

SD Education Department encounters criticism of proposed math standards

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER-OCTOBER 15, 2025 4:54 PM

The South Dakota Department of Education received 12 written public comments on its proposed math standards, and only one was positive.

Another two criticisms and two positive comments were offered verbally Wednesday during a hearing in Aberdeen conducted by the state Board of Education.

In response, department officials said they will amend the proposal.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 6 of 65

The proposed standards were reviewed by a 20-person revision committee after being developed by a statewide advisory group. South Dakota Secretary of Education Joe Graves said the proposal leaves core concepts largely unchanged but describes them more clearly and concisely.

"The department aimed to make them more accessible and understandable for educators, students and families alike," Graves said.

Others disagreed with that characterization. Sharon Vestal, a math professor at South Dakota State University, said she was concerned the simplification has "taken out some of the precise mathematics and the meaning behind it."

Oldham-Ramona math teacher Susan Gilkerson said she is "on the fence" regarding the changes. She worries the new standards "took the meat off the bones" and will not give educators a clear understanding of just how deeply they need to teach a subject to ensure they meet the new standards.

The proposal pulls from other states' standards across the nation, and from the Archimedes standards, which were written by an assistant professor at Hillsdale College. The Michigan-based private college was also involved in South Dakota's revised social studies standards, accepted in 2023 and implemented this school year.

One of the states from which the proposed math standards are drawn is Arkansas, which has historically had lower test scores than South Dakota. Graves said Arkansas went through a similar process to simplify and improve its math standards a few years ago.

"The results of that change haven't appeared. We don't know what that's going to result in," Graves said.

Graves added that South Dakota students "lack significant progress" on math testing since the COVID-19 pandemic, which he attributed to the current standards. About 44% of students were proficient or above on the state test annually over the last five years, he said.

Vestal told board members the scores are a result of disruptions students suffered during the pandemic.

"A lot was lost that year when they went online, and we're still trying to gain that back," Vestal said. "That has been a huge problem, and we haven't recovered."

The U.S. Education Department awarded South Dakota a five-year, \$3.7 million grant to support implementation of new standards, provide professional development for elementary school educators, facilitate higher education collaboration, and allow school district math leaders to meet and develop math plans.

Graves said the department will take the critiques raised in the public comments, "figure out what to do, and be back in November with ideas on those." The next meeting will be Nov. 10 in Sioux Falls.

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.

South Dakota's ACT score declines but outperforms similar states and national average

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER-OCTOBER 15, 2025 4:28 PM

South Dakota students' average ACT score in 2025 is slightly lower than last year and is unimproved for a fifth straight year, but it remains higher than the national average.

The state Department of Education released results of the college readiness exam Wednesday. South Dakota students earned an average composite score of 21. The highest possible score on the ACT is 36.

South Dakota's results continued a trend of lower scores since the state's recent high of 21.9 in 2018. The state averaged 21.1 in each of 2023 and 2024. The minimum score for acceptance at the state's public universities is 18.

"These numbers reflect what we know to be true – that South Dakota students who take the ACT are well-prepared to move on following their K-12 careers," said Secretary of Education Joe Graves in a news

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 7 of 65

release.

The national average composite score this year is 19.4, which is the same as last year and an eighth straight year of lower or unimproved scores after a peak score of 21 in 2017.

Sixty percent of South Dakota's high school graduates took the ACT this year, according to the department. Of students who indicated they want to attend college, 75% said they plan to attend higher education institutions in South Dakota. Forty-one percent of South Dakota test-takers met college readiness in three or four academic skill areas: English, mathematics, reading and science.

Comparing states based on their average ACT scores is difficult, because not all states require the test, and the percentage of students taking it in each state varies widely. The state will require all South Dakota juniors to take the test beginning this spring, replacing the state assessment test administered to high school juniors.

"Providing all public-school juniors the opportunity to demonstrate their readiness this spring is an exciting and important step. Having an ACT score in hand can open doors to opportunities students may never have considered before," Graves added. "I look forward to seeing students who would not typically take the ACT realize what their future may hold."

South Dakota will join nine other states that reported 100% of students taking the ACT. Among those states, the average score was 18.2.

South Dakota's average score of 21 for the roughly 60% of students who took the test is better or equal to states with the most similar participation rates, according to the ACT. Missouri, with 70% participation, reported 19.8; Hawaii, with 68% participation, reported 17.5; Minnesota, with 68% participation, reported 20.6; and Iowa, with 41% participation, reported 21.

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Trump threatens more crackdowns in Dem cities, prosecutions of his political enemies

BY: JACOB FISCHLER-OCTOBER 15, 2025 5:41 PM

President Donald Trump and FBI Director Kash Patel claimed victory Wednesday in what they said was a months-long surge of law enforcement in major cities and pledged to continue sending federal authorities to address violent crime in U.S. cities.

The FBI arrested more than 8,700 suspects during an initiative Trump dubbed "Operation Summer Heat" from June to September.

The exact parameters of the operation, which had not been previously made public, were unclear as Trump and Patel said during an Oval Office appearance that they would continue to prioritize aggressive enforcement, particularly in major cities led by Democrats.

"Honestly, we haven't really gotten going yet," Trump said. "If we didn't have to fight all these radical left governors, we could've had Chicago taken care of, as an example."

Since June, Trump has pursued a controversial and legally questionable effort to send National Guard troops to U.S. cities — Los Angeles; Washington, D.C.; Memphis and Portland, Oregon — to deal with protestors and general street crime while consistently hinting that more deployments would be coming.

He said Wednesday that residents of Chicago largely approved of aggressive policing tactics and were "walking around with MAGA hats." Trump won just 28% of the vote in Chicago's Cook County in the 2024 election, compared to 70% for Democrat Kamala Harris.

"They're not interested in National Guard, Army, Navy — bring them in, bring in the Marines," he said. "They just want the crime to stop."

The crime push took Trump by surprise, he said, noting it was not a primary part of his campaign.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 8 of 65

"I did get elected for crime, but I didn't get elected for what we're doing," he said. "This is many, many steps above."

He also identified White House Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller as an architect and chief communicator of the administration's law enforcement policies, though he made a passing implication that Miller's far-right views were too extreme for much of the country.

"I love watching him on television," he said. "I'd love to have him come up and explain his true feelings. Maybe not his true feelings — that might be going a little bit too far. But Stephen, thank you for doing an incredible job. The people of this country love you."

Political crime and Caribbean boats

Trump again broached the possibility of defying two typical norms of presidential power: calling for prosecutions to retaliate against officials who'd investigated him and defending the extrajudicial strikes on alleged drug runners in the Caribbean Sea that he said could expand to land.

Standing between Patel and Attorney General Pam Bondi, Trump said U.S. Sen. Adam Schiff, who, as a U.S. House Democrat before joining the Senate, led congressional investigations into Trump, and former prosecutor Jack Smith, who led criminal prosecutions, should be investigated.

"Deranged Jack Smith is, in my opinion, a criminal," Trump said.

"I hope they're looking at Shifty Schiff," he added, referring to the California Democrat. "I hope they're looking at political crime, because there's never been as much political crime against a political opponent as what I had to go through."

Trump said the military's attacks on vessels suspected to be bringing drugs to the United States had effectively halted drug importation from Venezuela. The operation could expand to land targets, he said.

"We are certainly looking at land now, because we've got the sea very well under control," he said.

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

South Dakota board approves funding for satellite voting centers in tribal areas

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR-OCTOBER 15, 2025 2:48 PM

The board voted unanimously to fund the three counties' requests, totaling about \$50,000, to operate in-person, satellite voting sites during the 2026 election cycle. The satellite locations are in addition to early voting and election-day polling places typically located in county courthouses.

Lyman County received \$17,800 to hire poll workers, pay travel expenses and rent space for a temporary voting site. Oglala Lakota County was approved for \$25,400 for similar expenses, and Todd County received \$6,500.

Courts have repeatedly found that South Dakota and some counties have failed to provide equal access to polling locations, registration opportunities and early voting for Native Americans. In some of those lawsuits, judges have ruled that without such voting sites, those Native American voters faced barriers that violate the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Wednesday for satellite voting centers in three counties where travel distances have made it harder for Native Americans to cast ballots.

The state's HAVA Grant Board, which administers federal money from the Help America Vote Act, met virtually to approve grant requests from Lyman, Oglala Lakota and Todd counties. Those counties are home to much of the Lower Brule, Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations.

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

Survey finds many South Dakota parents unable to enroll children in afterschool programs

BY: SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT STAFF-OCTOBER 15, 2025

Two in three South Dakota parents who want afterschool programs for their children are unable to enroll them, in many cases because programs are too expensive, unavailable or inaccessible, according to a survey commissioned by the Afterschool Alliance and released Wednesday.

"Every child deserves access to a quality afterschool program but sadly, this study shows we're far from reaching that goal," said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant in a news release. "We need greater support from federal, state, and local governments, businesses, and philanthropy to change that."

The Afterschool Alliance is a nonprofit working to ensure that children have access to quality afterschool programs. Its America After 3PM survey finds that 76% of South Dakota parents with a child in an afterschool program rate it as excellent or very good, and there is broad support among South Dakota parents for public funding for the programs.

Overall in South Dakota, the parents of 64,080 children want afterschool programs while 21,645 children are enrolled, the study found. Nearly 9 in 10 South Dakota parents favor public funding for afterschool opportunities, according to the survey. A majority of parents in the state say the programs keep kids safe, build their social skills and responsible decision making, and help parents keep their jobs and boost their productivity at work.

Conducted by Edge Research, the fifth edition of America After 3PM is based on a survey of 30,515 U.S. parents with school-age children in their households, including in-depth interviews with 222 in South Dakota.

A closer look at what's driving the rising rate of uninsured children

Decades of progress on children's health coverage is being slowly erased

BY: KIM KRISBERG, PUBLIC HEALTH WATCH-OCTOBER 15, 2025

Hundreds of thousands of more children in the United States are going without health insurance, and experts warn that actions by the Trump administration and Congress will likely make the problem worse.

The national uninsured rate for children and teens rose to 6% in 2024, up from 5.4% in 2023, according to new year-over-year data released by the U.S. Census Bureau in September. The rate is the highest in a decade and follows a trend of childhood coverage losses that began a few years before COVID-19 arrived and picked up again after the pandemic emergency response.

"The storm clouds are gathering for people who rely on public health insurance and Medicaid, but for children, sadly, they are already here," said Joan Alker, executive director of the Center for Children and Families at Georgetown University, during a briefing on the new child health data.

Last month, the center released an analysis of the latest census data, finding an 18% increase in the number of uninsured U.S. children between 2022 and 2024. The upsurge — which represents more than half a million additional kids who lost health coverage — affected nearly every racial and ethnic group. American Indian and Alaska Native children still had the highest uninsured rate by far, at 12.4% in 2024, compared to 9.7%, 5.5% and 4.9% among Hispanic, Black and white children, respectively.

Twenty-two states experienced a "significant increase" in the rate of uninsured kids from 2022 to 2024, according to the analysis. Just one state, New Hampshire, reported a "significant decrease," from 3.4% to 2.3%.

Texas continues to have the highest rate of uninsured children ages 18 and under, at 13.6% in 2024, up nearly 3 percentage points from 2022. About 1.1 million Texas kids went without coverage last year, making up nearly a quarter of the nation's 4.6 million uninsured children.

States with Medicaid expansion for low-income adults — now effective in all but 10 states — had lower uninsured rates among children than states without expansion on a cumulative basis, the Georgetown analysis found. Some expansion states still have relatively high rates, and non-expansion states relatively low ones.

Bruce Lesley, president of First Focus on Children, a national, bipartisan advocacy group, said he fears even more children will lose health coverage as states wrangle with the approximately \$1 trillion in federal

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 10 of 65

Medicaid cuts included in H.R. 1, the “big, beautiful” tax-and-spending bill that President Donald Trump signed in July.

“For 20 years, we cut the uninsured rate for kids — it’s probably one of the most significant things to happen to American children in a half a century,” Lesley said. “Now we’re going backward.”

Here are some answers to key questions on the issues based on data and interviews with advocates and experts.

Why is the children’s uninsured rate rising again?

In 1997, the year President Bill Clinton signed the budget bill creating the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), 15% of U.S. kids — or 10.7 million — were uninsured, up from nearly 14% a couple of years earlier.

CHIP covers kids who don’t qualify for Medicaid but whose families can’t afford private coverage. Its creation led to a dramatic upswing in kids covered by both CHIP and Medicaid because of more intensive outreach efforts, according to federal officials. By 2016, coupled with the effects of the 2010 Affordable Care Act, the rate of uninsured children dropped to a historic low of 4.7%.

Soon after, it started inching back up. By 2019, it was at 5.7%.

Lesley attributed the reversal to a number of actions by the first Trump administration, including weakening “welcome mat” programs and singling out coverage of lawfully present immigrants for additional scrutiny. For example, it slashed funding for ACA marketplace navigators, who help families find affordable coverage, by 84%.

It also expanded the “public charge” rule — which immigration officials use to determine if a person will likely rely on public assistance — to include Medicaid. The change didn’t apply to kids, but researchers documented a chilling effect that led to a drop in Medicaid enrollment of hundreds of thousands of children. The Biden administration reversed the rule change.

More recent drops in kids’ health coverage — those reflected in the new census data — follow the expiration of emergency COVID-19 rules that had paused all Medicaid disenrollments. Millions of children nationwide lost coverage during the Medicaid “unwinding,” when states resumed eligibility checks in spring 2023.

Not every state tackled unwinding the same, and disenrollment rates vary widely. In Oregon, for example, children’s Medicaid enrollment declined about 2%. In Texas, it declined by more than 30%, or by 1.3 million kids, and mostly for paperwork reasons, not because they were ineligible.

“If all states had done as poorly as Texas did with the unwinding,” Alker said, “we would have seen a much higher jump in the uninsured rate of children nationally.”

Will the child uninsured rate keep going up?

According to Alker, “it’s probably happening as we speak.”

Many of the same factors that drove down child coverage in 2016-2019 are back in the second Trump term, she said at the briefing, including funding cuts to ACA enrollment assistance and heightened fears among immigrant families.

Earlier this year, federal health officials agreed to share personal Medicaid data with Immigration and Customs Enforcement. A judge ordered the administration to stop the practice.

One in 4 children and teens in the U.S. has at least one immigrant parent, KFF found.

“We’ve already had reports of families dropping coverage over data-privacy fears,” said Lynn Cowles, director of health and food justice at Every Texan, a nonprofit policy institute. “[Immigrants] are scared to go to appointments. ... Health centers are getting more requests for telehealth.”

Children’s coverage will also take a hit if Congress lets enhanced ACA tax credits expire later this year. Enrollment in the ACA marketplace has more than doubled to over 24 million since enhanced credits became available in 2021. Those credits are at the heart of the impasse in Congress that’s led to the federal shutdown.

If the credits expire, out-of-pocket premiums will skyrocket and 4.2 million more people will be uninsured by 2034, according to estimates from the Congressional Budget Office. More than 2.1 million U.S. children depended on marketplace coverage in 2024, Georgetown researchers reported.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 11 of 65

Cowles said more than 540,000 kids in Texas rely on ACA health plans. She expects many families will be priced out of the marketplace and become uninsured if tax credits expire.

State efforts that make it easier for low-income kids to stay insured face their own expiration date in Trump's second term. In July, the U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services said it would not renew or approve additional Medicaid waivers on multiyear coverage for children, citing spending concerns.

Nine states currently have such waivers to provide multiyear Medicaid coverage for kids from birth until age 6. Research shows continuous coverage in Medicaid or CHIP can reduce disenrollments and "churn," or when kids move on and off the rolls.

In 2022, Oregon became the first state with a multiyear waiver. Dr. Ben Hoffman, a pediatrician at Doernbecher Children's Hospital in Portland, said the uninterrupted coverage addresses a "critical developmental period" in a young child's life, when access to preventive and screening services is key.

"We want to make sure kids are as healthy and as ready as possible for kindergarten," he said.

Oregon's waiver expires in 2027, meaning families would return to more-frequent eligibility checks. Hoffman hopes the state will make that process as seamless as possible, but he suspects the end result "will be terrible for kids."

"It's just an underhanded way to increase turnover and lower costs through attrition," Hoffman said about CMS' decision. "In what universe is it beneficial to anybody for a child not to have health insurance?"

Will kids feel the trillion-dollar cut?

Trump signed the sweeping tax-and-spending bill, H.R. 1, in July, approving the biggest federal funding cut in Medicaid's history — almost \$1 trillion over 10 years.

A loss that large likely won't spare children.

"With almost half of the nation's children covered by Medicaid and CHIP, they cannot be shielded from a cut of approximately 11%," Alker said.

Lesley, at First Focus on Children, agreed. State responses to the funding loss will vary and it's still early, but he worries that lawmakers will seek out cost savings by putting up more enrollment hurdles for families.

"These barriers can be really tragic," Lesley said

This story is part of "Uninsured in America," a project led by Public Health Watch that focuses on life in America's health-coverage gaps and the impact of potential Medicaid cuts and lack of expansion.

This story was originally produced by Stateline, which is part of States Newsroom, a nonprofit news network which includes South Dakota Searchlight, and is

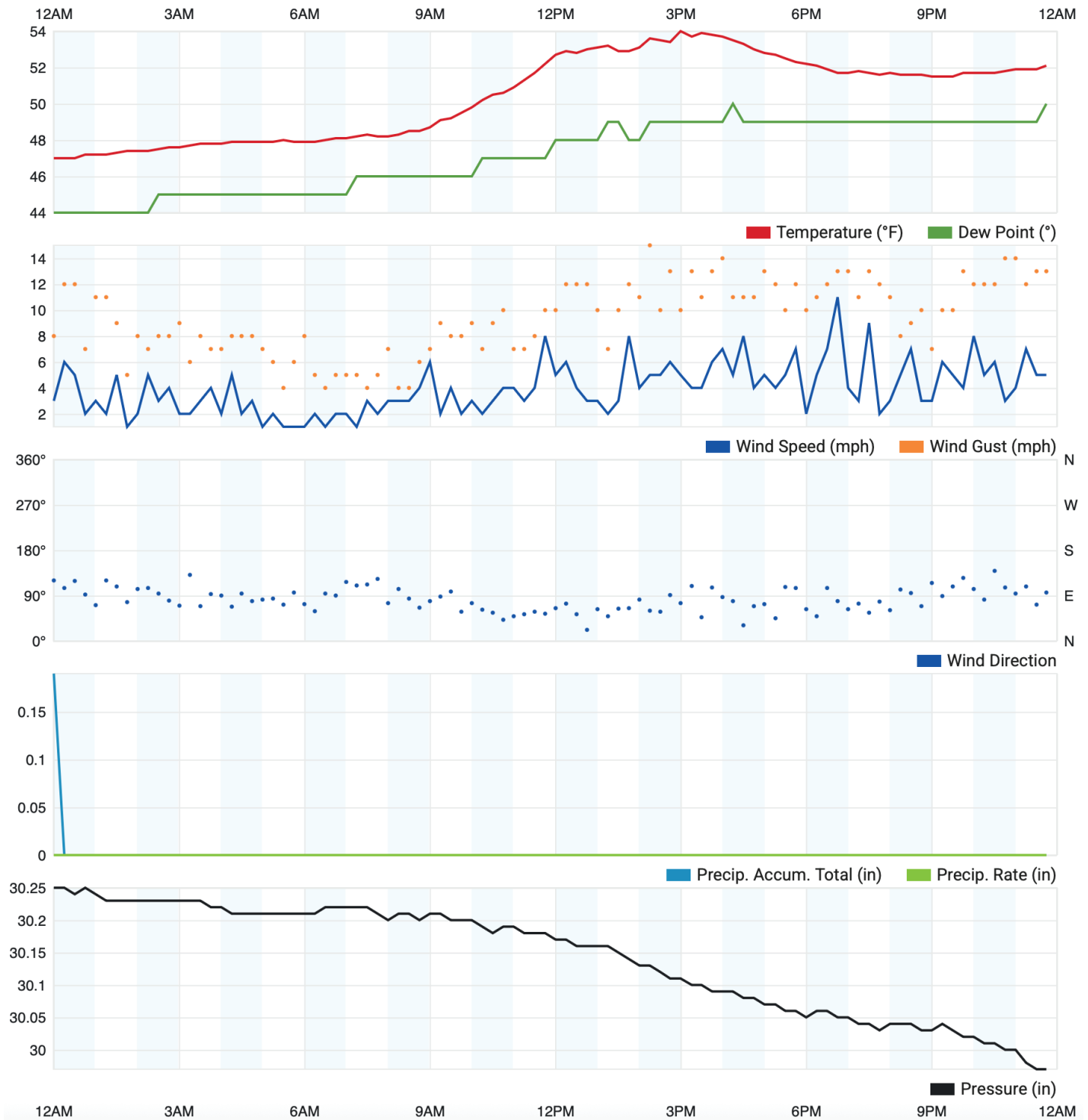
Kim Krisberg is a contributing writer for Public Health Watch.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 12 of 65

