

# Groton Daily Independent

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## 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.



## Sunday, Oct. 19

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

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

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

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

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

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

2nd Grade GBB Practice, 4 p.m.

Dance Team Practice, 5 p.m.

5th Grade GBB Practice, 4 p.m.

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# 1440

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

## '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.

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## 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.



**Football**  
Groton Area at Baltic  
Friday., Oct. 17, 7 p.m.



Groton  
Area  
Tigers  
Groton, SD

**GDILIVE**

 YouTube

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**Groton Daily Independent**

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



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## Tigers Sweep Deuel; Hanson Praises Team Depth and Culture

GROTON — The Groton Area Tigers volleyball team kept their winning rhythm alive Thursday night, cruising past the Deuel Cardinals in straight sets, 25-17, 25-7, and 25-14. With the victory, the Tigers improved to 16-4 heading into the Milbank Tournament on Saturday.

### Match Recap

Groton shook off an early 5-1 deficit in the opening set by rattling off eight straight points to seize momentum. Behind strong hitting from Taryn Traphagen and steady serving from Jaedyn Penning and Chesney Weber, the Tigers took the opener 25-17.

The second set was all Groton, as the Tigers jumped to an 8-1 lead and never looked back in a 25-7 win. The third set saw more resistance from Deuel, with five early ties before Groton pushed ahead 13-9 and finished off the sweep, 25-14.

Weber was perfect on the night—16-for-16 in both attacks and serving—finishing with 5 kills, 3 ace serves, 6 digs, and 22 assists. Traphagen dominated at the net with 7 kills, 3 solo blocks, and 2 assisted blocks. Penning delivered 5 kills, 5 aces, and 8 digs, while Tevan Hanson, Rylee Dunker, and McKenna Krause added valuable kills and front-line presence.

Groton finished with 11 ace serves, 31 kills, 28 assists, 37 digs, and 6 blocks while earning 69 percent of their total points for the match.

### Coach Hanson's Reflections

Head coach Chelsea Hanson said the Tigers were pleased with the win but found opportunities to keep learning even in a sweep.

"We kind of knew that Deuel maybe wasn't as skilled of a team," Hanson said, "but they did some things really well. I told their coach that was one of the best blocking teams we've played against. We haven't been blocked four times in a set all year."

Despite early frustration against Deuel's blocking, Hanson challenged her hitters to stay aggressive.

"The longer the season goes, the better the teams we play. I told them if we get blocked, we can come back from it. We just worked on finding shots and trying little things throughout the game."

Hanson noted that the Tigers gave up seven of Deuel's 14 points in the final set due to unforced errors — a reminder that discipline remains a focus.

"Sometimes that's hard in games where there's not a lot of intensity," she said. "You can get comfortable playing with a cushion."

### Team Depth and Culture

Hanson also highlighted the depth and unity of her roster.

"My goal all the time is to make sure we get everyone from the bench in the game," she said. "We got Abby Fjeldheim her first varsity kill tonight — that was exciting. The girls are always so happy for each other. I love their energy and how they celebrate one another."

With so much talent available, lineup decisions can be challenging — but Hanson considers it a blessing.

"I think we have the best bench in the state," she said. "I'm convinced we don't have a JV and a varsity — we have two varsity teams. At any point, any of the girls on the bench can go in and do what we need them to do."

She credited the players for embracing that competitive dynamic.

"It's not easy for high school girls to accept playing time changes," Hanson said. "But we talk about it a lot — there isn't a big line between player one and player twelve. They push each other, they support each other, and that's why we're doing so well."

### Looking Ahead

Groton now turns its attention to the Milbank Tournament on Saturday, where the Tigers will play four matches against a mix of familiar and new opponents.

"We'll see Beresford, Great Plains Lutheran again, and possibly Sioux Valley or Mobridge depending on the bracket," Hanson said. "Tournaments are always fun — you only need two sets to win, so you've got



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to show up ready. We're excited and in good shape to play."