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

October 15, 2025



Broton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 13 of 65

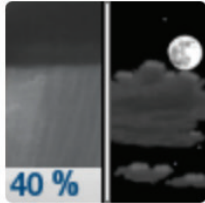
Thursday



High: 74 °F

Slight Chance
T-storms then
Slight Chance
Showers and
Breezy

Thursday
Night



Low: 46 °F

Chance
Showers then
Partly Cloudy

Friday



High: 63 °F

Mostly Sunny
and Breezy

Friday Night



Low: 42 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Saturday



High: 55 °F

Mostly Cloudy

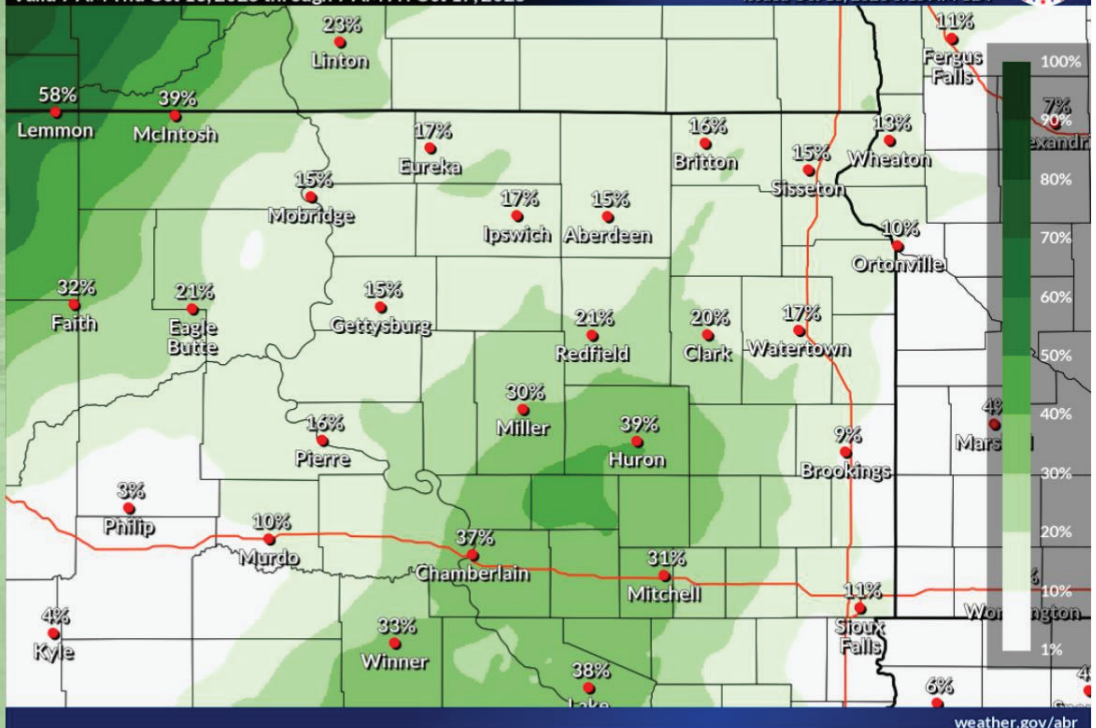
- Showers continue to move northwest across the forecast area, with a few rumbles of thunder possible.
- An additional few hundredths to a couple tenths of an inch are expected
- Highest amounts of rain will fall in far north central SD (30-50% chance of more than a quarter inch)

Percent Chance of 0.25" Liquid Precipitation or More

Valid 7 AM Thu Oct 16, 2025 through 7 AM Fri Oct 17, 2025

Weather Forecast Office
Aberdeen, SD

Issued Oct 16, 2025 3:15 AM CDT



Showers continue this morning across central and northeastern SD into west central MN with a few rumbles of thunder here and there. An additional few hundredths to a couple tenths of an inch are expected with highest accumulations in north central SD.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 14 of 65



Dense Fog Advisory

October 16, 2025

3:58 AM

Valid until 10 AM CDT Thursday

- Areas of dense fog have been observed over northeastern South Dakota throughout the overnight hours
 - Visibility of a quarter of a mile or less is likely.
- **A Dense Fog Advisory has been issued** for northeastern South Dakota.
 - The Advisory is valid until 10 AM CDT Thursday morning.
- **Low visibility could make driving conditions hazardous, especially during the Thursday morning commute.**
 - When driving in dense fog, slow down, use your headlights, and leave plenty of distance ahead of you.



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

A Dense Fog Advisory remains in effect until 10 AM CDT for northeastern SD. Visibilities of a quarter mile or less are likely. Some patchy fog is also possible along the Missouri River this morning. Low visibilities can make driving hazardous so leave plenty of distance between you and the car in front of you and plan extra time to get to your destination.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 15 of 65

Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 54 °F at 2:59 PM

Low Temp: 47 °F at 12:00 AM

Wind: 20 mph at 10:19 PM

Precip: : 0.00 (since midnight: 0.12)

Today's Info

Record High: 90 in 1991

Record Low: 19 in 1976

Average High: 59

Average Low: 33

Average Precip in Oct.: 1.21

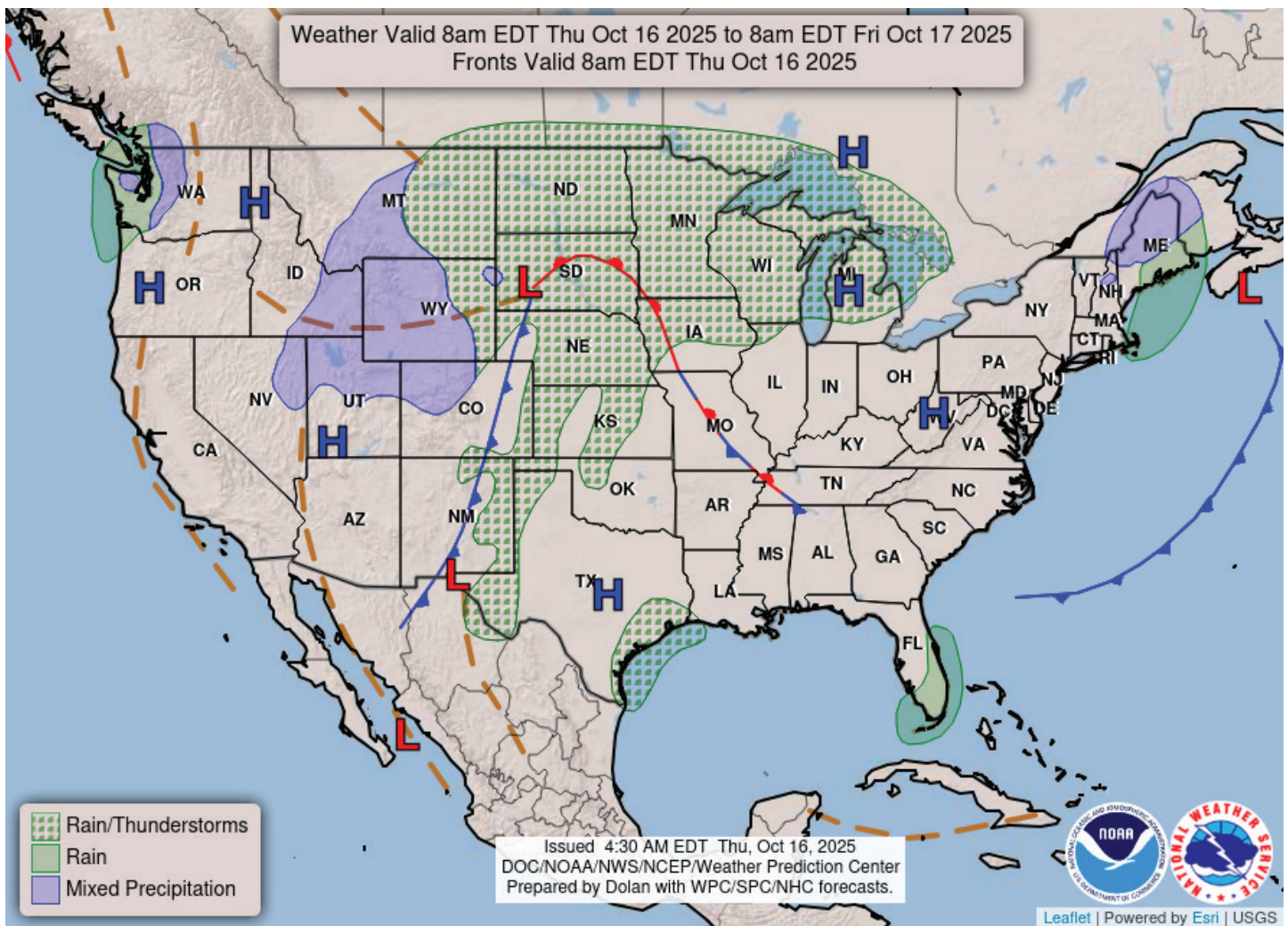
Precip to date in Oct.: 0.36

Average Precip to date: 19.54

Precip Year to Date: 23.28

Sunset Tonight: 6:45 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:51 am



Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 16 of 65

Today in Weather History

October 16, 1980: A squall line packing damaging winds developed across portions of central South Dakota and raced into Minnesota during the afternoon and evening. The line of thunderstorms developed around 2 pm CDT and moved east and northeast at over 50 miles an hour. A large portion of southeast South Dakota was belted with winds of 50 to 70 miles an hour. Yankton reported winds of 60 to 70 mph while Sioux Falls was hit with a 62 mile an hour gust. Considerable damage was done in southeast South Dakota to trees, farm structures, and small buildings. Damage estimates were 100 to 200 thousand dollars. By late afternoon the thunderstorms were roaring through southwest Minnesota. Numerous outbuildings and many trees were downed or damaged. In Redwood County, two combines and a 24-foot travel trailer were tipped over and damaged.

1937 - An unlikely winter-like storm produced as much as ten inches of snow in Minnesota and Iowa.

1944: The 1944 Cuba – Florida hurricane, also known as the Pinar del Rio Hurricane, struck western Cuba on this day as a Category 4. This storm killed an estimated 300 people in Cuba and nine in Florida. This hurricane is currently the 7th costliest U.S. Atlantic hurricane, with an estimated \$46.9 billion (2015 USD) in damages.

1987 - Ten cities in the southeastern U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date. The low of 34 degrees at Augusta GA marked their third straight morning of record cold. A cold front brought showers and thunderstorms to parts of the central U.S. Lightning struck a bull and six cows under a tree near Bat-tiest OK. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Late afternoon thunderstorms produced severe weather in southwestern Lower Michigan and northern Indiana. One thunderstorm spawned a tornado north of Nappanee IN which caused half a million dollars damage. Six cities in California reported record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 100 degrees at Red Bluff CA was the latest such reading of record for so late in the autumn season. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Heavy snow blanketed the foothills of Colorado. Up to three inches was reported around Denver. Echo Lake was buried under nineteen inches of snow. Temperatures again warmed into the 80s and lower 90s in the eastern and south central U.S. Thirteen cities reported record high temperatures for the date, including Atlantic City NJ with a reading of 84 degrees. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary).

1999: Hurricane Irene moved across the Florida Keys producing heavy rainfall, strong winds, and high waves. A gust 102 mph was reported in Big Pine Key.

2007: A blinding sandstorm in the high desert north of Los Angeles wreaks havoc with local traffic causing a highway pileup involving dozens of vehicles. Two people die, and 16 are injured as a result of the storm, which reportedly raised dust to 1000 foot high.

2015: A well-defined waterspout was visible from Marquette, Michigan. 1913 - The temperature in Downtown San Francisco soared to 101 degrees to equal their record for October. (The Weather Channel)

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 17 of 65



Daily Devotion

Sifted for Service

God uses challenging circumstances to sift our heart, exposing sin so that we might grow in holiness.

2 Chronicles 32:1-31

In one way or another, we are all being sifted by the circumstances that God allows to come our way. Sifting is never comfortable, but it exposes the "chaff" in our life—in other words, anything worthless—and gives us the opportunity to deal with it.

King Hezekiah was given such a chance at the pinnacle of his astonishing rule. He had just witnessed the Lord bringing about a spectacular victory over Sennacherib and the Assyrian hosts. After that, God healed him from a mortal illness, and then Hezekiah was also offered a supernatural sign that actually drove the sun's shadow 10 steps backward on the stairway (Isaiah 38:5; Isaiah 38:8).

On the heels of these miracles, emissaries from Babylon approached Hezekiah with flattery. Would he give in to pride and be consumed with an inflated view of himself? Scripture tells us, "God left him alone only to test him, that He might know all that was in his heart" (2 Chron. 32:31). As a result of this test, the chaff of self-importance was revealed.

Think about your own life and ask the Father to reveal any chaff. Though the process can be uncomfortable, remember that the Lord is guiding and interceding for you. Furthermore, the winnowing tools are in His hand, so be assured they will be used only for your ultimate good (Luke 3:17; Luke 21:18).

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

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 18 of 65

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Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 19 of 65



WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 10.14.25

12 22 49 57 58 19

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$625,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 37 Mins
DRAW: 36 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 10.15.25

8 24 33 46 47 4

All Star Bonus: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$5,010,000

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 52
DRAW: Mins 37 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 10.15.25

13 25 27 31 46 17

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 16 Hrs 7 Mins 37
DRAW: Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 10.15.25

8 20 26 33 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$51,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 7 Mins
DRAW: 37 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 10.15.25

5 20 27 44 51 21

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 36
DRAW: Mins 36 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 10.15.25

10 13 28 34 47 15

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$295,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 36
DRAW: Mins 36 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 20 of 65

Upcoming Groton Events

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

News from the **AP** Associated Press

The tiny African nation of Lesotho had victories in its HIV fight. Then, the US aid cuts came

By RENATA BRITO Associated Press

HA LEJONE, Lesotho (AP) — In the snow-topped mountains of Lesotho, mothers carrying babies on their backs walk for hours to the nearest health clinic, only to find HIV testing isn't available. Centers catering to the most vulnerable are shutting their doors. Health workers have been laid off in droves. Desperate patients ration or share pills.

This Lesotho was unimaginable months ago, residents, health workers and experts say. The small landlocked nation in southern Africa long had the world's second-highest rate of HIV infections. But over years, with nearly \$1 billion in aid from the United States, Lesotho patched together a health network efficient enough to slow the spread of the epidemic, one of the deadliest in modern history.

Then, on Jan. 20, the first day of U.S. President Donald Trump's second term, he signed an executive order freezing foreign aid. Within weeks, Trump had slashed overseas assistance and dismantled the U.S. Agency for International Development. Confusion followed in nearly all the 130 countries with USAID-supported programs. Nine months later in Lesotho, there's still little clarity.

With the single stroke of a distant president's pen, much of a system credited with saving hundreds of thousands of lives was dismantled.

It's a moment of chaos and temporary solutions

Weeks ago, the U.S. announced it would reinstate some of its flagship initiatives to combat HIV worldwide. Officials here applauded the move. But the measures are temporary solutions that stress countries must move toward autonomy in public health.

The State Department told The Associated Press in an email that its six-month bridge programs would ensure continuity of lifesaving programs — including testing and medication, and initiatives addressing mother-to-child transmission — while officials work with Lesotho on a multiyear agreement on funding.

Those negotiations will likely take months, and while programs may have been reinstated on paper, restarting them on the ground takes considerable time, Lesotho health workers and experts told AP.

HIV-positive residents, families and caregivers say the chaos that reigned most of this year has caused irreparable harm, and they're consumed with worry and uncertainty about the future. Most feel deep disappointment — even betrayal — over the loss of funds and support.

"Everyone who is HIV-positive in Lesotho is a dead man walking," said Hlaoli Monyamane, a 32-year-old miner who couldn't get a sufficient medication supply to support him while working in neighboring South Africa.

HIV prevention programs — targeting mother-to-child transmission, encouraging male circumcision, and working with high-risk groups including sex workers and miners — were cut off. Unpaid nurses and other workers decided to use informal networks to reach isolated communities. Labs shuttered, and public clinics grew overwhelmed. Patients began abandoning treatment or rationing pills.

Experts with UNAIDS — the U.N. agency tasked with fighting the virus globally — warned in July that up to 4 million people worldwide would die if funding weren't reinstated. And Lesotho health officials said the cuts would lead to increased HIV transmission, more deaths and higher health costs.

Calculating how many lives are lost or affected is a massive task, and those responsible for tracking and adding data to a centralized system were largely let go.

Lesotho Health Secretary Maneo Moliehi Ntene and HIV/AIDS program manager Dr. Tapiwa Tarumbiswa declined repeated requests to be interviewed or comment about the aid cuts. But Mokhothu Makhalanyane, chairperson of Lesotho's legislative health committee, said the impact is huge, estimating the country was set back at least 15 years in its HIV work.

"We're going to lose a lot of lives because of this," he said.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 22 of 65

Lesotho reached a milestone late last year — UNAIDS's 95-95-95 goal, with 95% of people living with HIV aware of their status, 95% of those in treatment, and 95% of those with a suppressed viral load. Still, the nation must care for the estimated 260,000 of its 2.3 million residents who are HIV-positive.

Overall, Lesotho and even global HIV efforts accounted for small parts of the United States' massive international aid efforts. USAID spent tens of billions of dollars annually. Its dismantling has rocked the lives of millions of people in low- and middle-income nations around the world.

For patients, 'this has been the most difficult time'

For many in this mountainous country and elsewhere, a positive HIV test 20 years ago was akin to a death sentence. If untreated, most people with HIV develop AIDS, acquired immunodeficiency syndrome. At the height of the epidemic in 2004, more than 2 million people died of AIDS-related illness worldwide — 19,000 in Lesotho, UNAIDS estimated.

In 2003, the U.S. launched the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. PEPFAR became the largest commitment by any nation to address a single disease, and its main implementing partner was USAID. PEPFAR became so important and well known in Lesotho and other countries that health professionals and residents use the term as shorthand to refer to any HIV aid.

When foreign assistance was frozen, Lesotho lost at least 23% of PEPFAR money, putting it in the top 10 countries for share of such funding cut, according to the Foundation for AIDS Research.

Mapapali Mosoeunyane is among Lesotho residents who credit PEPFAR with helping save them. After learning she had the virus in 2009, she was certain dying was just a matter of time. Neighbors gossiped, she was fired, and she considered giving up her two young sons for adoption.

But around 2013, she got access to antiretroviral medication — which suppresses HIV levels in the blood, with the potential to bring it to undetectable levels. In 2016, Lesotho was the first African country to "test and treat all" — everyone who tested positive was prescribed ARVs. That work, officials say, was possible because of PEPFAR.

Today, 62-year-old Mosoeunyane leads a peer support group in her village, Ha Koloboi. Neighbors ask for advice and trust her with their green medical booklets, where they record medical history, viral load, symptoms and medications.

Lately, the group mostly worries — about the future, losing medication access, getting sick again.

"This has been the most difficult time for me," Mosoeunyane said.

Many in Mosoeunyane's group wish Trump himself could hear their concerns. "Trump's decision is already translating into real life," said Mateboho Talitha Fusi, Mosoeunyane's friend and neighbor.

The worries span Lesotho society: from rural to urban, low to middle income, patients to officials. Many Basotho — as people in Lesotho are known — feel hopeless.

Since aid was cut, confusion and changes haven't stopped

When Trump dissolved USAID, Lesotho leaders said they tried to talk to U.S. officials, even through their South African neighbors after failing to connect directly. But, they said, they got more information from news reports.

For Lisebo Lechela, a 53-year-old sex worker turned HIV activist and health worker, the news was fast and blunt. Days after Trump's order, she was about to distribute medication, but a call from her boss interrupted her.

"Stop work immediately," she was told.

Lechela's organization, the USAID-funded Phelisanang Bophelong HIV/AIDS network, had drop-in centers at gas stations where sex workers could seek services. Workers set up tents outside bars with condoms and the prevention medication known as PrEP. Teams delivered medication directly to patients who wouldn't step foot in public health clinics, for fear of discrimination.

Lechela's group earned the trust of the skeptics and the stubborn. All that work is gone, she fears. She still gets calls from people desperate for services and refills. She does what she can, and their stories haunt her.

Among them is a textile factory worker who turned to sex work at night to support her three children. She used to take PrEP and isn't sure how she'll protect herself. Most clients won't use condoms, she said,

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 23 of 65

some turning violent if sex workers insist.

"I have to put bread on the table," said the woman, speaking on condition of anonymity because her husband, who works in South Africa, wouldn't approve of her sex work. She can't miss a day of factory work to wait in line at a clinic.

Visiting the woman at home, all Lechela could do was demonstrate how to use a female condom – and hope her clients wouldn't notice or protest.

With nearly all community groups and local organizations like Lechela's closed and 1,500 health workers fired, some Lesotho officials see overdue signs that their nation and others must stop relying on international aid.

"This is a serious wake-up call," said Makhalanyane, the health committee chair. "We should never put the lives of the people in the hands of people who are not elected to do that."

Rachel Bonnifield, director of the global health policy program at the Center for Global Development, called the Trump administration's new vision for PEPFAR — with funds sent directly to governments rather than through development organizations — ambitious but high-risk.

"It is disrupting something that currently works and works well, albeit with some structural problems, in favor of something with high potential benefits ... but is not proven and does not currently exist," she said, noting that U.S. House Republicans recently said they'd like to see PEPFAR funding cut in half by 2028.

Lesotho had made recent gains

UNAIDS' main goal is to end the AIDS epidemic as a public health threat by 2030. Lesotho had made enough progress in reducing new infections and deaths to be on track, according to Pepukai Chikukwa, UNAIDS's country director in Lesotho.

But after the aid cuts, things were "just crumbling," she said, though she commended Lesotho's efforts to mitigate the impact.

"Lesotho's made progress one should not overlook; at the same time, it is still a heavily burdened country with HIV."

Chikukwa was optimistic about the September announcement by the U.S. State Department — which took over implementation of foreign aid programs — that it would temporarily reinstate some lifesaving programs, including one to prevent mother-to-child HIV transmission. She also applauded U.S. efforts to buy doses of a twice-a-year HIV prevention shot and prioritize them for pregnant and breastfeeding women in low- to middle-income countries, including Lesotho, via PEPFAR.

"We lost some ground," she said. "The uncertainty was very high; now there is some hope."

But it's not clear how much the U.S. bridge programs will "close the gap," added Chikukwa, even as she's leaving Lesotho. Her role was eliminated because of the aid cuts. The South Africa UNAIDS office will oversee Lesotho, she said, but she wasn't sure where she'd be reassigned.

In its email to AP, the State Department said Secretary Marco Rubio had approved lifesaving PEPFAR programs and urged implementers to resume their work. The email emphasized that officials will work with Lesotho to continue providing health foreign assistance, but didn't give specifics about the amount of funding.

Lesotho funded only 12% of its own health budget. The U.S. and other foreign donors provided the rest. USAID alone accounted for 34% of the budget; the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 26%, according to a May presentation to lawmakers.

Health committee chair Makhalanyane said this month that it remains unclear how much U.S. aid is being reinstated, even if temporarily. There had been only verbal promises, nothing in writing, he noted, and hundreds of health workers who had been promised they'd be absorbed by the national health system remain unemployed.

Unlike other PEPFAR-supported countries, Lesotho funded medication for 80% of its HIV patients — a figure officials tout as they try to move toward a self-sustaining system. Still, the aid cuts sparked panic over supply and distribution.

Lesotho regularly gave patients a six- to 12-month supply to help its mobile population, including many

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 24 of 65

who work in South Africa, stick with treatment. But when the cuts were announced, some nurses gave out even more drugs than usual.

Nurses were told to cut back. Patients grew alarmed.

Miner Monyamane said he got a three-month supply, not his usual 12. So instead of continuing to work in South Africa, he decided to remain in his small village of Thaba-Tsoeu Ha Mafa. Like many miners, he chose his health over a job and steady paycheck. He fears diseases such as tuberculosis — a leading cause of death in Lesotho, attributed to weakened immune systems — may creep up on him if he interrupts treatment.

‘You can’t just hang a shingle’

The system propped up by foreign aid was always meant to be temporary. But public health experts say the shift to Lesotho and other countries becoming self-reliant should have been gradual.

At the United Nations General Assembly last month, Lesotho Prime Minister Samuel Matekane acknowledged the threat posed by declining foreign aid but fell short of pointing fingers. He said Lesotho is mobilizing domestic resources to address gaps.

But Catherine Connor, of the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation, emphasized that “any step backward creates a risk of resurgence.”

In the 16 years her organization has worked in Lesotho, HIV transmission from mother to child dropped to about 6% from nearly 18%. Lesotho’s government should get credit, Connor said, but her group and others were key in targeting children’s treatment and prevention.

Since 2008, Connor’s group received more than \$227 million from the U.S. for Lesotho programming, USASpending.gov data shows. This fiscal year, about half the work it planned has been terminated.

“You can’t just hang a shingle that says, ‘Get your ARVs here,’ and people line up,” Connor said.

Most at risk, she and others stressed, are children. As of late August, half of PEPFAR funding targeted toward children in Lesotho was terminated, and 54% of infants tested for HIV before their first birthday in fiscal year 2024 were evaluated by programs that had been cut, according to Foundation for AIDS Research data.

“When a child never gets diagnosed, it feels like a missed opportunity,” Connor said. “When a child who was receiving treatment stops getting treatment, it feels like a crime against humanity.”

A lack of trust in what remains of the system

Rethabile Motsamai, a 37-year-old psychologist and mother of two, has worked since 2016 for aid-funded organizations. But months ago, her HIV counselor role was eliminated.

She worries for the populations her work served.

“They have to travel for themselves to the facilities — some are very far,” she said, adding that she knows some patients simply won’t try. “They’ll just stop taking their medication.”

Those who do make the trip may be met with a dead end. Clinics have continued to close.

For Lechela — the longtime activist — the upheaval and loss of her job mean she once again depends solely on sex work. As she walked by the closed doors of her former clinic, passersby stopped and begged her to reopen.

“I don’t trust anyone else,” a young woman called out. “Please! Please!”

Lechela smiled but couldn’t bring herself to reply. Like many here, she simply has no answers.

A bomb explodes on Syrian Defense Ministry bus, killing and wounding soldiers

DAMASCUS, Syria (AP) — A bomb exploded Thursday on a Syrian Defense Ministry bus in the country’s east, killing and wounding several soldiers, state TV reported.

State-run Al-Ikhbariah TV said the explosion occurred on the road linking the eastern cities of Deir el-Zour and Mayadeen. The report did not give details, only saying that a number of soldiers were killed or injured.

The report said the soldiers’s job was guarding an oil facility in the oil-rich region that borders Iraq.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said three soldiers were killed and nine were

wounded in the attack.

No one claimed responsibility for the attack, but the area is known to be home to sleeper cells of the Islamic State group that was defeated in Syria in 2019.

IS, which once controlled large parts of Syria and Iraq, is opposed to the new authority in Damascus led by interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa, who was once the head of al-Qaida's branch in Syria and fought battles against IS.

Guerrero, Springer sparks Blue Jays, who hit 5 HRs and cut Mariners' ALCS lead to 2-1 with 13-4 rout

By ANDREW DESTIN AP Sports Writer

SEATTLE (AP) — Tired in Toronto, the Blue Jays slugged in Seattle.

Vladimir Guerrero Jr. and George Springer woke up Toronto as the Blue Jays hit five home runs to rebound from an early deficit, routing the Mariners 13-4 Wednesday night and closing to 2-1 in the AL Championship Series.

Toronto had 18 hits — all within the first three pitches of each at-bat.

"If they give us a first pitch, the pitch that we're looking for, we're going to attack and we're going to be aggressive," Guerrero said.

Seattle starter George Kirby gave up eight of the hits.

"I wasn't really executing when they got the guys on base," Kirby said. "And they're really aggressive when that happens. They made some good swings."

Julio Rodríguez's two-run, first-inning homer off former Cy Young Award winner Shane Bieber put Seattle ahead and stirred thoughts of a possible sweep in the best-of-seven matchup by a team seeking its first World Series appearance.

Andrés Giménez then sparked the comeback with a tying, two-run homer in a five-run third against Kirby.

Springer, Guerrero, Alejandro Kirk and Addison Barger also went deep as the Blue Jays totaled 2,004 feet of homers.

Guerrero had four hits, falling a triple short of the cycle, after going 0 for 7 as the Blue Jays lost the first two games at home.

"No one expected us to win the division, no one expected us to be here, and I think the guys take that to heart," Blue Jays manager John Schneider said. "I said it when we left Toronto: I hope we find some slug in the air out here. Maybe we did."

In the 2-3-2 format, teams that lost the first two games at home and won Game 3 on the road have captured the series three of 11 times.

A crowd of 46,471 at T-Mobile Park for Seattle's first home ALCS game since 2001 saw the teams combine to match the postseason record of eight combined home runs, set by the Chicago Cubs and St. Louis in Game 3 of the 2015 NL Division Series and matched by the Los Angeles Dodgers and Houston in Game 2 of the 2017 World Series.

Giménez hadn't homered since Aug. 27 before his drive off a Kirby fastball.

"Definitely something changed for our offense," Giménez said. "We come tonight with a mentality to attack."

Kirby allowed eight runs, eight hits and two walks, taking the loss.

"The first couple innings I thought he was dynamite," Mariners manager Dan Wilson said. "This is a team that's going to hurt you if you make mistakes on the plate. It looked like there were a couple that they were able to get to."

Kirby's run-scoring wild pitch put Toronto ahead 3-2 and Daulton Varsho followed with a two-run double.

Springer homered in the fourth, tying Bernie Williams for fourth on the career list with his 22nd post-season homer. Guerrero hit his fourth of the postseason for a 7-2 lead on the first pitch of the fifth.

Kirk added a three-run homer in the sixth and is hitting .413 (19 for 46) with eight RBIs in 14 games at

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 26 of 65

T-Mobile Park.

Bieber, who got the win, pitched shutout ball after the first and wound up allowing four hits in six innings — the longest outing by a Blue Jays starter in seven postseason games.

"Obviously didn't start the way he would have wanted to, but that's pretty much who he is," Springer said. "He can battle back from anything."

After the Blue Jays opened a 12-2 lead, Randy Arozarena connected in the eighth against Yariel Rodríguez for his first home run since Sept. 9 and Cal Raleigh, who led the major leagues with 60 home runs during the regular season, followed three pitches later with his third of the postseason.

"If there's one thing we've done since I've been here, we bounce back together well as a team," Mariners reliever Caleb Ferguson said. "We respond well when we kind of get smacked in the face a little bit."

Up next

Seattle RHP Luis Castillo, who pitched 1 1/3 innings of relief against Detroit in Game 5 of the Division Series, starts Thursday against RHP Max Scherzer. The 41-year-old, a three-time Cy Young Award winner, is 0-3 over eight postseason starts since the 2019 World Series opener and hasn't started since Sept. 24.

Just-released hostage attends funeral of fellow soldier, whose body was among few returned from Gaza

By GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO and MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Two hostages released by Hamas were reunited Wednesday in a Jerusalem cemetery for a final goodbye.

Surrounded by hundreds of mourners, Matan Angrest, who had returned to Israel just two days earlier, stood before the freshly dug grave cradling his 22-year-old commander, Capt. Daniel Peretz, and paid his respects. He prayed for more to make it home, including Sgt. Itay Chen — another member of their unit whose body is still held in Gaza.

"It's the least I can do for Daniel and the team that fought with me," said Angrest, 22, his voice strong despite his pallor and evident weakness. "I'm sure that they are still guarding me from heaven."

Angrest, Peretz and Chen were serving on a tank crew when they were taken during the Hamas-led attack on Oct. 7, 2023; militants killed 1,200 people in Israel and took 251 captives that day.

"I wish he could come back. I'm ready to go to Gaza to bring him back," Angrest said of Chen.

Under the terms of the ceasefire, Hamas is supposed to return all 28 of the deceased hostages' bodies held in Gaza, but only 10 bodies were released as of early Thursday. One was determined not to be a hostage's.

That left some families in the devastating limbo they have endured for more than two years, unable to give their loved ones the proper burial that in Judaism is an essential covenant with God, the deceased and the survivors.

"This is our obligation to God, we take the body and return it to the land," said Rabbi Benny Lau, a friend of the Peretz family. "The soul belongs to God and returns to God, but the body is our responsibility."

The spiritual importance of burial and mourning

The three largest monotheistic religions — Christianity, Islam and Judaism — teach that a person's soul continues to exist after being separated from the body by death. But in Judaism and Islam, there are also specific teachings that the body needs to be left as intact as possible and buried as quickly as possible, with ritual cleansing and prayers.

"The idea of respecting the dead is intrinsic to the Jewish life cycle," explained Sharon Laufer, who has volunteered as part of Jewish burial societies, for decades, and is a reserve soldier in a special unit that identifies and prepares bodies of fallen soldiers for burial. "Until the body is put in the ground, the soul is not complete, and that's why it's so important to us."

In normal circumstances, that means funerals are held within a day. In the case of the Jewish hostages, it translates into the ongoing struggle — involving government negotiators and family prayers — to bring everyone's remains back.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 27 of 65

"We cannot close that chapter of these two years without returning all of them," Lau said.

Many families rejoiced with the rest of the country in the return of the living hostages on Monday, but felt betrayed by those who said the crisis was over and that the ubiquitous yellow ribbons and hostage posters could be taken down.

Itay Chen was 19 when he was abducted on Oct. 7 while doing mandatory military service. Chen was on duty because he had switched weekends with another soldier so he could attend his brother's bar mitzvah. More than two years later, his body remains missing.

"It's a bizarre feeling where you start the day anticipating to get the worst phone call that you will in your lifetime, and then feel disappointed when you do not get that phone call," said his father, Ruby Chen.

Alongside dozens of people, Shlomit Grouda stood on bridge in Tel Aviv to watch a convoy drive to the cemetery for the funeral of Guy Illouz, who was abducted from a music festival and was also buried on Wednesday.

"I fought for them to come home, and as I was happy for the ones who came back alive, it's now time to bow our head for those who didn't," she said.

A grave with only a helmet and a family's agonizing wait continues

Ela Haimi watched her husband, Tal Haimi, 41, leave the saferoom where they were sheltering with their three children to go defend their kibbutz as Hamas-led militants stormed it on Oct. 7.

Later that day came the call that his phone was pinging in Khan Younis, Gaza. She took it as good news — he had been taken but was still close to home, she explained to the children, showing them a map.

Two months later, the Israeli military told her they believed he had been killed in the attack and his body taken to Gaza.

After two consecutive nights when Tal wasn't included among the returned bodies this week, Haimi said it no longer matters to her how long it takes — as long as he can be buried at his kibbutz eventually.

"I think he deserves this honor. He went out first, he went knowing I was alone with the kids among terrorists, to protect us. And he did," Haimi said from her home in Nir Yitzhak. She's returned there only this summer with the children — including one born seven months after his father was killed.

She did hold a funeral and went through the prescribed seven-day shiva mourning period in 2023. But the temporary grave only holds Tal's helmet.

"The kids know he left, and they don't know where he is," she added.

After burial, the mourning — and healing — can begin

Rabbis and mental health experts say it's hard for families to find closure until they can bury their loved ones.

"We need to give them the time and the possibility to move from the terrible uncertainty to learning to live with the reality that the person is no longer there," said Rabbi Mijael Even David. His synagogue in Be'er Sheva has celebrated funerals for victims of the attack in nearby kibbutzim as well as for soldiers killed in the war.

Judaism prescribes several periods of mourning after the burial, from the seven-day shiva where family members are expected to stay home and refrain from all regular routines to the one-month anniversary and beyond.

These rituals bring spiritual benefits both to the dead and the living relatives — and psychological ones, too.

Only when all the hostages are back can their families and the whole country begin to heal from observed symptoms of "traumatic grief," said Dr. Einat Yehene, a rehabilitation psychologist with the Hostages Families Forum.

In her eulogy at Peretz's funeral, his sister Adina Peretz said that standing by his grave carried more pain than she thought possible. But there was also some peace in being closer to her brother than she had been for two years.

"You can finally rest in the Holy Land," she said.

Closing the three-hour service where speakers ranged from Peretz's grandmother to Israel's president,

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 28 of 65

Shelley Peretz said the fact that her son had finally crossed back into Israel — on the Jewish holiday of Simchat Torah, the same as on the day he was taken — made all the difference.

"We have you home now where you belong," she said before a gun salute echoed in the late night.

'Gen Z' protesters lead global wave of generational discontent

By SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — From the Andes to the Himalayas, a new wave of protests is unfolding across the world, driven by generational discontent against governments and anger among young people.

This week, Madagascar's President Andry Rajoelina was forced out of power and out of the country after a military mutiny, the culmination of weeks of demonstrations led by young protesters referring to themselves as "Gen Z Madagascar."

The rage against the political establishment in the Indian Ocean island country mirrors other recent protests across the world, in countries like Nepal, the Philippines, Indonesia, Kenya, Peru and Morocco. These protests have been sparked by specific grievances but are driven by long-simmering issues like widening inequality, economic uncertainty, corruption, and nepotism of leaders.

But they have one thing in common: Mostly leaderless, they are made up primarily of young people who brand themselves as "Gen Z," defined as those born roughly between 1996 and 2010 — the first generation to grow up entirely in the internet age.

"What connects these youth-led protests is a shared sense that traditional political systems aren't responsive to their generation's concerns, whether that's corruption, climate change, or economic inequality. Protest then becomes the logical outlet when institutional channels feel blocked," said Sam Nadel, director of Social Change Lab, a U.K.-based nonprofit that researches protests and social movements.

Protesters take cues from each other

Though their specific demands differ, most of these protests have been sparked by government overreach or neglect. Some have also confronted harsh treatment by security forces and brutal repression.

In Morocco, a leaderless collective called Gen Z 212 — named after Morocco's dialing code — has taken to the streets to demand better public services and increased spending on health and education. In Peru, protests over a pension law exploded into broader demands, including action to tackle rising insecurity and widespread corruption in the government. In Indonesia, deadly protests have erupted over lawmakers' perks and the cost of living, forcing the president to replace key economic and security ministers.

The most widely recognized movement to be dubbed as a "Gen Z" protest was a deadly uprising in Nepal that culminated with the resignation of the prime minister in September. Protesters drew inspiration from successful anti-government movements elsewhere in South Asia — Sri Lanka in 2022 and Bangladesh in 2024 — which led to the ouster of incumbent regimes.

In Madagascar in turn, protesters say they were particularly inspired by the movements in Nepal and Sri Lanka.

The protests began against regular water and electricity cuts but quickly morphed into wider discontent, as demonstrators called for the president and other ministers to step down. On Wednesday, Madagascar's military coup leader said he is "taking the position of president."

Uniting behind a manga pirate flag

Across multiple countries, a singular pop culture symbol has emerged: a black flag showing a grinning skull and crossbones wearing a straw hat. The flag comes from a cult Japanese manga and anime series called "One Piece," which follows a crew of pirates as they take on corrupt governments.

In Nepal, protesters hung the same flag on the gates of the Singha Durbar, the seat of the Nepalese government, and on ministries, many of which were torched in protests. It was also hoisted by crowds in Indonesia, the Philippines, Morocco and Madagascar.

Last week in the Peruvian capital, Lima, 27-year-old electrician David Tafur stood with the same flag in San Martín Square, now the stage for weekly protests.

"We're fighting the same battle — against corrupt officials who, in our case, are also killers," he said,

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 29 of 65

recalling that President Dina Boluarte's government held on to power since December 2022 despite more than 500 protests and the deaths of 50 civilians.

"In my case, it's outrage over abuse of power, corruption, the deaths," Tafur said, referring to the sharp rise in murders and extortion plaguing the South American country since 2017, amid new laws that have weakened efforts to fight crime.

Boluarte had been under investigation for months over various allegations including bribery and involvement in a deadly crackdown on protesters in 2022. She was replaced last week by interim President José Jerí.

Tafur said that wasn't enough.

"The president is an ally of Congress and has to go," he said.

Harnessing social media for mobilization and awareness

Many significant protests in the past, like Occupy Wall Street in 2011, the Arab Spring between 2010 and 2012, and the 2014 Umbrella Revolution in Hong Kong, have been led by younger people. While they also used the internet and social media for mass mobilization, the "Gen Z" protesters are taking it to another level.

"Digital platforms are powerful tools for information sharing and building connections, but the most effective movements often combine digital mobilization with traditional in-person organizing, as we've seen in these recent protests," said Nadel from Social Change Lab.

Days before the deadly protests began in Nepal, the government announced a ban on most social media platforms for not complying with a registration deadline. Many young Nepalese viewed it as an attempt to silence them and began accessing social media sites through virtual private networks to evade detection.

Over the next few days, they used TikTok, Instagram and X to spotlight the lavish lifestyles of politicians' children, highlighting disparities between Nepal's rich and poor, and announce planned rallies and venues. Later, some of them also used the gaming chat platform Discord to suggest who to nominate as an interim leader for the country.

"Whatever movement happens, whether against corruption or injustice, it spreads through digital media. The same happened in Nepal. The changes that took place after the Gen Z protests in Nepal spread globally through digital platforms, influencing other countries as well," said protester Yujan Rajbhandari.

He said the protests in Nepal awakened not only the youth but also other generations.

"We realized that we are global citizens and the digital space connects us all and plays a powerful role across the world," Rajbhandari said.

Senate Democrats, holding out for health care, ready to reject government funding bill for 10th time

By STEPHEN GROVES and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Democrats are poised for the 10th time Thursday to reject a stopgap spending bill that would reopen the government, insisting they won't back away from demands that Congress take up health care benefits.