The Tigers' team-first mindset and consistent energy have become defining traits of this year's group, and Hanson says that culture is the heart of their success.

"They just want each other to succeed," she said. "That's what makes this team special."

## Groton Area 3, Deuel 0

(25-17, 25-7, 25-14) — October 16, 2025

### Team Totals

Category	Groton Area	Deuel
Serving	57/63 (90%) – 11 aces	2 aces
Attacks	64/78 (82%) – 31 kills	10 kills
Assists	28	9
Digs	37	30
Blocks	6	7
Points Earned	52 of 75 (69%)	17 of 38 (44%)

### Set-by-Set Points Earned

Set	Groton Earned	Deuel Earned
1	18 of 25 (72%)	9 of 17 (53%)
2	19 of 25 (76%)	2 of 7 (29%)
3	15 of 25 (60%)	6 of 14 (42%)
Total	52 of 75 (69%)	17 of 38 (44%)

### Groton Area Individual Leaders

Player	Attacks/Kills	Serving/Aces	Digs	Blocks	Assists
Chesney Weber	16/16 – 5 kills	16/16 – 3 aces	6	1	22
Taryn Traphagen	9/10 – 7 kills	—	—	3 solo, 2 ast.	—
Jaedyn Penning	5 kills	19/20 – 5 aces	8	—	—
Rylee Dunker	5 kills	—	—	—	—
Tevan Hanson	11/15 – 6 kills	—	—	—	—
McKenna Krause	3 kills	—	—	2 ast.	—
Talli Wright	1 kill	1 ace	—	—	3
McKenna Tietz	—	2 aces	—	—	—
Jerica Locke	—	8/8 – 1 ace	6	—	—
Abby Fjeldheim	1 kill	—	—	—	—
Sydney Locke	1 kill	—	—	—	—

### Deuel Individual Leaders

Player	Kills	Blocks	Assists	Digs	Aces
Alina Carlson	2	4 ast. blks	4	—	—
Kamryn Krieger	1	2 solo	—	—	—
Lauryn Pietereins	5	—	—	4	—
Clarissa Hanson	—	1 solo, 2 ast.	2	—	—
Ella Kerkvliet	—	—	—	9	2
Tori Engelbretsen	2	—	—	—	—
Camdyn Pietereins	2	—	—	—	—

### Junior Varsity – Groton 2, Deuel 0 (25-15, 25-20)

Player	Kills	Aces
Kinsley Rowen	2	—
Tevan Hanson	1	—
Sydney Locke	—	1
McKenna Krause	—	1
Abby Fjeldheim	4	—
Emily Jones	2	—
Elizabeth Cole	5	—
Liby Althoff	1	5
Kella Tracy	3	—



## State Cross Country Qualifiers

L to R: Reyelle Gilbert, Kella Tracy, Jayden Schwan, and Riley Schellenberger.

## Tigers Qualify Four for State at Region Meet

WEBSTER — The Groton Area cross country teams turned in a strong performance at the Region meet held Wednesday in Webster, earning multiple top finishes and four state qualifiers.

The Tigers girls team claimed fourth place overall, while the boys team finished sixth in a competitive regional field.

Leading the way for Groton, senior Jayden Schwan continued his outstanding season by racing to second place in the boys' division with a time of 17:29.09, securing his spot at the State Meet.

Sophomore Ryelle Gilbert led the Groton girls with a third-place finish in 20:36.38, while junior Kella Tracy followed close behind in 10th place with a time of 21:22.51—both qualifying for the State Meet.

Freshman Riley Schellenberger also advanced to state, placing 18th in the boys' race with a time of 19:38.85, rounding out Groton's list of individual qualifiers.

The State Class A Cross Country Meet will be held Friday, October 25, in Huron, where Groton's qualifiers will compete among the state's best for individual and team honors.