The repetition of votes on the funding bill has become a daily drumbeat in Congress, underscoring how intractable the situation has become as it has been at times the only item on the agenda for the Senate floor. House Republicans have left Washington altogether. The standoff has lasted over two weeks, leaving hundreds of thousands of federal workers furloughed, even more without a guaranteed payday and Congress essentially paralyzed.

"Every day that goes by, there are more and more Americans who are getting smaller and smaller paychecks," said Senate Majority Leader John Thune, adding that there have been thousands of flight delays across the country as well.

Thune, a South Dakota Republican, again and again has tried to pressure Democrats to break from their strategy of voting against the stopgap funding bill. It hasn't worked. And while some bipartisan talks

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 30 of 65

have been ongoing about potential compromises on health care, they haven't produced any meaningful progress toward reopening the government.

Democrats say they won't budge until they get a guarantee on extending subsidies for health plans offered under Affordable Care Act marketplaces. They warned that millions of Americans who buy their own health insurance — such as small business owners, farmers and contractors — will see large increases when premium prices go out in the coming weeks. Looking ahead to a Nov. 1 deadline in most states, they think voters will demand that Republicans enter into serious negotiations.

"We have to do something, and right now, Republicans are letting these tax credits expire," said Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer.

Still, Thune was also trying a different tack Thursday with a vote to proceed to appropriations bills — a move that could grease the Senate's wheels into some action or just deepen the divide between the two parties.

A deadline for subsidies on health plans

Democrats have rallied around their priorities on health care as they hold out against voting for a Republican bill that would reopen the government. Yet they also warn that the time to strike a deal to prevent large increases for many health plans is drawing short.

When they controlled Congress during the pandemic, Democrats boosted subsidies for Affordable Care Act health plans. It pushed enrollment under President Barack Obama's signature health care law to new levels and drove the rate of uninsured people to a historic low. Nearly 24 million people currently get their health insurance from subsidized marketplaces, according to health care research nonprofit KFF.

Democrats — and some Republicans — are worried that many of those people will forgo insurance if the price rises dramatically. While the tax credits don't expire until next year, health insurers will soon send out notices of the price increases. In most states, they go out Nov. 1.

Sen. Patty Murray, the top Democrat on the Senate Appropriations Committee, said she has heard from "families who are absolutely panicking about their premiums that are doubling."

"They are small business owners who are having to think about abandoning the job they love to get employer-sponsored health care elsewhere or just forgoing coverage altogether," she added.

Murray also said that if many people decide to leave their health plan, it could have an effect across medical insurance because the pool of people under health plans will shrink. That could result in higher prices across the board, she said.

Some Republicans have acknowledged that the expiration of the tax credits could be a problem and floated potential compromises to address it, but there is hardly a consensus among the GOP.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., this week called the COVID-era subsidies a "boondoggle," adding that "when you subsidize the health care system and you pay insurance companies more, the prices increase."

President Donald Trump has said he would "like to see a deal done for great health care," but has not meaningfully weighed into the debate. And Thune has insisted that Democrats first vote to reopen the government before entering any negotiations on health care.

If Congress were to engage in negotiations on significant changes to health care, it would likely take weeks, if not longer, to work out a compromise.

Votes on appropriations bills

Meanwhile, Senate Republicans are setting up a vote Thursday to proceed to a bill to fund the Defense Department and several other areas of government. This would turn the Senate to Thune's priority of working through spending bills and potentially pave the way to paying salaries for troops, though the House would eventually need to come back to Washington to vote for a final bill negotiated between the two chambers.

Thune said it would be a step toward getting "the government funded in the traditional way, which is through the annual appropriations process."

It wasn't clear whether Democrats would give the support needed to advance the bills. They discussed the idea at their luncheon Wednesday and emerged saying they wanted to review the Republican proposal and make sure it included appropriations that are priorities for them.

While the votes will not bring the Senate any closer to an immediate fix for the government shutdown, it could at least turn their attention to issues where there is some bipartisan agreement.

With fragile Gaza ceasefire taking hold, Trump says he's now looking to 'get Russia done'

By AAMER MADHANI and SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — With a fragile Israel-Hamas ceasefire and hostage deal holding, President Donald Trump says he's now turning his attention to bringing Russia's war on Ukraine to an end and is weighing providing Kyiv long-range weaponry as he looks to prod Moscow to the negotiating table.

Ending the wars in Ukraine and Gaza was central to Trump's 2024 reelection pitch, in which he persistently pilloried President Joe Biden for his handling of the conflicts. Yet, like his predecessor, Trump also has been stymied by President Vladimir Putin as he's unsuccessfully pressed the Russian leader to hold direct talks with Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelenskyy to end the war that is nearing its fourth year.

But fresh off the Gaza ceasefire, Trump is showing new confidence that he can finally make headway on ending the Russian invasion. He's also signaling that he's ready to step up pressure on Putin if he doesn't come to the table soon.

"Interestingly we made progress today, because of what's happened in the Middle East," Trump said of the Russia-Ukraine war on Wednesday evening as he welcomed supporters of his White House ballroom project to a glitzy dinner.

Earlier this week in Jerusalem, in a speech to the Knesset, Trump predicted the truce in Gaza would lay the groundwork for the U.S. to help Israel and many of its Middle East neighbors normalize relations. But Trump also made clear his top foreign policy priority now is ending the largest armed conflict in Europe since World War II.

"First we have to get Russia done," Trump said, turning to his special envoy Steve Witkoff, who has also served as his administration's chief interlocutor with Putin. "We gotta get that one done. If you don't mind, Steve, let's focus on Russia first. All right?"

Trump weighs Tomahawks for Ukraine

Trump is set to host Zelenskyy for talks Friday, their fourth face-to-face meeting this year.

Ahead of the meeting, Trump has said he's weighing selling Kyiv long-range Tomahawk cruise missiles, which would allow Ukraine to strike deep into Russian territory — if Putin doesn't settle the war soon. Zelenskyy, who has long sought the weapons system, said it would help Ukraine put the sort of pressure on Russia needed to get Putin to engage in peace talks.

Putin has made clear that providing Ukraine with Tomahawks would cross a red line and further damage relations between Moscow and Washington.

But Trump has been undeterred.

"He'd like to have Tomahawks," Trump said of Zelenskyy on Tuesday. "We have a lot of Tomahawks."

Agreeing to sell Ukraine Tomahawks would be a splashy move, said Mark Montgomery, an analyst at the conservative Foundation for Defense of Democracies in Washington. But it could take years to supply and train Kyiv on the Tomahawk system.

Montgomery said Ukraine could be better served in the near term with a surge of Extended Range Attack Munition (ERAM) missiles and Army Tactical Missile System, known as ATACMS. The U.S. already approved the sale of up to 3,350 ERAMs to Kyiv earlier this year.

The Tomahawk, with a range of about 995 miles (1,600 kilometers), would allow Ukraine to strike far deeper in Russian territory than either the ERAM (about 285 miles, or 460 km) or ATACMS (about 186 miles, or 300 kilometers).

"To provide Tomahawks is as much a political decision as it is a military decision," Montgomery said. "The ERAM is shorter range, but this can help them put pressure on Russia operationally, on their logistics, the command and control, and its force disbursement within several hundred kilometers of the front line. It

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 32 of 65

can be very effective.”

Signs of White House interest in new Russia sanctions

Zelenskyy is expected to reiterate his plea to Trump to hit Russia’s economy with further sanctions, something the Republican, to date, has appeared reluctant to do.

Congress has weighed legislation that would lead to tougher sanctions on Moscow, but Trump has largely focused his attention on pressuring NATO members and other allies to cut off their purchases of Russian oil, the engine fueling Moscow’s war machine. To that end, Trump said Wednesday that India, which became one of Russia’s biggest crude buyers after the Ukraine invasion, had agreed to stop buying oil from Moscow.

Waiting for Trump’s blessing is legislation in the Senate that would impose steep tariffs on countries that purchase Russia’s oil, gas, uranium and other exports in an attempt to cripple Moscow economically.

Though the president hasn’t formally endorsed it — and Republican leaders do not plan to move forward without his support — the White House has shown, behind the scenes, more interest in the bill in recent weeks.

Administration officials have gone through the legislation in depth, offering line edits and requesting technical changes, according to two officials with knowledge of the discussions between the White House and the Senate. That has been interpreted on Capitol Hill as a sign that Trump is getting more serious about the legislation, sponsored by close ally Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., along with Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn.

A White House official said the administration is working with lawmakers to make sure that “introduced bills advance the president’s foreign policy objectives and authorities.” The official, who was granted anonymity to discuss private deliberations, said any sanctions package needs to give the president “complete flexibility.”

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said Wednesday the administration is waiting for greater buy-in from Europe, which he noted faces a bigger threat from Russian aggression than the U.S. does.

“So all I hear from the Europeans is that Putin is coming to Warsaw,” Bessent said. “There are very few things in life I’m sure about. I’m sure he’s not coming to Boston. So, we will respond ... if our European partners will join us.”

Israel receives remains of 2 more hostages as military says another body was not that of a hostage

By SAM METZ, SAMY MAGDY and WAFAA SHURAFU Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel received the remains of two more hostages Wednesday, hours after the Israeli military said that one of the bodies previously turned over was not that of a hostage. The confusion added to tensions over the fragile truce that has paused the two-year war.

The coffins carrying the remains were transferred by the Red Cross from Hamas. Upon returning to Israel, they were sent to a forensic lab in Tel Aviv. The military in a statement cautioned that the hostages’ identities had yet to be verified.

Meanwhile, the Gaza Health Ministry said it received 45 more bodies of Palestinians from Israel, another step in implementation of the ceasefire agreement. That brought to 90 the total number of bodies returned to Gaza for burial. The forensics team examining the remains said they showed signs of mistreatment.

As part of the deal, four bodies of hostages were handed over by Hamas on Tuesday, following four on Monday that were returned hours after the last 20 living hostages were released from Gaza. In all, Israel has been awaiting the return of the bodies of 28 hostages.

The Israeli military said forensic testing showed that “the fourth body handed over to Israel by Hamas does not match any of the hostages.” There was no immediate word on whose body it was.

In exchange for the release of the hostages, Israel freed around 2,000 Palestinian prisoners and detainees Monday.

Unidentified bodies returned to Gaza show signs of abuse

Israel is expected to turn over more bodies, though officials have not said how many are in its custody

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 33 of 65

or how many will be returned. It is unclear whether the remains belong to Palestinians who died in Israeli custody or were taken from Gaza by Israeli troops. Throughout the war, Israel's military has exhumed bodies as part of its search for the remains of hostages.

As forensic teams examined the first remains returned, the Health Ministry on Wednesday released images of 32 unidentified bodies to help families recognize missing relatives.

Many appeared decomposed or burned. Some were missing limbs or teeth, while others were coated in sand and dust. Health officials have said Israeli restrictions on allowing DNA testing equipment into Gaza have often forced morgues to rely on physical features and clothing for identification.

The forensics team that received the bodies said some arrived still shackled or bearing signs of physical abuse.

Sameh Hamad, a member of a commission tasked with receiving the bodies at Khan Younis' Nasser Hospital, said some arrived with their hands and legs cuffed.

"There are signs of torture and executions," he told The Associated Press.

The bodies, he said, belonged to men ages 25 to 70. Most had bands on their necks, including one that had a rope around the neck.

Most of the bodies wore civilian clothing, but some were in uniforms, suggesting they were militants.

Hamad said the Red Cross provided names for only three of the dead, leaving many families uncertain of their relatives' fate. The fighting has killed nearly 68,000 Palestinians, according to the Health Ministry, which is part of the Hamas-run government in Gaza. The ministry maintains detailed casualty records that are seen as generally reliable by U.N. agencies and independent experts.

Thousands more people are missing, according to the Red Cross and Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics.

Rasmiya Qudeih, 52, waited outside Nasser Hospital, hoping her son would be among the 45 bodies transferred Wednesday from Israel.

He vanished on Oct. 7, 2023, the day of the Hamas-led attack that triggered the war. She was told he was killed by an Israeli strike.

"God willing, he will be with the bodies," she said.

Netanyahu says Israel won't compromise

The ceasefire plan introduced by U.S. President Donald Trump had called for all hostages — living and dead — to be handed over by a deadline that expired Monday. But under the deal, if that didn't happen, Hamas was to share information about deceased hostages and try to hand them over as soon as possible.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Wednesday that Israel "will not compromise" and demanded that Hamas fulfill the requirements laid out in the ceasefire deal about the return of hostages' bodies.

Trump, in an interview with CNN, warned that Israel could resume the war if he feels Hamas isn't upholding its end of the agreement.

"Israel will return to those streets as soon as I say the word," Trump said.

Hamas' armed wing said in a statement Wednesday that the group honored the ceasefire's terms and handed over the remains of the hostages it had access to.

Hamas has assured the U.S. through intermediaries that it is working to return dead hostages, according to two senior U.S. advisers. The advisers, who were not authorized to comment publicly and briefed reporters on the condition of anonymity, said they do not believe Hamas has violated the deal.

The widespread destruction in the territory has complicated the retrieval of the dead, the officials added. One of the advisers said debris as well as unexploded weapons add to the difficulty.

Hamas has told mediators that some bodies are in areas controlled by Israeli troops.

This is not the first time Hamas has returned a wrong body to Israel. During a previous ceasefire, the group said it handed over the bodies of Shiri Bibas and her two sons, who were among those taken in Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on Israel, in which some 1,200 people were killed and 251 abducted.

Testing in February 2025 showed that one of the bodies returned was identified as a Palestinian woman.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 34 of 65

Bibas' body was returned a day later.

More aid bound for Gaza

The World Food Program said its trucks began arriving in Gaza after the entrance of humanitarian aid into Gaza was paused for two days due to the exchange on Monday and a Jewish holiday Tuesday.

The timing of the scaled-up deliveries — which are part of the ceasefire deal — was called into question after Israel said Tuesday that it would cut the number of trucks allowed into Gaza, saying Hamas was too slow to return the hostages' bodies.

The Egyptian Red Crescent said 400 trucks carrying food, fuel and medical supplies were bound for Gaza on Wednesday. The Israeli defense body overseeing humanitarian aid in Gaza, COGAT, declined to comment on the number of trucks expected to enter Gaza.

Alaska airlifting hundreds from storm-devastated coastal villages

By BECKY BOHRER and JESSE BEDAYN Associated Press

JUNEAU, Alaska (AP) — One of the most significant airlifts in Alaska history was underway Wednesday to move hundreds of people from coastal villages ravaged by high surf and strong winds from the remnants of Typhoon Halong last weekend, officials said.

The storm brought record water levels to two low-lying communities and washed away homes — some with people inside. At least one person was killed and two are missing. Makeshift shelters were quickly established and swelled to about 1,500 people, an extraordinary number in a sparsely populated region where communities are reachable by air or water.

The remoteness and the scale of the destruction created challenges for getting resources in place. Damage assessments have been trickling in as responders have shifted from initial search-and-rescue operations to trying to stabilize or restore basic services.

The communities of Kipnuk and Kwigillingok near the Bering Sea saw water levels more than 6 feet (1.8 meters) above the highest normal tide line. Leaders asked the state to evacuate the more than 1,000 residents in those villages, said Jeremy Zidek, a spokesperson with the state emergency management office.

Some homes cannot be reoccupied, even with emergency repairs, and others may not be livable by winter, said emergency management officials. Forecasters say rain and snow is possible in the region this weekend, with average temperatures soon below freezing.

Mark Roberts, the incident commander with the state emergency management agency, said the immediate focus was on "making sure people are safe, warm and cared for while we work with our partners to restore essential services."

Meantime, restrooms were again working at the school in Kwigillingok, where about 350 people had sheltered overnight Tuesday, according to a state emergency management statement. "Damage to many homes is severe, and the community leadership is instructing residents not to reenter homes due to safety concerns," it said.

About 300 evacuees were being brought to Anchorage on Wednesday, about 500 miles (805 kilometers) east of the battered coastline villages, according to the state Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. They were going to the Alaska Airlines Center, a sports and events complex with capacity for about 400, Zidek said.

Shelter space closer to home — in the southwest Alaska regional hub of Bethel — had been reaching capacity, officials said.

Zidek did not know how long the evacuation process would take and said authorities were looking for additional sheltering locations. The aim is to get people from congregate shelters into hotel rooms or dormitories, he said.

The crisis unfolding in southwest Alaska has drawn attention to Trump administration cuts to grants aimed at helping small, mostly Indigenous villages prepare for storms or mitigate disaster risks.

For example, a \$20 million U.S. Environmental Protection Agency grant to Kipnuk, which was inundated by floodwaters, was terminated by the Trump administration, a move challenged by environmental groups.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 35 of 65

The grant was intended to protect the boardwalk residents use to get around the community as well as 1,400 feet (430 meters) of river from erosion, according to a federal website that tracks government spending.

There was limited work on the project before the grant was ended. The village had purchased a bulldozer for shipment and briefly hired a bookkeeper, according to Public Rights Project, which represents Kipnuk.

The group said no single project was likely to prevent the recent flood. But work to remove abandoned fuel tanks and other material to prevent it from falling into the river might have been feasible during the 2025 construction season.

"What's happening in Kipnuk shows the real cost of pulling back support that was already promised to front line communities," said Jill Habig, CEO of Public Rights Project. "These grants were designed to help local governments prepare for and adapt to the growing effects of climate change. When that commitment is broken, it puts people's safety, homes and futures at risk."

Trump confirms the CIA is conducting covert operations inside Venezuela

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump confirmed Wednesday that he has authorized the CIA to conduct covert operations inside Venezuela and said he was weighing carrying out land operations on the country.

The acknowledgement of covert action in Venezuela by the U.S. spy agency comes after the U.S. military in recent weeks has carried out a series of deadly strikes against alleged drug-smuggling boats in the Caribbean. U.S. forces have destroyed at least five boats since early September, killing 27 people, and four of those vessels originated from Venezuela.

Asked during an event in the Oval Office on Wednesday why he had authorized the CIA to take action in Venezuela, Trump affirmed he had made the move.

"I authorized for two reasons, really," Trump replied. "No. 1, they have emptied their prisons into the United States of America," he said. "And the other thing, the drugs, we have a lot of drugs coming in from Venezuela, and a lot of the Venezuelan drugs come in through the sea."

Trump added the administration "is looking at land" as it considers further strikes in the region. He declined to say whether the CIA has authority to take action against President Nicolás Maduro.

Trump made the unusual acknowledgement of a CIA operation shortly after The New York Times published that the CIA had been authorized to carry out covert action in Venezuela.

Maduro pushes back

On Wednesday, Maduro lashed out at the record of the U.S. spy agency in various conflicts around the world without directly addressing Trump's comments about authorizing the CIA to carry out covert operations in Venezuela.

"No to regime change that reminds us so much of the (overthrows) in the failed eternal wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and so on," Maduro said at a televised event of the National Council for Sovereignty and Peace, which is made up of representatives from various political, economic, academic and cultural sectors in Venezuela.

"No to the coups carried out by the CIA, which remind us so much of the 30,000 disappeared," a figure estimated by human rights organizations such as the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo during the military dictatorship in Argentina (1976-1983). He also referred to the 1973 coup in Chile.

"How long will the CIA continue to carry on with its coups? Latin America doesn't want them, doesn't need them and repudiates them," Maduro added.

The objective is "to say no to war in the Caribbean, no to war in South America, yes to peace," he said.

Speaking in English, Maduro said: "Not war, yes peace, not war. Is that how you would say it? Who speaks English? Not war, yes peace, the people of the United States, please. Please, please, please."

In a statement, Venezuela's Foreign Ministry on Wednesday rejected "the bellicose and extravagant

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 36 of 65

statements by the President of the United States, in which he publicly admits to having authorized operations to act against the peace and stability of Venezuela.”

“This unprecedented statement constitutes a very serious violation of international law and the United Nations’ Charter and obliges the community of countries to denounce these clearly immoderate and inconceivable statements,” said the statement, which Foreign Minister Yván Gil posted on his Telegram channel. Resistance from Congress

Early this month, the Trump administration declared drug cartels to be unlawful combatants and pronounced the United States is now in an “armed conflict” with them, justifying the military action as a necessary escalation to stem the flow of drugs into the United States.

The move has spurred anger in Congress from members of both major political parties that Trump was effectively committing an act of war without seeking congressional authorization.

On Wednesday, Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said while she supports cracking down on trafficking, the administration has gone too far.

“The Trump administration’s authorization of covert C.I.A. action, conducting lethal strikes on boats and hinting at land operations in Venezuela slides the United States closer to outright conflict with no transparency, oversight or apparent guardrails,” Shaheen said. “The American people deserve to know if the administration is leading the U.S. into another conflict, putting servicemembers at risk or pursuing a regime-change operation.”

The Trump administration has yet to provide underlying evidence to lawmakers proving that the boats targeted by the U.S. military were in fact carrying narcotics, according to two U.S. officials familiar with the matter.