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## U.S. Winter Outlook 2025-2026 & Winter Preparedness

Winter Outlook 2025-2026 (December-January-February)

This year, La Niña conditions are present and favored to persist through December 2025 - February 2026, with a transition away from La Niña and back to neutral likely in January-March 2026 (55% chance). While La Niña conditions may be brief, its influence favors cooler and wetter conditions for the Northern Plains.

### Temperature

Warmer-than-average temperatures are favored from the southern tier of the U.S. to the eastern seaboard and northern Alaska. These probabilities are strongest along the Southwest US and most of Florida.

Below-average temperatures are slightly favored from the Pacific Northwest to the Northern Plains and western Great Lakes region. Below-average temperatures are also slightly favored across southern Alaska. The probabilities are strongest across Montana, North Dakota and northern Minnesota.

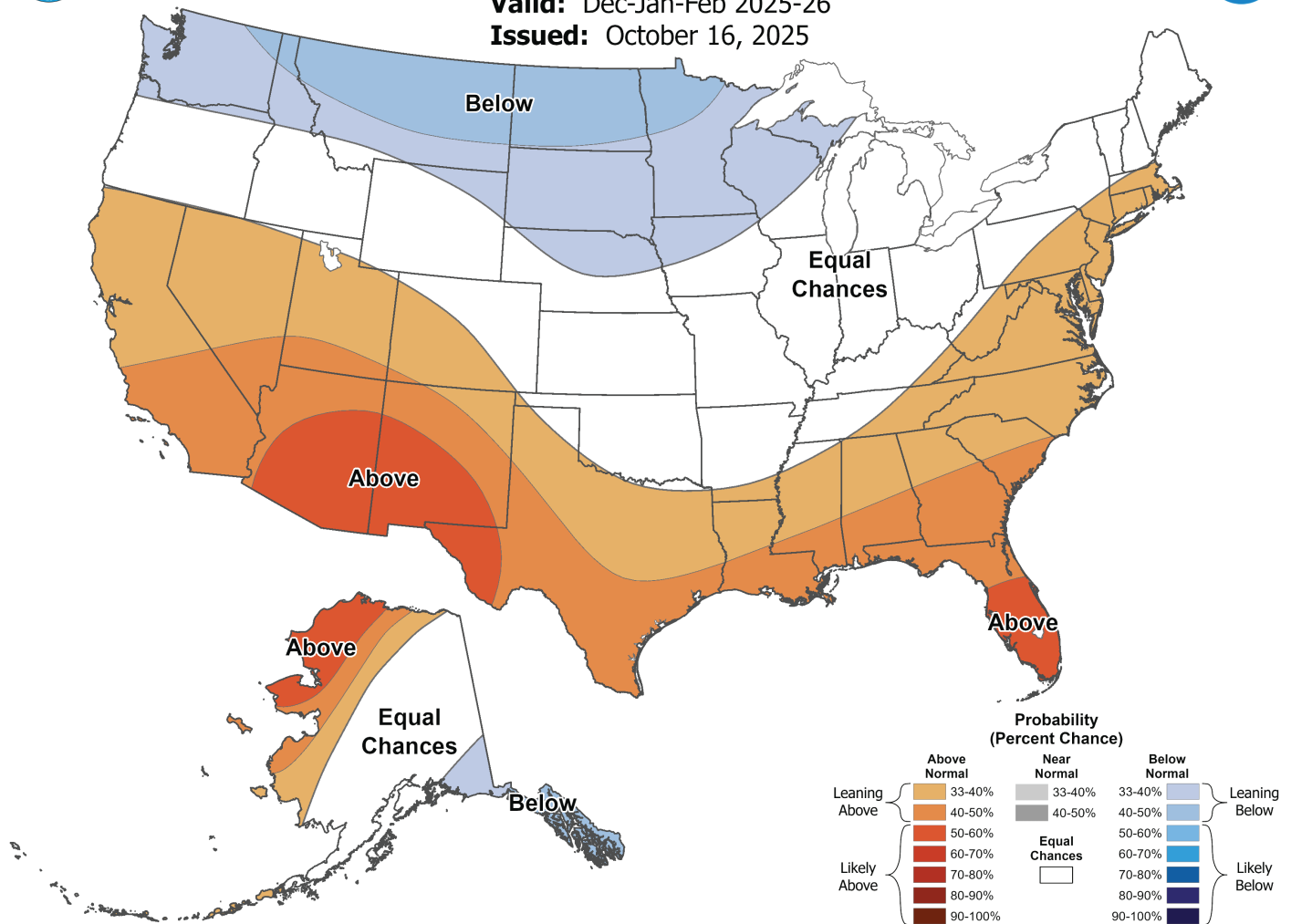
The remaining areas have equal chances of below-, near-, or above-average seasonal mean temperatures.