The officials, who were not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity, said the administration has only pointed to unclassified video clips of the strikes posted on social media by Trump and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and has yet to produce “hard evidence” that the vessels were carrying drugs.

Lawmakers have expressed frustration that the administration is offering little detail about how it came to decide the U.S. is in armed conflict with cartels or which criminal organizations it claims are “unlawful combatants.”

Even as the U.S. military has carried out strikes on some vessels, the U.S. Coast Guard has continued with its typical practice of stopping boats and seizing drugs.

Trump on Wednesday explained away the action, saying the traditional approach hasn’t worked.

“Because we’ve been doing that for 30 years, and it has been totally ineffective. They have faster boats,” he said. “They’re world-class speedboats, but they’re not faster than missiles.”

Human rights groups have raised concerns that the strikes flout international law and are extrajudicial killings.

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Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 37 of 65

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Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 38 of 65

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Judge temporarily blocks the Trump administration from firing workers during the government shutdown

By JANIE HAR Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — A federal judge on Wednesday temporarily blocked President Donald Trump's administration from firing workers during the government shutdown, saying the cuts appeared to be politically motivated and were being carried out without much thought.

U.S. District Judge Susan Illston in San Francisco repeatedly pressed the assistant U.S. attorney to explain the administration's rationale for the more than 4,100 layoff notices that started going out Friday even though furloughed workers can not access their work emails and there are no human resources specialists to assist with next steps.

"It's very much ready, fire, aim on most of these programs, and it has a human cost," she said. "It's a human cost that cannot be tolerated."

She granted a temporary restraining order blocking the job cuts, saying she believed the evidence would ultimately show the cuts were illegal and in excess of authority.

Asked for comment, the White House referred The Associated Press to the Office of Management and Budget. The budget office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The American Federation of Government Employees and other federal labor unions had asked Illston to block the administration from issuing new layoff notices and implementing those that were already sent out. The unions said the firings were an abuse of power designed to punish workers and pressure Congress.

"The president seems to think his government shutdown is distracting people from the harmful and lawlessness actions of his administration, but the American people are holding him accountable, including in the courts," said Skye Perryman, president and CEO of legal organization Democracy Forward. "Our civil servants do the work of the people, and playing games with their livelihoods is cruel and unlawful and a threat to everyone in our nation."

Illston's order came as the shutdown, which started Oct. 1, entered its third week.

Democratic lawmakers are demanding that any deal to reopen the federal government address their health care demands. Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson predicted the shutdown may become the longest in history, saying he "won't negotiate" with Democrats until they hit pause on those demands and reopen.

Democrats have demanded that health care subsidies, first put in place in 2021 and extended a year later, be extended again. They also want any government funding bill to reverse the Medicaid cuts in Trump's big tax breaks and spending cuts bill passed this summer.

The Trump administration has been paying the military and pursuing its crackdown on immigration while slashing jobs in health and education, including in special education and after-school programs. Trump said programs favored by Democrats are being targeted and "they're never going to come back, in many cases."

In a court filing, the administration said it planned to fire more than 4,100 employees across eight agencies.

In a related case, Illston had blocked the administration from carrying out much of its plans to reduce the size of the federal workforce. But the Supreme Court said the administration could continue firing workers while the lawsuit is pending.

The unions say the layoff notices are an illegal attempt at political pressure and retribution and are based

on the false premise that a temporary funding lapse eliminates Congress' authorization of agency programs. Assistant U.S. Attorney Elizabeth Hedges said in court Wednesday that the district court lacks jurisdiction to hear employment decisions made by federal agencies. Under prodding by the judge, Hedges said she was not prepared to discuss the merits of the case, only reasons why a temporary restraining order should not be issued.

Illston was nominated to the bench by former President Bill Clinton, a Democrat.

Journalists turn in access badges, exit Pentagon rather than agree to new reporting rules

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Dozens of reporters turned in access badges and exited the Pentagon on Wednesday rather than agree to government-imposed restrictions on their work, pushing journalists who cover the American military further from the seat of its power. The nation's leadership called the new rules "common sense" to help regulate a "very disruptive" press.

News outlets were nearly unanimous in rejecting new rules imposed by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth that would leave journalists vulnerable to expulsion if they sought to report on information — classified or otherwise — that had not been approved by Hegseth for release.

Many of the reporters waited to leave together at a 4 p.m. deadline set by the Defense Department to get out of the building. As the hour approached, boxes of documents lined a Pentagon corridor and reporters carried chairs, a copying machine, books and old photos to the parking lot from suddenly abandoned workspaces. Shortly after 4, about 40 to 50 journalists left together after handing in badges.

"It's sad, but I'm also really proud of the press corps that we stuck together," said Nancy Youssef, a reporter for The Atlantic who has had a desk at the Pentagon since 2007. She took a map of the Middle East out to her car.

It is unclear what practical impact the new rules will have, though news organizations vowed they'd continue robust coverage of the military no matter the vantage point.

Images of reporters effectively demonstrating against barriers to their work are unlikely to move supporters of President Donald Trump, many of whom resent journalists and cheer his efforts to make their jobs harder. Trump has been involved in court fights against The New York Times, CBS News, ABC News, the Wall Street Journal and The Associated Press in the past year.

Trump supports the new rules

Speaking to reporters at the White House on Tuesday, Trump backed his defense secretary's new rules. "I think he finds the press to be very disruptive in terms of world peace," Trump said. "The press is very dishonest."

Even before issuing his new press policy, Hegseth, a former Fox News Channel host, has systematically choked off the flow of information. He's held only two formal press briefings, banned reporters from accessing many parts of the sprawling Pentagon without an escort and launched investigations into leaks to the media.

He has called his new rules "common sense" and said the requirement that journalists sign a document outlining the rules means they acknowledge the new rules, not necessarily agree to them. Journalists see that as a distinction without a difference.

"What they're really doing, they want to spoon-feed information to the journalist, and that would be their story. That's not journalism," said Jack Keane, a retired U.S. Army general and Fox News analyst, said on Hegseth's former network.

When he served, Keane said he required new brigadier generals to take a class on the role of the media in a democracy so they wouldn't be intimidated and also see reporters as a conduit to the American public. "There were times when stories were done that made me flinch a little bit," he said. "But that's usually because we had done something that wasn't as good as we should have done it."

Youssef said it made no sense to sign on to rules that said reporters should not solicit military officials

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 40 of 65

for information. "To agree to not solicit information is to agree to not be a journalist," she said. "Our whole goal is soliciting information."

Reporting on US military affairs will continue — from a greater distance

Several reporters posted on social media when they turned in their press badges.

"It's such a tiny thing, but I was really proud to see my picture up on the wall of Pentagon correspondents," wrote Heather Mongilio, a reporter for USNI News, which covers the Navy. "Today, I'll hand in my badge. The reporting will continue."

Mongilio, Youssef and others emphasized that they'll continue to do their jobs no matter where their desks are. Some sources will continue to speak with them, although they say some in the military have been chilled by threats from Pentagon leadership.

In an essay, NPR reporter Tom Bowman noted the many times he'd been tipped off by people he knew from the Pentagon and while embedded in the military about what was happening, even if it contradicted official lines put out by leadership. Many understand the media's role.

"They knew the American public deserved to know what's going on," Bowman wrote. "With no reporters able to ask questions, it seems the Pentagon leadership will continue to rely on slick social media posts, carefully orchestrated short videos and interviews with partisan commentators and podcasters. No one should think that's good enough."

The Pentagon Press Association, whose 101 members represent 56 news outlets, has spoken out against the rules. Organizations from across the media spectrum, from legacy organizations like The Associated Press and The New York Times to outlets like Fox and the conservative Newsmax, told their reporters to leave instead of signing the new rules.

Only the conservative One America News Network signed on. Its management likely believes it will have greater access to Trump administration officials by showing its support, Gabrielle Cuccia, a former Pentagon reporter who was fired by OANN earlier this year for writing an online column criticizing Hegseth's media policies, told the AP in an interview.

Supreme Court case could lead to loss of Black representation in Congress, but the scope is unknown

By MATT BROWN, GARY FIELDS and NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A neutering by the Supreme Court of the Voting Rights Act's last remaining major provision would potentially trigger a political avalanche — an event that starts narrow but gathers momentum as it spreads across the national map.

In this case, the benefit would be to Republicans seeking to maintain a majority in the House of Representatives, perhaps for many years to come.

Such a change seemed more plausible Wednesday after the court's conservative majority indicated a willingness to limit race-based districts under Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act. The landmark civil rights law requires the drawing of legislative districts that allow minorities to select representatives of their choosing. That has created majority-Black and Latino districts that vote reliably Democratic in some of the nation's most conservative states.

Plaintiffs in one of those states, Louisiana, brought the case before the high court after the state was ordered by a federal judge to redraw its congressional map to include a second majority-Black district, one that was won by a Democrat last year. If the plaintiffs win their case, it could turn that district back into one likely to be represented by a Republican and possibly even eliminate its other Democratic seat, which also was mandated under the Voting Rights Act.

That could ripple across the South, where the Democratic group Fair Fight found that there are 19 VRA-mandated, Democratic-held seats that Republicans could conceivably redraw to their benefit.

"I'm really worried that, given the political climate that we're in and the conservative nature of this court, and then rolling back affirmative action and giving more executive power to the president, that this will

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 41 of 65

not end well for us," said Rep. Terri Sewell, an Alabama Democrat.

Difficult to predict the extent of GOP gains in Congress

Republicans have increasingly complained about Section 2, contending it forces them to either violate the Constitution by using racial factors in redistricting or get sued if they're not solicitous enough of racial groups that lean Democratic.

"We are damned if we do and damned if we don't," Louisiana Attorney General Elizabeth Murrill told reporters Wednesday.

If the court sides with Louisiana, some Democratic members of Congress said they hoped the decision would be narrowly tailored to that case rather than an all-out assault on the last major pillar of the landmark civil rights law.

Even if the court strikes a broader blow to the Voting Rights Act, it's unlikely most of those districts could be redrawn before the 2026 midterm elections, and the number that ultimately could swing to the GOP is likely smaller.

Still, with the House decided by a razor-tight margin in recent elections — the GOP currently controls the chamber by three votes — every seat counts.

"It makes it harder for Democrats to create a majority if they are eliminating only Democratic districts," said Jonathan Cervas, a political scientist at Carnegie Mellon University who has helped draw maps ordered by judges in multiple Voting Rights Act-related cases. But he cautioned against predicting the size of future Republican gains.

"None of us can even know this," Cervas said, adding that there would still be limits on GOP benefits. "We're talking about real ceilings here."

With extreme gerrymandering, 'It won't be a democracy'

That's because, even if Section 2 went away, the Democratic-leaning voters it gave voice to would not. Republican mapmakers would have to put them somewhere — likely still in Democratic districts.

Take Tennessee, where the Republican-controlled Legislature drew a ruthlessly partisan map during the last redistricting cycle. That map yielded seven reliably Republican seats, and one Democratic one, a Voting Rights Act-compliant district in Memphis.

Even without the Voting Rights Act, Cervas said, there is no way for Republicans to make that Memphis seat red. If they scattered the city's voters among neighboring GOP-heavy districts, they might make those competitive.

He said some other GOP-controlled states, such as Missouri and South Carolina, are in similar binds with their lone, heavily Democratic seats that were drawn to comply with the voting law. Others, like Georgia, are so politically competitive that it's likely Republicans couldn't erase a Democratic seat in one part of the state without jeopardizing one of their own.

Still other GOP-controlled states, such as Mississippi, may have an easier time eliminating their lone Democratic, Voting Rights Act-mandated seat. And in larger states such as North Carolina and Florida, Republicans would have a freer hand to redraw the maps to favor their party without having to preserve majority-minority seats held by Democrats.

Members of the Congressional Black Caucus gathered after Wednesday's Supreme Court arguments and warned that a broad decision against Section 2, which allows challenges to racially discriminatory electoral practices, could lead to extreme gerrymandering by Republicans. That could leave many Black voters without real representation in Congress, they said.

"If you take away the elements that create the opportunity for it to look like its people, it won't be a democracy as we hoped it would be," said Rep. Troy Carter, a Louisiana Democrat who represents much of New Orleans. "It will be a much weaker one, and ultimately on the road to an oligarchy and not a democracy."

Congressional map changes might still be years away

Republicans already are engaged in a fevered, national mid-decade redistricting campaign because President Donald Trump wants them to maximize their number of winnable seats to stave off losing control of

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 42 of 65

the House of Representatives in 2026. The incumbent president's party usually loses seats in the midterms.

It's unlikely that many Republican states could take advantage of loosened Voting Rights Act standards in time to help Trump's quest. It's not clear when the court will issue its decision, but it will almost certainly be issued by early summer of 2026. That could come after the filing deadlines for congressional races in almost all states.

While some Republican-controlled states could try extraordinary measures to take advantage of a favorable ruling, it's more likely that most changes would be incorporated into maps for 2028 and beyond.

Still, Democrats are on edge.

"If they were to strip Section 2, I think that's going to give license for us to see a more aggressive re-districting, and that's what's been blocking them throughout the entire nation," said Rep. Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick, a Florida Democrat who represents a majority minority district in South Florida.

"The Voting Rights Act is the most important piece of civil rights legislation ever enacted and continues to remain relevant in an environment where there are people across this country who want to undermine our free and fair elections, particularly as it relates to communities of color," House Minority Leader Ha-keem Jeffries, the first person of color to lead a major party in Congress, said in an interview with The Associated Press.

The main effect of any changes actually would be felt well beyond the halls of Congress, said Kareem Crayton of the Brennan Center for Justice. He said three-quarters of all Section 2 cases concern state or local government offices.

"It's the things below Congress that are closer to the people, city councils, county commissions, school boards, all of those have been the direct recipients of the work of plaintiffs who have sued to get representation that allows people to actually engage in what we call traditional politics," he said.

JD Vance dismisses bipartisan outrage over racist and offensive Young Republican group chat

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

The public release of a Young Republican group chat that included racist language, jokes about rape and flippant commentary on gas chambers prompted bipartisan calls for those involved to be removed from or resign their positions.

The Young Republican National Federation, the GOP's political organization for Republicans between 18 and 40, called for those involved to step down from the organization. The group described the exchanges, first reported by Politico, as "unbecoming of any Republican."

Republican Vice President JD Vance, however, has weighed in several times to speak out against what he characterized as "pearl clutching" over the leaked messages.

Politico obtained months of exchanges from a Telegram conversation between leaders and members of the Young Republican National Federation and some of its affiliates in New York, Kansas, Arizona and Vermont.

Here's a rundown of reaction to the inflammatory group chat, in which the operatives and officials involved openly worried that their comments might be leaked, even as they continued their conversation:

Vance

After Politico's initial report Tuesday, Vance posted on X a screen grab from 2022 text messages in which Jay Jones, the Democratic candidate in Virginia's attorney general race, suggested that a prominent Republican get "two bullets to the head."

"This is far worse than anything said in a college group chat, and the guy who said it could become the AG of Virginia," Vance wrote Tuesday. "I refuse to join the pearl clutching when powerful people call for political violence."

Jones has taken "full responsibility" for his comments and offered a public apology to Todd Gilbert, who then was speaker of Virginia's House of Delegates.

Vance reiterated his initial sentiment Wednesday on "The Charlie Kirk Show" podcast, saying when

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 43 of 65

asked about the reporting that a “person seriously wishing for political violence and political assassination is 1,000 times worse than what a bunch of young people, a bunch of kids say in a group chat, however offensive it might be.”

Vance, 41, said he grew up in a different era where “most of what I, the stupid things that I did as a teenager and as a young adult, they’re not on the internet.”

The father of three said he would caution his own children, “especially my boys, don’t put things on the internet, like, be careful with what you post. If you put something in a group chat, assume that some scumbag is going to leak it in an effort to try to cause you harm or cause your family harm.”

“I really don’t want to us to grow up in a country where a kid telling a stupid joke, telling a very offensive, stupid joke is cause to ruin their lives,” Vance said.

Republicans

Other Republicans demanded more immediate intervention. Republican legislative leaders in Vermont, along with Gov. Phil Scott — also a Republican — called for the resignation of state Sen. Sam Douglass, revealed to be a participant in the chat. A joint statement from the GOP lawmakers termed the comments “unacceptable and deeply disturbing.”

Saying she was “absolutely appalled to learn about the alleged comments made by leaders of the New York State Young Republicans,” Rep. Elise Stefanik of New York called for those involved to step down from their positions. Danedri Herbert, chair of the Kansas GOP, said the remarks “do not reflect the beliefs of Republicans and certainly not of Kansas Republicans at large.”

In a statement posted to X on Tuesday, the Young Republican National Federation said it was “appalled” by the reported messages and calling for those involved to resign from their positions within the organization. Young Republican leaders said the behavior was “disgraceful, unbecoming of any Republican, and stands in direct opposition to the values our movement represents.”

Democrats

Democrats have been more uniform in their condemnation. On Wednesday, California Gov. Gavin Newsom wrote to House Oversight Committee Chairman James Comer asking for an investigation into the “vile and offensive text messages,” which he called “the definition of conduct that can create a hostile and discriminatory environment that violates civil rights laws.”

Speaking on the Senate floor, Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer of New York on Tuesday described the chat as “revolting,” calling for Republicans including Trump and Vance to “condemn these comments swiftly and unequivocally.”

Asked about the reporting, New York Gov. Kathy Hochul called the exchanges “vile” and called for consequences for those involved.

“Kick them out of the party. Take away their official roles. Stop using them as campaign advisers,” Hochul said. “There needs to be consequences. This bulls— has to stop.”

What to know about President Trump’s threat to take World Cup matches from Boston

By MICHAEL CASEY Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — President Donald Trump has threatened to relocate World Cup matches set to be played next year in suburban Boston, after suggesting that parts of the city had been “taken over” by unrest.

Foxborough, Massachusetts, home to the NFL’s New England Patriots and about 30 miles from Boston, is set to stage matches as the U.S. cohosts the 2026 World Cup with Mexico and Canada. Trump was asked about Boston’s mayor, Michelle Wu, a Democrat whom he called “intelligent” but “radical left.”

“We could take them away,” Trump said of the World Cup games. “I love the people of Boston and I know the games are sold out. But your mayor is not good.”

He repeated those threats Wednesday.

Can Trump take away the World Cup games?

Trump has previously suggested he could declare cities “not safe” for the 104-game soccer tournament

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 44 of 65

and alter a detailed hosting plan that FIFA confirmed in 2022. It includes games at NFL stadiums near New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco.

World Cup host sites aren't up to Trump. The 11 U.S. cities — plus three in Mexico and two in Canada — are contracted with FIFA, which would face significant logistical and legal issues to make changes in the eight months before the June 11 kickoff.

"It's FIFA's tournament, FIFA's jurisdiction, FIFA makes those decisions," the soccer body's vice president Victor Montagliani said earlier this month at a sports business conference in London.

Trump nonetheless said, "If somebody is doing a bad job, and if I feel there's unsafe conditions, I would call Gianni — the head of FIFA who's phenomenal -- and I would say, 'Let's move into another location' and they would do that."

The president meant FIFA head Gianni Infantino, a close ally. Trump said Infantino "wouldn't love to do it, but he'd do it very easily."

Speaking on a local podcast Wednesday, Wu questioned how Trump could take away the games with less than a year to go. She said most everything is already "locked down by contract" so no single person "even if they live in the White House currently can undo it."

"There's no ability to take away the World Cup games," Wu said. "There's no real threat when it comes to saying cities are so unsafe that they can't host the games."

World Cup in Massachusetts

Among the seven matches that will be played at Gillette Stadium in the Boston suburb of Foxborough will be five group stage matches, one match in the round of 32 and a quarterfinal match on July 9, 2026. The news of so many big games was a surprise to local organizers.

"The later in the tournament, the more eyeballs," said Mike Loynd, head of Boston's World Cup organizing committee, when the schedule was announced last year. "For us, it's just a matter of excitement. ... For us, it's a perfect schedule. I don't think FIFA could have done a better job."

The tournament is expected to bring \$1.1 billion in local economic impact, create over 5,000 jobs, and generate more than \$60 million of tax revenue throughout the region, according to organizers. They also expect that more than 2 million visitors will come to New England throughout the tournament's 39-day span.

Robert Kraft connection

Gillette Stadium is operated by Robert Kraft, who owns the NFL's New England Patriots and Major League Soccer's New England Revolution.

Kraft served as honorary chair of the United Bid to help bring the World Cup back to the United States. In a 2024 interview on "The Breakfast Club" he described himself as a "social friend" of Trump beginning in the 1990s shortly after he purchased the Patriots. He said in that interview that the only donation he'd ever made to Trump was a "strong donation to his inauguration" following his 2016 election.

But Kraft also gifted the president a diamond-encrusted Super Bowl ring during his first term after the Patriots won the NFL's championship to cap the 2016 season. Sitting presidents typically receive gifts from sports teams during celebratory White House visits — a personalized jersey is standard — but Kraft gave Trump a ring as well, the team confirmed at the time.

Kraft decided after the team's April 2017 visit to have a ring made for Trump so he would have something special to display in his presidential library, the team said. But Kraft said in that same 2024 "Breakfast Club" interview that he hadn't spoken to Trump since the January 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol.

Trump takes aim at Boston

Boston and its mayor have been frequent targets of the Trump administration for much of the year.

Trump and his allies have focused their attacks on the city's so-called sanctuary city policies and how much police should support deportations. In September, the Trump administration sued the city, arguing its sanctuary city policies are illegal under federal law and the city's refusal to cooperate with immigration authorities has resulted in the release of dangerous criminals who should be deported.

The Trump administration has already deployed National Guard troops to Washington and Memphis, and efforts to do so in Chicago and Portland, Oregon, have sparked legal fights. Democratic and Republican

leaders across Massachusetts have pushed back against the National Guard deployment in Boston and Wu, who is running unopposed for reelection, often cites the city's historical low crime rates.

Wu touts the fact that gun violence fell to the lowest level on record in her first year in office and has continued to decline. The city saw a historical low number of homicides in 2024 with 24 — but the city has surpassed that number so far in 2025 with 27, the police department said.

Faulty engineering led to implosion of Titan submersible headed to Titanic wreckage, NTSB finds

By PATRICK WHITTLE and HOLLY RAMER Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — Faulty engineering led to the implosion of an experimental submersible that killed five people on the way to the wreck of the Titanic, the National Transportation Safety Board concluded in a report Wednesday.

The NTSB made the statement in its final report on the hull failure and implosion of the Titan submersible in June 2023. Everyone on board the submersible died instantly in the North Atlantic when Titan suffered a catastrophic implosion as it descended to the wreck.

The NTSB report states that the faulty engineering of the Titan “resulted in the construction of a carbon fiber composite pressure vessel that contained multiple anomalies and failed to meet necessary strength and durability requirements.” It also stated that OceanGate, the owner of the Titan, failed to adequately test the Titan and was unaware of its true durability.

The report also said the wreckage of the Titan likely would have been found sooner had OceanGate followed standard guidance for emergency response, and that would have saved “time and resources even though a rescue was not possible in this case.”

The NTSB report dovetails with a Coast Guard report released in August that described the Titan implosion as preventable. The Coast Guard determined that safety procedures at OceanGate, a private company based in Washington state, were “critically flawed” and found “glaring disparities” between safety protocols and actual practices.

OceanGate suspended operations in July 2023 and wound down. A spokesperson for the company declined to comment on Wednesday.

In August, after the Coast Guard report was released, a company spokesperson offered condolences to the families of those who died.

The Titan's implosion killed OceanGate CEO Stockton Rush and led to lawsuits and calls for tighter regulation of private deep sea expeditions. The implosion also killed French underwater explorer Paul-Henri Nargeolet, known as “Mr. Titanic”; British adventurer Hamish Harding; and two members of a prominent Pakistani family, Shahzada Dawood and his son Suleman Dawood.

The NTSB report recommends the Coast Guard commission a panel of experts to study submersibles and other pressure vehicles for human occupancy. It also recommends that the Coast Guard implement regulations for the vehicles that are informed by that study. The report states that current regulations for small passenger vessels “enabled OceanGate's operation of the Titan in an unsafe manner.”

The report also called on the Coast Guard to “disseminate findings of the study to the industry,” which has grown in recent years as privately financed exploration has grown.

The company was aware of the possibility of Coast Guard regulations prior to the implosion. In describing OceanGate's corporate culture, the report quotes an operations technician who quit the company after expressing concern about calling paying passengers “mission specialists.” The company's CEO responded that “if the Coast Guard became a problem ... he would buy himself a congressman and make it go away,” the technician said, according to the report.

The vessel had been making voyages to the Titanic site since 2021. Its final dive came on the morning of June 18, 2023. The submersible lost contact with its support vessel about two hours later and was reported overdue that afternoon. Ships, planes and equipment were rushed to the scene about 435 miles (700 kilometers) south of St. John's, Newfoundland.

A multiday search for survivors off Canada made international headlines. It soon became clear there would be no survivors, and the Coast Guard and other authorities began lengthy investigations into what had happened.

A crowd of 700, but no witnesses? South Carolina investigation into mass shooting at bar stalls

By JEFFREY COLLINS Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — A sheriff said his deputies are methodically investigating a weekend mass shooting that killed four people and injured 16 more at a bar on a South Carolina island but haven't gotten the kind of help they need from the hundreds of people partying before the shooting.

No arrests have been made yet as investigators test DNA, analyze weapons and bullets, and enhance video from the crime scene of the early Sunday shooting at Willie's Bar and Grill on St. Helena Island, Beaufort County Sheriff P.J. Tanner said Wednesday.

Investigators think the shooting started as a dispute between two or three people who grew up together in Beaufort County and started firing at each other.

"We had 700 people at this party. And we have yet to get a witness that can tell us who the shooters are. It's ridiculous," Tanner said.

The sheriff said he thinks people want to cooperate but fear retribution. He said they can report what they know anonymously through Crimestoppers.

Tanner took questions from reporters and the community Wednesday about the shooting that happened near last call for drinks at a party celebrating the 25th anniversary of the class of 2000 at Battery Creek High School in Beaufort.

Tanner called the scene horrific but not surprising considering the shots were fired indiscriminately in such a large crowd of about 300 people inside the bar itself and 400 outside.

"When that many shots are fired in a crowd with the volume of people we had — multiple people get injured. Multiple people died," Tanner said at Wednesday's briefing.

Building a case based on evidence as opposed to eyewitnesses takes time, Tanner said.

Shell casing and bullets, some taken from inside the victims, were being sent to state agents on Wednesday. The FBI was trying to enhance and analyze video from inside and outside the bar. And Beaufort County deputies were testing DNA, Tanner said.

The goal is to make sure whatever charges are filed stick, the sheriff said.

"What I'm not going to do is victimize these families a second time," Tanner said.

Tanner refused to say exactly how many people may have fired or give any identifying information about possible suspects.

The sheriff also clarified that 16 people were wounded in the shooting. Initial reports said at least 20 were hurt by gunfire.

Kashawn Glaze, 22; Chiraad Smalls, 33; Amos Gary, 54; and A'shan'tek Milledge, 22, were killed in the shooting.

Willie's Bar serves Gullah-inspired cuisine and describes itself on its website as "not just a restaurant but a community pillar committed to giving back, especially to our youth."

An estimated 5,000 or more Gullah people living on St. Helena Island trace their ancestry back to enslaved West Africans who once worked rice plantations in the area before being eventually freed by the Civil War.

After months in chains and darkness, freed Hamas hostages begin their long road to recovery

By MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — They will be treated for malnutrition, lack of sunlight and the trauma of wearing leg chains for months. They suffer from unexplained pain and unresolved emotions, and they will have to

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 47 of 65

relearn how to make everyday decisions as simple as when to use the bathroom.

The last 20 living hostages released by Hamas are beginning a difficult path to recovery that will also include rebuilding a sense of control over their lives, according to Israeli health officials. Along the way, each one will be accompanied by a team of doctors, nurses, specialists and social workers to guide their reentry to society after two years of captivity in Gaza.

All of the hostages were in stable condition Monday following their release, and none required immediate intensive care.

"But what appears on the outside doesn't reflect what's going on internally," explained Hagai Levine, the head of the health team for the Hostages Family Forum, who has been involved in medical care for returned hostages and their relatives.

The newly freed hostages will stay in the hospital for several days as they undergo tests, including a full psychiatric exam, according to protocols from the Israeli Ministry of Health. A nutritionist will guide them and their families on a diet to avoid refeeding syndrome, a dangerous medical condition that can develop after periods of starvation if food is reintroduced too quickly.

Hostages emerged thin and pale

After previous releases, some hostages and their families chose to stay together in a hotel north of Tel Aviv for a few weeks to get used to their new reality. Others returned home immediately after their discharge from the hospital.

All of the hostages who emerged Monday were exceptionally thin and pale, the likely result of enduring long periods without enough food, Levine said.

The lack of sunlight and nutrition can lead to issues with the kidneys, liver and cognition, as well as osteoporosis. Many hostages wore leg chains for their entire captivity, which can lead to orthopedic problems, muscle waste and blood clots.

Elkana Bohbot told his family he suffers from pain all over his body, especially his back, feet and stomach due to force-feeding, according to Israeli television's Channel 12.

"Ahead of his release, he received food in large portions so he will look a bit better for the world," Rebecca Bohbot, Elkana's wife, told reporters Tuesday from the hospital.

Some hostages who previously returned had minor strokes in captivity that were not treated, Levine said. Many also had infections and returned with severely compromised immune systems, which is why the number of visitors should be kept to a minimum, he said.

Levine denounced politicians' visits to the hostages as both unnecessary and potentially dangerous. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited five hostages Tuesday evening and was diagnosed Wednesday with bronchitis. President Isaac Herzog and Defense Minister Israel Katz also visited hostages.

"Previously released hostages were told they look 'pretty good,' but some needed surgeries that were very complicated. Some had constant pain. Many have all types of pains that they are not able to explain, but it's really impacting their quality of life," Levine said.

Levine said Israel also learned from the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, when more than 60 Israeli soldiers were held for six months in Syria. Many of them later developed cancer, cardiovascular problems and accelerated aging and were at risk for early death.

The war began when Hamas-led militants burst across the Israeli border, killing around 1,200 people and kidnapping 251. The fighting has killed more than 67,600 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which is part of the Hamas-run government. The ministry maintains detailed casualty records that are seen as generally reliable by U.N. agencies and independent experts. It does not say how many of the deaths were civilians or combatants.

Restoring a sense of autonomy

The most important step for returning hostages is to help them regain a sense of control, explained Einat Yehene, a clinical neuropsychologist and the head of rehabilitation for the Hostages Families Forum. Many of the hostages were brought straight from Hamas tunnels, seeing sunlight for the first time in nearly two years, she said.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 48 of 65

"I'm happy to see the sun. I'm happy to see the trees. I saw the sea. You have no idea how precious that is," Elkana Bohbot told his family, according to Israeli media.

"Stimulation-wise and autonomy-wise, it's really overwhelming," Yehene said. "Someone is asking you a question — do you need to go to the bathroom? Would you like to eat something? These are questions they never heard for two years."

Hostages' sense of autonomy can be jump-started by allowing them to make small decisions. According to protocol, everyone treating them must ask their permission for each thing, no matter how small, including turning off a light, changing bedsheets or conducting medical tests.

Some returned hostages are terrified of the physical sensation of thirst because it makes them feel as if they are still in captivity, Yehene said. Others cannot spend time on their own, requiring a family member to be present around the clock.

Among the hostages who have experienced the smoothest integration from long-term captivity were those who were fathers, Levine said, though it took some time to rebuild trust with their young children.

"It's a facilitator of recovery because it forces them to get back into the role of father," Levine said. None of the women held in captivity for long periods of time were mothers.

The world starts 'to move again'

The first few days after being released, the hostages are in a state of euphoria, though many feel guilty for the pain their families have been through, Yehene said.

For those who saw little media and have no idea what happened in Israel, people should take care to expose them to information slowly, she added.

Yehene said she also saw an immediate psychological response from hostages who were released in previous ceasefires after Monday's release. Many of the previously released hostages have been involved in the struggle to return the last hostages and said they were unable to focus on their own recovery until now.

"I see movement from frozen emotions and frozen trauma," Yehene said. "You don't feel guilty anymore. You don't feel responsible."

Iair Horn was released from captivity in February, but it did not feel real until Monday, when his younger brother, Eitan, was finally freed.

"About eight months ago, I came home. But the truth is that only today am I truly free," Horn said, sobbing as he spoke from the hospital where his brother is being evaluated. Only now that Eitan is back "is my heart, our heart, whole again."

Liran Berman is the brother of twins Gali and Ziv Berman, who were also released.

"For 738 days, our lives were trapped between hope and fear," Liran Berman said. "Yesterday that chapter ended. Seeing Gali and Ziv again, holding them after so long, was like feeling the world start to move again."

Most US stocks rise after swinging through another erratic day

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Most U.S. stocks rose Wednesday following another topsy-turvy day on Wall Street.

The S&P 500 added 0.4%, but only after jumping toward one of its biggest gains since the summer, erasing it all and then climbing back.

The Nasdaq composite climbed 0.7% after earlier pinballing between a drop of 0.4% and a rally of 1.4%. The Dow Jones Industrial Average lagged the market and edged down by 17 points, or less than 0.1%.

The erratic trading followed Tuesday's roller coaster, where the Dow careened between a loss of 615 points and a jump of 455. The dizzying moves go back to the end of last week, when President Donald Trump shattered what had been a remarkably calm and strong run for Wall Street by threatening much higher tariffs on China.

Technology stocks helped lead the way Wednesday following a better-than-expected profit report from ASML, a major supplier to the semiconductor industry. It expects its revenue for 2025 to be 15% above

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 49 of 65

last year's, while next year's should be at least as high as this year's.

"On the market side, we have seen continued positive momentum around investments in AI," CEO Christophe Fouquet said, "and have also seen this extending to more customers." That's key when worries have been high that a bubble may be forming in artificial-intelligence technology, with too much investment flowing in akin to the 2000 dot-com frenzy.

ASML's stock climbed 3.1% in Amsterdam. On Wall Street, Broadcom rose 2.1% and Advanced Micro Devices jumped 9.4%. They were two of the strongest forces lifting the S&P 500.

Several big banks also drove the market higher. Bank of America climbed 4.4% after delivering a profit for the latest quarter that was stronger than analysts expected. CEO Brian Moynihan said every line of the bank's business reported growth.

Morgan Stanley rose 4.8% after likewise reporting a stronger profit than analysts expected. That followed better-than-expected profit reports from several banks the day before, including JPMorgan Chase and Wells Fargo.

They helped offset a 3.9% drop for PNC Financial. It reported a stronger-than-expected profit for the latest quarter, but it also gave a forecast for upcoming earnings that some analysts said was below expectations.

Abbott Laboratories sank 2.4% after its revenue for the latest quarter finished just shy of analysts' expectations.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 26.75 points to 6,671.06. The Dow Jones Industrial Average slipped 17.15 to 46,253.31, and the Nasdaq composite climbed 148.38 to 22,670.08.

Companies are under pressure to deliver strong profits after their stock prices broadly surged 35% from a low in April. To justify those gains, which critics say made their stock prices too expensive, companies will need to show they're making much more in profit and will continue to do so.

Corporate profit reports are also under more scrutiny than usual as investors hunt for clues about the health of the U.S. economy. That's because the U.S. government's latest shutdown is delaying important updates on the economy, such as the report on inflation that was supposed to arrive Wednesday.

The lack of such reports is making the job more difficult for the Federal Reserve, which is trying to figure out whether high inflation or a slowing job market is the bigger problem for the economy.

The Fed cut its main interest rate last month for the first time this year, and officials indicated more may be on the way to give the job market a boost. But too low interest rates can push upward on inflation, which has remained stubbornly stuck above the Fed's 2% target.

Comments from the Fed's chair, Jerome Powell, on Tuesday may have hinted more cuts to rates may be on the way.

In the bond market, the yield on the 10-year Treasury held at 4.03%, where it was late Tuesday.

One big winner because of expectations for coming cuts to rates has been gold, and its price rose 0.9% to top \$4,200 per ounce. It's up nearly 60% for the year so far because of a variety of reasons. Investors are looking to buy something that can offer protection from trade wars, real military wars and the prospect of higher inflation coming because of mountains of debt being amassed by the U.S. and other governments worldwide.

In stock markets abroad, indexes were mixed in Europe following a stronger finish in Asia.

South Korea's Kospi jumped 2.7%, and France's CAC 40 rose 2% for two of the world's bigger moves.

Trump claims India will stop buying Russian oil, escalating pressure on Moscow over Ukraine war

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said Wednesday that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi personally assured him that his country would stop buying Russian oil.

The change, which has not been confirmed by the Indian government, would boost Trump's efforts to pressure Moscow to negotiate an end to the war in Ukraine.

"There will be no oil. He's not buying oil," Trump said. The change won't take immediately, he said, but

"within a short period of time."

The Indian embassy in Washington did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Trump has been frustrated by his inability to force an end to the war in Ukraine, which began with Russia's invasion almost four years ago. He's expressed dissatisfaction with Russian President Vladimir Putin, whom he increasingly describes as the primary obstacle to a resolution, and he's scheduled to meet with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Friday.

India is the second biggest purchaser of Russian oil, after China, and Trump punished India with higher tariffs in August.

Leader of Madagascar's military coup tells AP he is 'taking the position of president'

By BRIAN INGANGA, NQOBILE NTSHANGASE and GERALD IMRAY Associated Press

ANTANANARIVO, Madagascar (AP) — The leader of Madagascar's military coup told The Associated Press on Wednesday that he is "taking the position of president" and that the armed forces would be in charge of the African island nation for up to two years before any elections are held.

Col. Michael Randrianirina, who led the rebellion that ousted President Andry Rajoelina on Tuesday following weeks of youth-led protests, said in his first interview with a global news outlet since taking power that he expects to be sworn in as the country's new leader in the next few days.

"There must be an oath-taking" to make his position official, Randrianirina said at his unit's barracks while flanked by fellow officers. "We are staying here for at least 18 months, at most two years."

Randrianirina announced Tuesday that the armed forces were taking power in Madagascar, a sprawling country of about 30 million people off of Africa's east coast that is the world's leading vanilla producer and is known for its unique biodiversity. Since gaining independence from France in 1960, it also has a history of coups and political crises.

The latest military takeover capped weeks of protests against Rajoelina and his government led by youth groups calling themselves "Gen Z Madagascar." The protesters, who also included labor unions and civic groups, have demanded better government and job opportunities, echoing youth-led protests elsewhere in the world. Among other things, the Madagascar protesters have railed against chronic water and electricity outages, limited access to higher education, government corruption and poverty, which affects roughly three out of every four Madagascans, according to the World Bank.

Although some suggest the military seized power on the backs of the civilian protesters, demonstrators cheered Randrianirina and other soldiers from his elite CAPSAT unit as they triumphantly rode through the streets of the capital, Antananarivo, on Tuesday, with one protest leader telling the AP "the military is listening to us."

The takeover was "an awakening of the people. It was launched by the youth. And the military supported us," said the protest leader, Safika, who only gave one name as has been typical with the demonstrators. "We must always be wary, but the current state of affairs gives us reason to be confident."

The protests reached a turning point Saturday when Randrianirina and soldiers from his unit sided with the demonstrators calling for the president to resign. Rajoelina said he fled to an undisclosed country because he feared for his life.

Randrianirina explained that he is taking over as Madagascar's head of state because the country's High Constitutional Court invited him to do so in the absence of Rajoelina. He previously said the military had acted on behalf of the people and cast the coup as a move to "restore" the country.

"We had to take responsibility yesterday because there is nothing left in the country, no president, no president in the senate, no government," Randrianirina said. The colonel said the military leadership was "accelerating" the appointment of a new prime minister "so that the crisis in the country does not last forever." He didn't give an exact time frame for that to happen.

Rajoelina, who first came to power as a transitional leader in a 2009 military coup, was elected president in 2018 and reelected in 2023. He fired his government last month in an attempt to appease the protest-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 51 of 65

ers after a crackdown by security forces left 22 people dead and more than 100 injured, according to the United Nations. Rajoelina's government disputed those figures.

The exiled Rajoelina, 51, has rejected the military takeover's legitimacy.

But Randrianirina pushed back on that, telling the AP: "What is he saying is illegal? We have an order from the High Constitutional Court. We did not force the HCC or point a gun at it to issue this."

Randrianirina's claim that his authority to take over as president came from the country's highest court seemed to contradict his announcement Tuesday that the military council that was taking power had suspended that court's powers.

In a statement, Rajoelina's office claimed that some of the high court's judges had been threatened so they would sign off on the colonel's ascendancy.

The African Union announced Wednesday that it had suspended Madagascar from its bodies with immediate effect "until constitutional order is restored in the country." The group previously suspended several other member states after military coups, including Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea.

U.N. Secretary General António Guterres, meanwhile, is "deeply concerned by the unconstitutional change of power in Madagascar" and hopes all stakeholders there can "work together to reach a peaceful settlement to the ongoing crisis and its root causes," his spokesperson, Stéphane Dujarric, said in a statement, noting that the U.N. will continue to work to "restore peace and stability in the country."

Some analysts have described Madagascar's youth movement as an expression of understandable grievances over government failures, and condemned the military takeover.

"Gen-Zers in Madagascar have been on the streets of the country protesting the lack of essential services, especially water and electricity, and the negative impact on their lives for almost a month," said Olufemi Taiwo, professor of Africana studies at Cornell University. "This is a civil society uprising and its resolution should not involve the military."

Democrats say they won't be intimidated by Trump's threats as the shutdown enters a third week

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Entering the third week of a government shutdown, Democrats say they are not intimidated or cowed by President Donald Trump's efforts to fire thousands of federal workers or by his threats of more firings to come.