## Seasonal Temperature Outlook

Valid: Dec-Jan-Feb 2025-26

Issued: October 16, 2025



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## Precipitation

Wetter-than-average conditions are most likely over Montana, and above-average precipitation is also favored in northern and western Alaska, the Pacific Northwest, the Northern Plains, the Great Lakes region and Ohio River Valley.

The greatest likelihood for drier-than-average conditions are over the far southeast U.S., but dryer-than-normal is favored across all of the southern tier States and southern Alaska.

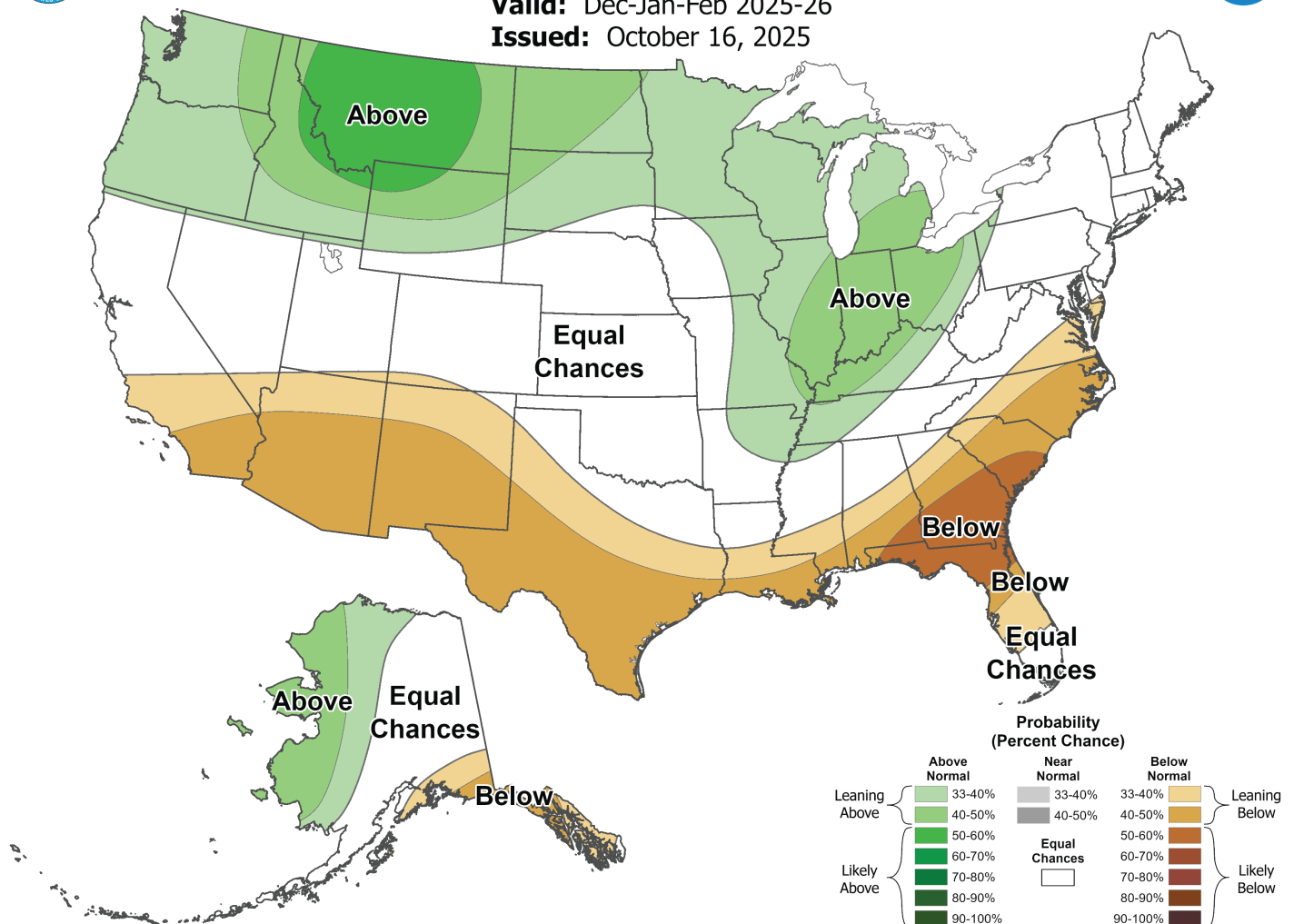
The remaining areas have equal chances of below-average, near-average or above-average seasonal total precipitation.