Instead, Democrats appear emboldened, showing no signs of caving as they returned to Washington from their home states this week and twice more rejected a Republican bill to open the government. The vote Wednesday was the ninth time the GOP plan has failed.

"What people are saying is, you've got to stop the carnage," said Virginia Sen. Tim Kaine, describing what he heard from his constituents, including federal workers, as he traveled around his state over the weekend. "And you don't stop it by giving in."

Hawaii Sen. Brian Schatz said the firings are "a fair amount of bluster" and predicted said they ultimately will be overturned in court or otherwise reversed. That was already happening Wednesday, when a federal judge in California temporarily ordered the administration to stop the firings.

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer of New York said Wednesday that the layoffs are a "mistaken attempt" to sway Democratic votes. His House counterpart, Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries, said the administration's "intimidation tactics are not working. And will continue to fail."

Democratic senators say they are hearing instead from voters about health insurance subsidies that expire at the end of the year, the issue that the party has made central to the shutdown fight.

Sen. Chris Coons of Delaware said that the impact of the expiring health insurance subsidies on millions of people, along with cuts to Medicaid enacted by Republicans earlier this year, "far outweighs" any of the firings of federal workers that the administration is threatening.

Republicans, too, are confident in their strategy not to negotiate on the health care subsidies until Democrats give them the votes to reopen the government. There were no signs of any movement on either side.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 52 of 65

"We're barreling toward one of the longest shutdowns in American history," House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., said earlier this week.

Moderate Democrats aren't budging

In the first hours of the shutdown, which began at 12:01 a.m. EDT Oct. 1., it was not clear how long Democrats would hold out.

A group of moderate Democrats who had voted against the GOP bill immediately began private, informal talks with Republicans. The GOP lawmakers hoped enough Democrats would quickly change their votes to end a filibuster and pass the spending bill with the necessary 60 votes.

But the bipartisan talks over the expiring health care subsidies have dragged on without a resolution so far. Two weeks later, the moderates, including Sens. Jeanne Shaheen and Maggie Hassan of New Hampshire and Gary Peters of Michigan, are still voting no.

"Nothing about a government shutdown requires this or gives them new power to conduct mass layoffs," Peters said after the director of the White House's budget director, Russell Vought, announced that the firings had started on Friday.

DC-area lawmakers see advantages to shutdown

Another key group of Democrats digging in are lawmakers such as like Kaine who represent millions of federal workers in Virginia and Maryland. Kaine said the shutdown was preceded by "nine months of punitive behavior" as the Republican president has made cuts at federal agencies "and everybody knows who's to blame."

"Donald Trump is at war with his own workforce, and we don't reward CEOs who hate their own workers," Kaine said.

Appearing at a news conference Tuesday alongside supportive federal workers, Democratic lawmakers from Maryland and Virginia called on Republicans to come to the negotiating table.

"The message we have today is very simple," said Sen. Chris Van Hollen of Maryland. "Donald Trump and Russ Vought stop attacking federal employees, stop attacking the American people and start negotiating to reopen the federal government and address the looming health care crisis that is upon us."

Mass firings, and a judge's order to stop

In a court filing Friday, the White House Office of Management and Budget said well over 4,000 federal employees from eight departments and agencies would be fired in conjunction with the shutdown.

On Tuesday, Trump said his administration is using the shutdown to target federal programs that Democrats like and "they're never going to come back, in many cases."

"We are closing up Democrat programs that we disagree with and they're never going to open again," he said.

But U.S. District Judge Susan Illston in San Francisco said Wednesday that the cuts appeared politically motivated and were being carried out without much thought. She granted a temporary restraining order that unions had sought to block the cuts, saying she believed the evidence ultimately would show they were illegal.

"It's a human cost that cannot be tolerated," she said.

More votes in the Senate

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., held firm that Republicans would not negotiate until Democrats reopen the government. "We're willing to have a conversation on all of the other issues they want to talk about," he said Wednesday, but not until then.

The firings, Thune has repeatedly said, "are a situation that could be totally avoided."

As Democrats again rejected the GOP legislation to reopen the government, Republicans announced additional votes on individual spending bills, starting Thursday with the defense legislation that would fund salaries for the military. It was unclear whether Democrats would support it.

Supreme Court seems inclined to limit race-based electoral districts under the Voting Rights Act

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Wednesday appeared ready to gut a key tool of the Voting Rights Act that has helped root out racial discrimination in voting for more than a half century, a change that would boost Republican electoral prospects, particularly across the South.

During 2 1/2 hours of arguments, the court's six conservative justices seemed inclined to effectively strike down a Black majority congressional district in Louisiana because it relied too heavily on race.

Such an outcome would mark a fundamental change in the 1965 voting rights law, the centerpiece legislation of the Civil Rights Movement, that succeeded in opening the ballot box to Black Americans and reducing persistent discrimination in voting.

A ruling for Louisiana could open the door for legislatures to redraw congressional maps in southern states, helping Republican electoral prospects by eliminating majority Black and Latino districts that tend to favor Democrats. Legislatures already are free to draw extremely partisan districts, subject only to review by state courts, because of a 2019 Supreme Court decision.

Just two years ago, the court, by a 5-4 vote, affirmed a ruling that found a likely violation of Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act in a similar case over Alabama's political boundaries. Chief Justice John Roberts and Justice Brett Kavanaugh joined their three more liberal colleagues in the outcome.

Roberts and Kavanaugh struck a different tone Wednesday, especially in their questions to civil rights lawyer Janai Nelson.

The chief justice suggested the Alabama decision was tightly focused on its facts and should not be read to require a similar outcome in Louisiana.

Kavanaugh pressed Nelson on whether the time has come to end the use of race-based districts under the Voting Rights Act, rather than "allowing it to extend forever."

The court's liberal justices focused on the history of the Voting Rights Act in combating discrimination. Getting to the remedy of redrawing districts only happens if, as Justice Elena Kagan said, a court finds "a specific identified, proved violation of law."

A mid-decade battle over congressional redistricting already is playing out across the nation after Republican President Donald Trump began urging Texas and other GOP-controlled states to redraw their lines to make it easier for the GOP to hold its narrow majority in the House.

The court's conservative majority has been skeptical of considerations of race, most recently ending affirmative action in college admissions. Twelve years ago, the court bludgeoned another pillar of the landmark voting law that required states with a history of racial discrimination to get advance approval from the Justice Department or federal judges before making election-related changes.

The court has separately given state legislatures wide berth to gerrymander for political purposes. If the Supreme Court now weakens or strikes down the Voting Rights Act's Section 2, states would not be bound by any limits in how they draw electoral districts. Such a result would be expected to lead to extreme gerrymandering by whichever party is in power at the state level.

The court's Alabama decision in 2023 led to new districts there and in Louisiana that sent two more Black Democrats to Congress.

Now, though, the court has asked the parties to answer a fundamental question: "Whether the state's intentional creation of a second majority-minority congressional district violates the Fourteenth or Fifteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution."

Louisiana and the Trump administration joined with a group of white voters in arguing to invalidate the challenged district and make it much harder to claim discrimination in redistricting.

The arguments led Justice Sonia Sotomayor to assert that the administration's "bottom line is just get rid of Section 2."

Justice Department lawyer Hashim Mooppan disagreed and said state lawmakers would have no incentive to get rid of every majority Black district because doing so would create swing districts and imperil

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 54 of 65

some Republican incumbents.

In addition, Mooppan said, only 15 of the 60 Black members of the House represent majority Black districts. "But even if you eliminated Section 2 entirely, fully 75% of the Black congressmen in this country are in districts that are not protected by Section 2."

In the first arguments in the Louisiana case in March, Roberts sounded skeptical of the second majority Black district, which last year elected Democratic Rep. Cleo Fields. Roberts described the district as a "snake" that stretches more than 200 miles (320 kilometers) to link parts of the Shreveport, Alexandria, Lafayette and Baton Rouge areas.

The court fight over Louisiana's congressional districts has lasted three years.

The state's Republican-dominated legislature drew a new congressional map in 2022 to account for population shifts reflected in the 2020 census. But the changes effectively maintained the status quo of five Republican-leaning majority white districts and one Democratic-leaning majority Black district.

Civil rights advocates won a lower-court ruling that the districts likely discriminated against Black voters.

The state eventually drew a new map to comply with the court ruling and protect its influential Republican lawmakers, including House Speaker Mike Johnson. But white Louisiana voters claimed in their separate lawsuit that race was the predominant factor driving it. A three-judge court agreed, leading to the current high court case.

The court is expected to rule by early summer in 2026.

What is the chikungunya virus now transmitted in the US for the first time in years?

Associated Press undefined

A person living in the suburbs of New York City has tested positive for chikungunya, a mosquito-borne virus that is more often seen in South America and hasn't been transmitted on the U.S. mainland in a decade.

Health officials said the virus, which often causes fever and joint pain, was identified in a patient on Long Island who started experiencing symptoms in August after having traveled outside of the region, but not out of the country.

The patient likely got the virus from a mosquito bite, but it isn't clear where that happened. The virus has not been detected in local mosquito pools and isn't spread directly from one person to another.

Here's what to know about chikungunya:

What is chikungunya?

Chikungunya is a disease caused by a virus of the same name.

The chikungunya virus was first identified in people sickened during an outbreak in Tanzania in 1952. Its name is derived from a word in the Makonde language, which means "that which bends up," due to the severe pain it can cause.

Chikungunya is transmitted by infected mosquitoes and mostly causes mild symptoms. The majority of people who get chikungunya recover without needing medical attention after one to two weeks.

What are the symptoms of chikungunya?

Chikungunya typically produces symptoms including fever, muscle pain, nausea, fatigue and a rash.

But in rare cases, it can cause debilitating joint pain that persists for months or even years. Patients who get severely ill often require hospitalization because of the risk of organ damage.

The World Health Organization says severe cases and deaths are rare and mostly occur in babies or elderly people with underlying health conditions.

Is there a treatment or vaccine?

There is no specific treatment for chikungunya, but health workers can treat the symptoms by giving medicines to lower fevers or ease muscle pain.

Two vaccines have been approved in several regions, including Britain, Brazil, Canada and Europe. Those are mostly targeted at travelers and are not widely available in the countries most affected by chikungunya.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 55 of 65

Where does chikungunya normally occur?

Chikungunya causes regular outbreaks in Africa, Asia and the Americas, with occasional small epidemics in Europe.

As of August, there have been about 317,000 cases of chikungunya this year, including 135 deaths in 16 countries and territories, according to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. The countries that reported the highest number of infections were Brazil, Bolivia, Argentina and Peru.

What's happening in the United States?

The case confirmed in New York was the first locally acquired instance in the United States since 2015, meaning the person was infected without traveling elsewhere. Ten years ago, one person was infected in Texas, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Two cases were recorded in U.S. territories in 2019.

It's the first time that a locally acquired case has ever been detected in New York, the state Health Department said.

Health officials said the virus can be transmitted when a mosquito bites an infected traveler, becomes infected and bites another person.

The type of mosquito known to transmit chikungunya, the *Aedes albopictus* mosquito, is present in parts of downstate New York, and people should take care to avoid being bitten by wearing long sleeves and removing standing water from things like flowerpots, health officials said.

However, colder nighttime temperatures currently being recorded in New York make the transmission risk in the area "very low," state Health Commissioner James McDonald said in a statement.

Although locally acquired cases have been virtually nonexistent in recent years, the CDC has tracked a number of travel-related infections in the U.S., including 199 in 2024 and 152 in 2023, according to agency data.

Are we seeing more chikungunya outbreaks?

Yes.

The number of outbreaks has increased since 2000, just as there have been more outbreaks of other mosquito-transmitted diseases like dengue and Zika, according to Robert Jones, an assistant professor at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

Jones said in a statement that in 2013, chikungunya was first seen in the island of St. Martin and that over the next three years, cases were confirmed in almost 50 countries in the Caribbean and the Americas, with more than 1 million suspected cases.

Jones said the risk of chikungunya epidemics has risen due to climate change and urban expansion.

This family visit to a military base ended with ICE deporting a Marine's dad

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Parents of a U.S. Marine were detained by federal immigration officials and one of them was later deported after visiting family members at a California military base, a case that has drawn attention to how the government's immigration crackdown is touching military families.

Steve Rios, a Marine from Oceanside, California, told NBC 7 San Diego that his parents, Esteban Rios and Luisa Rodriguez, were taken into custody late last month while picking up his pregnant sister, Ashley Rios, and her husband, who is also a Marine, at Camp Pendleton.

The couple, who came to the United States from Mexico three decades ago and had pending green card applications, were stopped by immigration agents and later released with ankle monitors, Steve Rios said. At a later check-in with federal immigration officials, they were detained and taken into custody, he said.

Esteban Rios, who had been wearing a hat and shirt that read "Proud Dad of a U.S. Marine," was deported on Friday, his son said.

"He said, 'Yeah, this is my lucky shirt, so we'll be fine,'" Rios recalled his father saying.

Marine Corps recruiters have long promoted enlistment as a path to stability for families without legal

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 56 of 65

immigration status, but experts say those assurances have eroded as federal authorities have moved to enforce existing laws more strictly.

The Marine Corps previously told The Associated Press that recruiters have been informed they are “not the proper authority” to “imply that the Marine Corps can secure immigration relief for applicants or their families.”

A spokesperson for the Department of Homeland Security, Tricia McLaughlin, said in a statement to The Associated Press that people who break the law would face consequences.

Requests for additional information on Wednesday were not immediately returned. Messages seeking additional comment were sent to the contact addresses and telephone numbers listed for the Rios family.

The episode comes as the Trump administration pursues an aggressive immigration enforcement campaign, which has at times ensnared the relatives of military members and veterans.

In June, a Louisiana Marine veteran said immigration authorities detained his wife even though she was still nursing their 3-month-old daughter.

And in July, a U.S. Army veteran who was born and raised in California was arrested during an immigration raid at a marijuana farm where he worked in security. George Retes, 25, was detained for three days at the Metropolitan Detention Center in downtown Los Angeles, then released without being charged.

Pakistan and Afghanistan announce ceasefire after deadliest clashes in years

By MUNIR AHMED Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Pakistan and Afghanistan on Wednesday announced a ceasefire following days of the deadliest clashes in years that killed dozens of people on both sides of the border.

The pause came after appeals from major regional powers, including Saudi Arabia and Qatar, as the violence threatened to further destabilize a region where groups, including the Islamic State group and al-Qaida, are trying to resurface.

Pakistan accuses Afghanistan of harboring armed groups, a charge rejected by the country’s Taliban rulers. Pakistan is grappling with militant attacks that have increased since 2021, when the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan.

Pakistan’s Foreign Ministry described the ceasefire as a 48-hour one and said the ceasefire was at Afghanistan’s request. Key border crossings remained closed.

Moments later, the Taliban government’s chief spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, said the truce was at the “insistence” of the Pakistani side. His social media post did not mention a 48-hour time frame.

Earlier Wednesday, Pakistan said its troops killed dozens of Afghan security forces and militants in overnight fighting.

Humanitarian group Emergency NGO, which runs a surgical center in the Afghan capital of Kabul, said it received five dead and 40 wounded following explosions in the capital.

Dejan Panic, Emergency NGO’s country director in Afghanistan, said the victims had “shrapnel wounds, blunt force trauma and burns.” In a statement, he said 10 were in critical condition.

It was unclear what caused the blasts. There was an oil tanker explosion, confirmed by the Taliban. And two Pakistani security officials said their army had hit militant hideouts. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak with the media.

Mujahid, the Taliban spokesman, earlier said that Pakistani forces used light and heavy weapons in assaults on Spin Boldak in southern Kandahar province, with more than a dozen people killed and over 100 wounded. Afghan forces returned fire and killed several Pakistani soldiers, Mujahid said.

Pakistan maintains it has repelled “unprovoked” assaults, but denies targeting civilians during the fighting. Meanwhile, people in the Pakistani border town of Chaman reported mortars falling near villages.

“People who live close to the border are leaving the area,” said resident Najibullah Khan, who urged the countries to end the fighting for good.

Pakistan’s border regions have experienced violence since 1979, when it became a frontline state in the

U.S.-backed war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.

"After the Sept. 11 attacks, Pakistan's tribal belt descended into chaos as the Afghan Taliban, al-Qaida and other groups operated from both sides of the border for attacks on NATO forces and Pakistani security forces," said Abdullah Khan, a defense analyst and managing director of the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies.

New York health officials confirm state's first locally acquired case of chikungunya virus

MINEOLA, N.Y. (AP) — A person living in New York has tested positive for the chikungunya virus in what state health officials say is the first reported transmission of the mosquito-borne illness within the United States in six years.

The state Department of Health said Tuesday that the virus, which has been spreading in China and elsewhere, was identified in a person living in Nassau County on Long Island.

The county's health department, in a separate statement, said the person began experiencing symptoms in August after having traveled outside of the region, but not out of the country.

It's not clear how exactly the person, whom authorities have not named, contracted the virus.

Health officials say the person was likely bit by an infected mosquito, but they also say the virus has not been detected in local mosquito pools and there is no evidence of ongoing transmission.

The type of mosquito known to carry chikungunya is present in parts of the New York City metropolitan area, including suburban Long Island. The disease cannot be spread directly from one person to another.

Since mosquitoes are less active during the fall's cooler temperatures, the current risk of transmission is "very low," said state Health Commissioner James McDonald.

Chikungunya is found mostly in tropical and subtropical regions, according to the state health department. Its symptoms include fever and joint pain, headache, muscle pain, joint swelling and rashes.

The illness is rarely fatal and most patients recover within a week, though newborns, older adults and people with chronic health conditions such as high blood pressure and diabetes are at higher risk, the agency said.

The U.S. and its territories have not seen a locally acquired case of the virus since 2019.

New York state has had three other cases of the virus this year, though all were linked to international travel to regions where the virus is prevalent, state health officials said.

Local mosquitoes can transmit other dangerous viruses, such as West Nile, Eastern Equine Encephalitis and Jamestown Canyon viruses.

LeBron James, Chris Paul and Kyle Lowry enter season as the NBA's largest 20-year club

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

LeBron James' beard has quite a bit of gray in it these days. Chris Paul has been hearing questions for years about how much longer he wants to play. Kyle Lowry already has his retirement job lined up, for whenever that day comes.

Meet the NBA's current 20-year club. It's bigger than ever before.

There are no players currently in the league — and very few in the league's 80-season history — with more seniority than the trio of James, Paul and Lowry. For the first time, the NBA has three players simultaneously entering their 20th seasons; James, when he makes his 2025-26 debut, will be the first 23-year player in league history, while Paul is going into his 21st season and Lowry is entering his 20th.

"The love of the game is still high. The love of the process is even higher," James said. "So, that's what continues to push me to play this game. I mean, it is really that simple."

There's nothing simple about it. To still be contributing at this level, at this point in their careers, is practically unheard of.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 58 of 65

All three invest plenty of their own money (they've made a combined \$1.2 billion in NBA salaries) in their own individualized programs that have helped them survive the rigors of NBA life for this long.

James' workout regimen is legendary, yet still not invincible — he'll miss the start of this season while dealing with sciatica and there's no firm timetable for when he'll actually take the floor with the Los Angeles Lakers to start Year 23.

Lowry, at least since the NBA began tracking such stats, is the NBA's all-time leader in charges taken, which means he's probably taken more hard falls than anybody. And last season with San Antonio, Paul became the first player in NBA history to play 82 games in a 20th year of a career — and he started all of them, too.

"I've always believed in 'keep stacking days' and that you just have to show up every single day, every single day," said Paul, who rejoined the Los Angeles Clippers this summer. "So, that's what I plan on bringing to this team. ... My role on this team is obviously different than it's been the past 20 years of being in the NBA, but showing up every day, if I can show some of the guys what it looks like every day to clock in and clock out, I'm excited for it."

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar was the first player in the 20-season club, getting there in 1988-89. Robert Parish followed in 1995-96 (and played a 21st season as well). Kevin Willis played 21 seasons, his career ending in 2006-07.

The rest of the entrants into the club have all come in the last decade: Kevin Garnett, Kobe Bryant, Dirk Nowitzki, Vince Carter (the league's first 22-year player before James tied that mark last year), Jamal Crawford, Udonis Haslem, James, Paul and soon, Lowry.

What the likes of James, Paul and Lowry have done, and how they've done it, has been noticed by everyone — veteran and younger players alike.

"I'm asking and taking advice from these guys and I want to take even more advice from them in the future," said San Antonio center Victor Wembanyama, who is going into his third season. "They're definitely examples."

Milwaukee forward Giannis Antetokounmpo, who is entering his 13th season, pointed out that constant innovation in medicine, recovery, technology and more has made it possible for players to extend their careers if they choose to put in the effort.

"At this point, if you don't follow the blueprint that guys like Vince Carter, Dirk, LeBron ... if you don't follow that blueprint, I don't know what blueprint you should follow," Antetokounmpo said. "Those guys have been playing at a high level for so many years, they've been taking such good care of their body. They have their own physio, they have their chef. You know how you sit down with your financial advisor four times a year and you go through your finances? I think you should sit down with your doctors and your physios four times a year, minimum, to talk about what you want from your body."