## Seasonal Precipitation Outlook

Valid: Dec-Jan-Feb 2025-26

Issued: October 16, 2025





## Name Released in Pennington County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash

Where: 23528 Bradsky Road, nine miles east of Rapid City, SD

When: 9:02 a.m., Monday, October 13, 2025

Driver 1: Matthew Hughlen Martin, 58-year-old male from Rapid City, SD, fatal injuries

Vehicle 1: 2008 Chevrolet Silverado

Seat belt Used: Under investigation

Pennington County, S.D.- One man died in a single vehicle crash Monday morning, nine miles east of Rapid City, SD.

Preliminary crash information indicates Matthew Hughlen Martin, the driver of a 2008 Chevrolet Silverado, was traveling northbound on Bradsky Road when the vehicle left the roadway to the right, entered the ditch, and struck a stack of hay bales. Martin was taken to a Rapid City hospital where he later died.

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

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



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### **Sustainable jet fuel developer moves priority from SD to ND amid Summit pipeline delays**

**Company conducted ceremonial groundbreaking three years ago in South Dakota**

**BY: JEFF BEACH-OCTOBER 16, 2025 7:07 PM**

A sustainable aviation fuel developer plans to shift its immediate investment from South Dakota to North Dakota, in part because of delays in the development of the multi-state Summit Carbon Solutions pipeline.

The company added that it still hopes to develop its South Dakota site.

Colorado-based Gevo had obtained a \$1.46 billion loan through the U.S. Department of Energy to build a jet fuel plant at Lake Preston, South Dakota. Company officials told the North Dakota Monitor on Thursday that it instead will push ahead with making jet fuel at the Richardton, North Dakota, ethanol plant it bought last year. Gevo is working with the Department of Energy to transfer the loan to expand the North Dakota site.



**Red Trail Energy at Richardton, North Dakota, produces about 65 million gallons of ethanol from about 23 million bushels of corn each year.** (Photo courtesy of Red Trail Energy)

Red Trail Energy at Richardton in 2022 became the first ethanol plant in the country to capture and store carbon dioxide, taking advantage of its location in an area with the right geology for permanent underground storage.

Gevo plans to expand the North Dakota ethanol plant, which turns corn into fuel. It would convert the ethanol into higher-value aviation fuel in a process it calls alcohol to jet. Carbon capture is a key part of making sustainable aviation fuel.

"We don't have to share pipelines. We don't have to wait. We're already doing it," CEO Pat Gruber said of carbon capture at the North Dakota site.

#### **Company previously broke ground in SD**

Gevo's South Dakota site relied on the planned Summit Carbon Solutions pipeline to take carbon dioxide captured from ethanol plants in five states to an underground storage site in North Dakota.

But the future of that project in South Dakota is in doubt because of landowner resistance, which has contributed to two rejected Summit permit applications in South Dakota and a ban on eminent domain for carbon pipelines adopted by the Legislature and signed into law by Gov. Larry Rhoden.

In 2022, Rhoden attended and spoke at Gevo's groundbreaking near Lake Preston, where it proposed to build its plant in South Dakota. Rhoden was lieutenant governor at the time. Then-Gov. Kristi Noem said

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in a press release on the day of the groundbreaking that “businesses are choosing South Dakota because we are ‘Open for Business,’ and we give them the opportunity to succeed.” The press release described the Gevo project as the “largest economic investment in South Dakota history.”

On Thursday, Rhoden’s office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

In Iowa, where Summit is based, the company is seeking to change its pipeline permit. Summit wants to remove North Dakota as the designated end point for the pipeline.

A spokesperson for Summit said Friday the change “keeps open the option to transport CO2 west through Nebraska or north through South Dakota,” reported the Iowa Capital Dispatch.

Gruber said the jet fuel production in North Dakota would be 30 million gallons a year, half of what was planned for South Dakota. But he said the 500 acres at Richardton could allow for expansion.

He said the jet fuel plant would cost about \$500 million. Gruber noted that is substantially less than \$2.6 billion it planned to spend on the South Dakota site.

Gevo is hosting a meeting Monday to answer questions for farmers and others in the Richardton area. The meeting will be from 6 to 7:30 Mountain time at WIX Barn near Richardton.

## **ND location provides access to oil industry**

Gruber said building in North Dakota also opens the door to Gevo selling its carbon to the oil industry. North Dakota oil producers could buy the carbon dioxide for enhanced oil recovery — pumping gas into the well to help the well produce more oil.

“This is a great opportunity for us, and we sit right next to Bakken,” Gruber said, referring to the Bakken Formation. North Dakota is the nation’s No. 3 oil producing state, with most of it coming from the Bakken.

Oil industry and state leaders have touted enhanced oil recovery as a way for North Dakota to sustain oil production for decades to come and continue to provide the state with tax revenue.

Gruber said Gevo has started discussion with oil companies, but he said the infrastructure to make enhanced oil recovery possible is still years away.

Ethanol plants are seen as a prime source for carbon dioxide because the gas is captured from the fermentation process of turning corn into ethanol instead of from the burning of fuel.

“It’s pure, concentrated CO2,” Gruber said.

Another benefit of carbon capture for Gevo is the ability to sell carbon credits to other industries with high carbon emissions. Gevo in September announced it is partnering with Biorecro North America on carbon credit sales generated at the North Dakota facility.

## **‘Matter of when’ with SD site**

Gruber said he was grateful that the Department of Energy is working with Gevo on transferring the federal loan, though there are steps remaining to complete the process. Gevo filed a document with the federal Securities and Exchange Commission on Tuesday of its intent to use the loan money in North Dakota.

As for the future of the eastern South Dakota site, Gevo officials said it remains a great industrial location and will be developed.

“There are other things we can do at that site,” said Paul Bloom, Gevo’s chief business officer. “It’s a matter of when.”

But the Gevo officials said the demand for sustainable aviation fuel meant the company could not wait for the Summit pipeline. Summit had hoped to be operating in 2024 but has yet to start construction as it tries to secure all the permits it needs.

“We can’t sit around for that,” Gruber said. “We’ve got a mission here.”

*The staff of South Dakota Searchlight contributed to this report.*

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*North Dakota Monitor Deputy Editor Jeff Beach is based in the Fargo area. His interests include agriculture, renewable energy and rural issues.*



## Board expands 'critical needs' teaching scholarship to all prospective teachers, citing shortage

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR-OCTOBER 16, 2025 1:30 PM

A South Dakota board voted on Thursday to expand teaching scholarships for areas of critical need to cover all prospective K-12 teachers, in response to teacher shortages around the state.