Lowry is back with the Philadelphia 76ers this season, though he has signed with another team as well — Amazon Prime, which he's joining as an analyst this season, even while still playing. It's a multiyear deal with one of the NBA's new broadcast partners, with the assumption that when he stops playing he'll simply slide into a bigger analysis role.

He'll debut on Amazon next week. But his mind is fully on Year 20 as a player, not Year 1 of TV.

"I love the game of basketball and I have had the ability to play professional basketball for 20 years and basketball my whole life," Lowry said. "When you wake up every day you should still be motivated to play basketball. ... And I have some unbelievable teammates, unbelievable teammates. That's my motivation. I just want to continue to give what I've learned for as long as I can."

Why a Supreme Court case from Louisiana will matter for the future of the Voting Rights Act

By GARY FIELDS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Voting rights activists were relieved in 2023 when, in a surprise to some, the Supreme Court upheld the most important remaining element of the Voting Rights Act.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 59 of 65

The ruling forced Alabama and later Louisiana to redraw their congressional maps to give Black residents greater representation, moves that eventually sent two additional Black lawmakers to Washington.

Two years later, the Voting Rights Act's Section 2 is before the court again. This time, it's a rehearing of a Louisiana lawsuit over the state's redrawn congressional map in a case that revolves around the same part of the 60-year-old law.

At the heart of Wednesday's arguments lies a simple question, and one with potentially far-reaching consequences: Will the court, with the same lineup of justices who decided the 2023 case, change its mind about the landmark law?

What is Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act?

Section 2 is the primary way plaintiffs can challenge racially discriminatory election practices. For nearly 50 years, a companion part of the law, Section 5, required certain states and counties with a history of discriminatory voting practices to get federal review before changing their election rules. Most of those places were in the South.

In 2013, the Supreme Court issued a 5-4 decision in a case known as *Shelby v. Holder* that removed the preclearance requirement in the Civil Rights-era law. States that had been under its jurisdiction began announcing changes to their election and voting laws, most of them restrictive.

That accelerated in Republican-controlled states after President Donald Trump began lying about his loss in the 2020 election, falsely claiming it was due to widespread fraud.

A decision against Section 2 would largely neuter the Voting Rights Act, said Binny Miller, a law professor at the American University.

"When Section 5 existed, it caught a lot of the problems that would have turned into Section 2 litigation," he said.

Without those two pillars of the law, plaintiffs would have a much harder time challenging new voting restrictions. Instead, they would have to prove that lawmakers intended to discriminate.

More Black representation in Congress

Louisiana's Republican-dominated Legislature drew a new congressional map in 2022 to account for population shifts reflected in the 2020 census. But the changes effectively maintained the status quo of five Republican-leaning majority white districts and one Democratic-leaning majority Black district in a state where the population is about one-third Black.

After civil rights advocates challenged the map, a district judge and then a federal appeals court panel agreed that the original map had likely violated Section 2.

The Supreme Court put that ruling on hold while it took up a similar case out of Alabama. The court's 2023 ruling in favor of a second Black district there led to the election of Rep. Shomari Figures.

After that ruling, Republican Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry urged the Legislature to revamp the state's congressional map and create a new majority minority district that would give Black residents a greater chance of electing a representative of their choice. His other goal was to maintain safe Republican districts, including those of House Speaker Mike Johnson and House Majority Leader Steve Scalise.

The new 6th Congressional District, represented by Democratic Rep. Cleo Fields, stretches more than 200 miles (320 kilometers), linking parts of the Shreveport, Alexandria, Lafayette and Baton Rouge areas.

Lawsuit from white plaintiffs challenges the new district

A different set of plaintiffs, a group of self-described "non-African Americans," in January 2024 filed a lawsuit that claimed the new map that led to Fields' election was illegal because it was driven too much by race, in violation of the Constitution.

In court filings, those plaintiffs have argued that the basis for the new district is racial and does not follow the standards for drawing a district, including compactness: "The State has not even tried to cover its motives or offer race-neutral reasons for the map," one court filing said.

The Supreme Court heard the case in March but reached no decision in that term. In an unusual move, it instead ordered a new briefing on the case, leading to Wednesday's arguments.

Why is the case being argued again?

The court has asked the parties to answer the question of: "Whether the state's intentional creation of

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 60 of 65

a second majority-minority congressional district violates the Fourteenth or Fifteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution.”

Those amendments, adopted in the aftermath of the Civil War, were intended to bring about political equality for Black Americans.

Justice Clarence Thomas signaled at least one point of view in his dissent against not addressing the case in the last session, arguing that the court’s interpretation of Section 2 is in direct conflict with the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution.

“The Constitution is supreme over statutes and no intervening developments will change that,” he argued.

In the run-up to the new hearing, Louisiana abandoned its defense of the map it had drawn and urged the Supreme Court to reject any consideration of race in redistricting.

There is a range of possible outcomes. The court could send the case back to a lower court with instructions to draw a new map, including reexamining some of those presented by the original plaintiffs. On the extreme, the court could say that Section 2 and its reliance on racial considerations is out of line with the 14th and 15th amendments.

How could undercutting Section 2 affect future elections?

The new Alabama district created after the 2023 Supreme Court decision would almost certainly be drawn out of existence, along with the Louisiana seat now held by Fields. All other congressional districts that have resulted from Section 2 cases also would be in jeopardy.

It doesn’t stop there.

The role of Section 2 is often discussed in relation to Congress. But about three-quarters of all Section 2 lawsuits pertain to state and local government bodies, said Kareem Crayton, senior director for voting and representation at the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University.

City councils, county commissions, school boards and other local elected offices “have been the direct recipients” of plaintiffs bringing those cases, he said.

A significant ruling that dilutes that part of the Voting Rights Act also would likely negate another voting rights case coming to the court. That one involves two North Dakota Native American tribes that have sued to overturn a legislative map they say does not give them representation.

A panel of the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled against the tribes and in doing so overturned decades of precedent. It said private individuals and organizations cannot bring voting rights challenges. The judges said that right was reserved for the U.S. Justice Department, even though it’s responsible for filing only a fraction of those types of cases.

That case would seem to be moot if the Supreme Court undercuts Section 2 in the Louisiana case, especially if it all but prohibits challenges to voting or election laws thought to be racially discriminatory.

Trump threatens to yank World Cup games from Boston though it’s up to FIFA to choose sites

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Tuesday threatened to relocate World Cup matches set to be played next year in suburban Boston, after suggesting that parts of the city had been “taken over” by unrest.

Foxborough, Massachusetts, home to the NFL’s New England Patriots and about 30 miles from Boston, is set to stage matches as the U.S. cohosts the 2026 World Cup with Mexico and Canada. Trump was asked about Boston’s mayor, Michelle Wu, a Democrat whom he called “intelligent” but “radical left.”

“We could take them away,” Trump said of the World Cup games. “I love the people of Boston and I know the games are sold out. But your mayor is not good.”

He suggested “they’re taking over parts of Boston” without offering details, but added “we could get them back in about two seconds.”

The Trump administration has already deployed National Guard troops to Washington and Memphis, and efforts to do so in Chicago and Portland, Oregon, have sparked legal fights.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 61 of 65

Wu's office did not react directly to Trump's threat, issuing a statement that read, "Boston is honored and excited to host World Cup matches, and we look forward to welcoming fans from around the world to our beautiful city, the cradle of liberty and city of champions."

Trump's comments came during his meeting with Argentina President Javier Milei and it wasn't immediately clear what he was referring to by parts of Boston having been seized. Earlier this month, however, there were multiple arrests in connection with a pro-Palestinian protest that turned violent on Boston Common. Four police officers were injured.

Trump has previously suggested he could declare cities "not safe" for the 104-game soccer tournament and alter a detailed hosting plan that FIFA confirmed in 2022. It includes games at NFL stadiums near New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco.

World Cup host sites aren't up to Trump. The 11 U.S. cities — plus three in Mexico and two in Canada — are contracted with FIFA, which would face significant logistical and legal issues to make changes in the eight months before the June 11 kickoff.

"It's FIFA's tournament, FIFA's jurisdiction, FIFA makes those decisions," the soccer body's vice president Victor Montagliani said earlier this month at a sports business conference in London.

Trump nonetheless said, "If somebody is doing a bad job, and if I feel there's unsafe conditions, I would call Gianni — the head of FIFA who's phenomenal -- and I would say, 'Let's move into another location' and they would do that."

The president meant FIFA head Gianni Infantino, a close ally. Trump said Infantino "wouldn't love to do it, but he'd do it very easily."

Scientists hope underwater fiber-optic cables can help save endangered orcas

By ANNIKA HAMMERSCHLAG Associated Press

SAN JUAN ISLAND, Wash. (AP) — As dawn broke over San Juan Island, a team of scientists stood on the deck of a barge and unspooled over a mile of fiber-optic cable into the frigid waters of the Salish Sea. Working by headlamp, they fed the line from the rocky shore down to the seafloor — home to the region's orcas.

The bet is that the same hair-thin strands that carry internet signals can be transformed into a continuous underwater microphone to capture the clicks, calls and whistles of passing whales — information that could reveal how they respond to ship traffic, food scarcity and climate change. If the experiment works, the thousands of miles of fiber-optic cables that already crisscross the ocean floor could be turned into a vast listening network that could inform conservation efforts worldwide.

The technology, called Distributed Acoustic Sensing, or DAS, was developed to monitor pipelines and detect infrastructure problems. Now University of Washington scientists are adapting it to listen to the ocean. Unlike traditional hydrophones that listen from a single spot, DAS turns the entire cable into a sensor, allowing it to pinpoint the exact location of an animal and determine the direction it's heading.

"We can imagine that we have thousands of hydrophones along the cable recording data continuously," said Shima Abadi, professor at the University of Washington Bothell School of STEM and the University of Washington School of Oceanography. "We can know where the animals are and learn about their migration patterns much better than hydrophones."

The researchers have already proven the technology works with large baleen whales. In a test off the Oregon coast, they recorded the low-frequency rumblings of fin whales and blue whales using existing telecommunications cables.

But orcas present a bigger challenge: Their clicks and calls operate at high frequencies at which the technology hasn't yet been tested.

Fighting for survival

The stakes are high. The Southern Resident orcas that frequent the Salish Sea are endangered, with a population hovering around 75. The whales face a triple threat: underwater noise pollution, toxic con-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 62 of 65

taminants and food scarcity.

"We have an endangered killer whale trying to eat an endangered salmon species," said Scott Veirs, president of Beam Reach Marine Science and Sustainability, an organization that develops open-source acoustic systems for whale conservation.

The Chinook salmon that orcas depend on have declined dramatically. Since the Pacific Salmon Commission began tracking numbers in 1984, populations have dropped 60% due to habitat loss, overfishing, dams and climate change.

Orcas use echolocation – rapid clicks that bounce off objects – to find salmon in murky water. Ship noise can mask those clicks, making it difficult for them to hunt.

If DAS works as hoped, it could give conservationists real-time information to protect the whales. For instance, if the system detects orcas heading south toward Seattle and calculates their travel speed, scientists could alert Washington State Ferries to postpone noisy activities or to slow down until the whales pass.

"It will for sure help with dynamic management and long-term policy that will have real benefits for the whales," Veirs said.

The technology would also answer basic questions about orca behavior that have eluded scientists, such as determining whether their communication changes when they're in different behavioral states and how they hunt together. It could even enable researchers to identify which sound is coming from a particular whale — a kind of voice recognition for orcas.

Beyond the Salish Sea

The implications extend far beyond the Salish Sea. With some 870,000 miles (1.4 million kilometers) of fiber-optic cables already installed underwater globally, the infrastructure for ocean monitoring largely exists. It just needs to be tapped.

"One of the most important challenges for managing wildlife, conserving biodiversity and combating climate change is that there's just a lack of data overall," said Yuta Masuda, director of science at Allen Family Philanthropies, which helped fund the project.

The timing is critical. The High Seas Treaty enters into force in January, which will allow for new marine protected areas in international waters. But scientists still don't understand how human activities affect most ocean species or where protections are most needed. A dataset as vast as the one the global web of submarine cables could provide might help determine which areas should be prioritized for protection.

"We think this has a lot of promise to fill in those key data gaps," Masuda said.

Back on the barge, the team faced a delicate task: fusing two fibers together above the rolling swell. They struggled to align the strands in a fusion splicer, a device that precisely positions the fiber ends before melting them together with an electric current. The boat rocked. They steadied their hands and tried again, and again. Finally, the weld held.

Data soon began flowing to a computer on shore, appearing as waterfall plots — cascading visualizations that show sound frequencies over time. Nearby, cameras trained on the water stood ready so that if a vocalization was detected, researchers could link a behavior with a specific call.

All that was left was to sit and wait for orcas.

Former Kenyan premier Raila Odinga, a key figure in African democracy efforts, dies at 80

By EVELYNE MUSAMBI and RODNEY MUHUMUZA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Raila Odinga, a former prime minister of Kenya and perennial presidential candidate whose populist campaigns challenged one-party rule, rattled authorities and gave him outsized influence on political life in the East African country, died Wednesday of a heart attack while traveling in India. He was 80.

His death was confirmed by Devamatha Hospital in Kerala State, where he was taken after he collapsed during a morning walk. A hospital statement said Odinga didn't respond to resuscitation efforts.

There were somber scenes at his home in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi, where mourners included national

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 63 of 65

leaders. Tributes cited his commitment to democracy.

President William Ruto declared a seven-day mourning period during which national flags will fly at half-staff, calling Odinga's death an "immense and immeasurable loss." Odinga will have a state funeral, Ruto said.

Odinga had recently signed a political pact with Ruto that saw his opposition party involved in government policy-making and its members appointed to the cabinet.

But his ambition was to become Kenya's president, and he ran five times over three decades — sometimes with enough support that many believed he might win.

He came close to taking the presidency in 2007, when he narrowly lost to incumbent Mwai Kibaki in a disputed election marred by ethnic violence. And in 2017, a court nullified the presidential election — a first in Africa — after Odinga's challenge but he decided to boycott the fresh vote, asserting it wouldn't be credible without reforms.

Although Odinga never succeeded at becoming president, for many he was a revered figure and statesman whose activism helped steer Kenya into a vibrant multiparty democracy.

Violence followed 2007 presidential bid

Odinga, a member of the Luo ethnic group in western Nyanza province, reached the peak of his political career in the 2007 presidential race, winning the support of leaders from other tribes and drawing massive crowds during campaign events.

Although Kibaki, of the Kikuyu ethnic group, had posted good economic figures in his first term, his government had been weakened by corruption scandals. The official results — Odinga's 44% against Kibaki's 46% — was the closest in Kenyan history.

Odinga's camp rejected that result, provoked in part by an unreliable electoral authority whose leader said later that he did not know whether Kibaki had won.

Protests erupted in Nairobi almost immediately after Kibaki's inauguration, and violence spread to other parts of Kenya as people were targeted along ethnic lines: Luos and Kalenjins targeting Kikuyus, and Kikuyus mobilizing reprisal attacks.

Hundreds of people were killed in days of violence that shattered Kenya's status as a stable democracy in a volatile region.

Although Odinga was never accused of inciting violence, others — including future presidents Ruto and Uhuru Kenyatta — were. They were among six suspects who faced criminal charges related to post-election violence when the International Criminal Court opened its investigation in 2010.

The case never yielded any successful prosecutions, with charges withdrawn, terminated or tossed out amid claims of witness intimidation and political interference.

After the turmoil, Odinga became prime minister in a unity government put together with the mediation of the international community.

Early activism, detention and exile

Raila Amolo Odinga was born on Jan. 7, 1945, in Kisumu, a city on the shores of Lake Victoria near the border with Uganda.

The son of Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, Kenya's first vice president, he attended local schools until he left to study engineering in East Germany. Upon returning in the 1970s, he taught at the University of Nairobi and started a range of businesses, including a successful one selling liquid petroleum gas cylinders.

Odinga first rose to prominence as a political activist fighting against the one-party rule of President Daniel arap Moi in the 1980s. He was linked to a failed coup plot by a group of air force officers who tried to take power in 1982.

Some of the coup leaders were convicted of treason and executed, and the names of Odinga and his father came up during interrogations of some suspects. Odinga was accused of treason, and though the charge was later dropped, he spent much of the next decade in detention.

Odinga described the harsh conditions of imprisonment and alleged torture, including an assault by a police officer who hit him with a wooden table leg. He insisted that while he had been involved in educating and mobilizing people to bring about change in Kenya at the time of the coup attempt, he had never

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 64 of 65

advocated violence.

He briefly went into exile in Europe in 1991 after he was freed.

A return to Kenya, and politics

Odinga returned to Kenya in 1992 and won a seat in the national assembly as an opposition lawmaker representing a constituency in Nairobi, winning massive support among people disaffected by official corruption and poverty.

In 2001 he accepted a position in government as Moi's energy minister, unsuccessfully angling for a ticket as the ruling party's standard-bearer.

He was instrumental in the rise of Kibaki, an economist without a popular touch that he backed in the 2002 presidential race and who would be his rival in the disputed election of 2007.

Even as he grew older, appearing drowsy at campaign rallies, Odinga never seemed to lose his zest for politics, and even some of his rivals conceded that he was an excellent mobilizer.

In 2017, speaking on civil disobedience after he lost his fourth presidential campaign, Odinga told The Associated Press that street protests were a democratic measure permitted by the country's constitution.

"If a regime is undemocratic, if a regime does not enjoy legitimacy, the people are justified to resist that regime," he said.

Odinga's last campaign for president was in 2022, when he was backed by the outgoing president, Kenyatta, in a race against Ruto. He lost again and went on to assert that he had been cheated of victory, and launched a wave of street protests.

Earlier in 2025, he lost a bid to become the executive head of the African Union Commission, the body that runs the continental African Union.

Odinga's survivors include his wife, Ida.

Today in History: October 16, Cuban Missile Crisis begins

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, Oct. 16, the 289th day of 2025. There are 76 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Oct. 16, 1962, the Cuban missile crisis began as President John F. Kennedy was informed that reconnaissance photographs had revealed the presence of Soviet nuclear missile sites in Cuba.

Also on this date:

In 1758, American lexicographer Noah Webster was born in Hartford, Connecticut.

In 1793, Marie Antoinette, the queen of France, was beheaded during the French Revolution.

In 1859, radical abolitionist John Brown led an unsuccessful raid on the U.S. arsenal at Harpers Ferry in what was then western Virginia. The raid failed to spark Brown's intended slave rebellion, but deepened North-South animosities leading to the Civil War. (Ten of Brown's men were killed, others fled, and Brown and six followers were caught and executed.)

In 1934, Chinese communists, under siege by the Nationalists, began their "long march" lasting a year from southeastern to northwestern China.

In 1964, China set off its first atomic bomb, codenamed "596," on the Lop Nur Test Ground.

In 1968, American athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos sparked controversy at the Mexico City Olympics by giving "Black power" salutes during a victory ceremony after they had won gold and bronze medals in the 200-meter race.

In 1978, the College of Cardinals of the Roman Catholic Church chose Cardinal Karol Wojtyla (voy-TEE'-wah) to be the new pope; he took the name John Paul II.

In 1984, Anglican Bishop Desmond Tutu was named winner of the Nobel Peace Prize for his decades of non-violent struggle for racial equality in South Africa.

In 1987, 18-month-old Jessica McClure was pulled from an abandoned well in Midland, Texas, after being stuck there for more than two days. The efforts to rescue "Baby Jessica" captured the attention of the nation.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Oct. 16, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 134 ~ 65 of 65

In 1991, a gunman opened fire at a Luby's Cafeteria in Killeen, Texas, killing 23 people before taking his own life.

In 1995, the Million Man March, a gathering of Black men meant to foster unity in the face of economic and social issues affecting African Americans, was held in Washington, D.C.

In 2017, Army Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl, who had been captured and held by the Taliban for five years after walking away from his post in Afghanistan in 2009, pleaded guilty to desertion and misbehavior before the enemy. He was subsequently given no prison time after submitting evidence of torture at the hands of the Taliban. A federal judge vacated his military conviction in 2023.

In 2024, more than 140 people, including children, were killed in Nigeria when an overturned gasoline tanker truck exploded in flames while they tried to scoop up spilled fuel. Dozens more were injured in the massive inferno in Jigawa state.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Fernanda Montenegro is 96. Actor Barry Corbin is 85. Musician Bob Weir is 78. Actor-director Tim Robbins is 67. Rock musician Flea (Red Hot Chili Peppers) is 63. Filmmaker Kenneth Lonergan is 63. Actor Terri J. Vaughn is 56. Singer John Mayer is 48. Former WNBA point guard Sue Bird is 45. Actor Caterina Scorsone is 44. Philadelphia Phillies outfielder Bryce Harper is 33. Tennis player Naomi Osaka is 28.