Currently, South Dakota's Critical Teaching Needs Scholarship targets college students studying for specific teaching fields such as special education, high school math and science, and career and technical education. Awardees must maintain a 2.8 grade-point average and teach in the state for five years.

"You could argue that any certified teaching position, right now, remains in a shortage," state Department of Education Secretary Joseph Graves said during the virtual meeting of the Critical Teaching Needs Scholarship Board.



**Sioux Falls School District students learn in a classroom.**

(Courtesy of Sioux Falls School District)

State officials presented data showing persistent turnover and vacancies across nearly all teaching disciplines. At the end of the 2023-24 school year, public school districts reported 1,178 full-time equivalent instructors no longer employed, and at the start of the current school year, 137 full-time equivalent teaching positions were unfilled statewide.

The scholarship board agreed that narrowing eligibility no longer makes sense when most districts are struggling to attract applicants.

Parkston Superintendent Patrick Mikkonen said "there is just no candidate pool" for his school district in southeastern South Dakota.

"I can't get anything, as far as an applicant," he told the board.

The board approved a motion to open the scholarship to all K-12 teacher education students and to make it auto-renewable for recipients who maintain the required GPA. Currently, students have to reapply after the first year.

Twelve students were awarded a combined total of \$120,732 in scholarships for the 2023-24 school year, an average of about \$10,000 per student. The funding comes from interest earned on the state's Education Enhancement Trust Fund.

The state's Critical Teaching Needs Scholarship application window opens on Nov. 1 and closes on Dec. 15.

*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.*



## The nation's community health centers face money troubles Frozen federal funding and the prospect of more uninsured patients could force cuts or closures

BY: SHALINA CHATLANI-OCTOBER 16, 2025 8:00 AM

NEW YORK — On a busy street in Queens, New York, just around the corner from a halal hot chicken sandwich restaurant and a barber shop, the Long Island City Health Center welcomes its patients into a brightly lit waiting room, painted baby blue and filled with soft white and gray seats.

A woman working behind the desk on a recent weekday answered one patient's questions in Spanish. Other patients came dressed in hijabs, kurtas or other traditional clothing from countries around the globe. A caseworker assigned to the center rolled one woman, wheelchair-bound because of a stroke, toward an examination room.

The Long Island City Health Center is part of a national network of more than 1,300 community health centers, safety-net clinics that served more than 31 million patients in 2023, according to KFF, a health research nonprofit. The clinics are located in areas where there aren't many doctors or hospitals, and they provide care to all patients, regardless of their ability to pay.

Thanks largely to their broad reach, the centers have long enjoyed bipartisan support. But the federal government shutdown, freezes to federal grants, looming cuts to Medicaid and new Trump administration policies barring some immigrants from receiving care at the centers have put them under financial stress.

Community health centers disproportionately serve low-income people, people of color and rural residents. In 2023, 90% of patients had incomes at or below 200% of the federal poverty level, according to KFF. Forty percent of patients were Hispanic, 17% were Black and 31% were rural residents.

More than 80% of patients were insured, and about half of all patients were covered by Medicaid.

The health centers are funded by the payments they get from Medicaid, Medicare and private insurers, plus federal and state grants. Money is always tight, but between 2010 and 2023, average operating margins remained in the black. That changed last year, as the average margin dipped to -2.1%, according to an audit conducted by the National Association of Community Health Centers.

Half of community health centers have fewer than 90 days of cash on hand, and one-quarter operate with margins below -4%, according to the audit.

When the Trump administration froze some federal grants in February, it forced some clinics, particularly



**A woman walks into the Community Healthcare Network's Long Island City Health Center in Queens, N.Y., this month. This community health center is one of more than 1,300 across the country that serve patients regardless of their background or ability to pay.** (Photo by Shalina Chatlani/ Stateline)

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in rural areas, to reduce hours or shut down. The broad domestic policy law President Donald Trump signed July 4 is projected to increase the number of uninsured patients seeking care at the health centers. And the ranks of the uninsured would grow further if Affordable Care Act insurance plans get much more expensive at the end of this year, as would happen if Congress fails to extend tax credits that have kept prices down.

Meanwhile, the government shutdown has prevented Congress from renewing the Community Health Center Fund, which expired on Sept. 30 and provides about 70% of the centers' federal funding. And the centers worry that a new Trump administration policy barring them from providing care to some immigrants would force them to dedicate scarce resources to verifying patients' legal status. A federal judge has temporarily blocked the change.

Andrew G. Nixon, director of communications for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, told Stateline that the administration is "fully committed to protecting America's community health centers, which play a vital role in serving millions of families nationwide."

"The Trump Administration is working to reopen the government and restore full funding, while also ensuring that federal resources are prioritized for American citizens and lawful residents in accordance with the law," Nixon said in an emailed statement.

This year, some states — including Connecticut, Illinois and Minnesota — approved more money for community health centers. But Illinois and Minnesota also have scaled back or ended health care programs that served low-income people regardless of their immigration status, which might prompt more of those patients to seek care at the centers. And California Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom in June signed a state budget that bars immigrants who are here illegally from enrolling in the state's Medicaid program.

"Historically, health centers have had bipartisan support, but we're operating in a very different world now," Feygele Jacobs, a professor of health policy and management at George Washington University, told Stateline.

Jacobs said health centers are a target for the Trump administration because they serve people of color, low-income residents, immigrants and the uninsured.

"It's those very communities that are really being challenged right now by the administration," Jacobs said. "So I don't know that the focus is so much on health centers as entities, but really more on an administration whose views are antithetical to many of the people that health centers have historically cared for."

But Chris Pope, a senior fellow at the conservative-leaning Manhattan Institute, questioned whether the Medicaid changes included in Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill Act would lead to a significant increase in the number of people without insurance or a dramatic reduction in the program's finances.

Pope also noted that the law doesn't take direct aim at the federal funding of community health centers.

"There's no direct cut in terms of reimbursement for community centers," Pope said. "It's not the intent of the bill to slash and attack health center revenues."

## Welcoming culture

The first community health centers were created in 1965 in Mississippi and Massachusetts as federal demonstration projects under President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty. The program became permanent in 1975.

Doctors at the Long Island City Health Center describe it as a one-stop shop for patients. In addition to providing primary care and mental health services, the center has an in-house pharmacy and provides laboratory tests, vaccinations, drug treatment, HIV/AIDS treatment, and support for transgender patients and their families. Including its dozen medical residents, the center has doctors who can speak French, Tamil, Kru, Ibo, Yoruba, Spanish, Hindi, Nepali, Russian and Tagalog, among other languages.

Dr. Libby Brubaker, an attending physician at the Long Island City Health Center, told Stateline that providing a welcoming atmosphere for everybody is at the core of the center's mission.

"Our social workers go to bat for our patients and help them get access to housing. ... We write letters to allow our patients with asthma to be able to have air conditioners inside their apartments," Brubaker said.

"Really what we're providing for our patients is all encompassing, and that sets us apart," she added.

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"Hospitals don't do all of those things. They do some, but being able to offer that breadth of services in an outpatient setting is invaluable."

Sandra Tapía, a Long Island City resident from Bogotá, Colombia, walked into the clinic on a Friday to see her nutritionist for the first time. She's been in the U.S. for seven years, is a green card holder and has Medicaid. She said she likes the center because "it's close and it's safe."

Tapía said she can't imagine not being able to have access to health care, and values being able to speak to her provider in her native Spanish.

"Here, they offer really great services," Tapía said. "I don't want people without as many resources, like me, to be punished."

The idea of cuts frightens patients such as Olga Scott, 65, who said she has been coming to Long Island City Health Center for years. Scott lives in the Bronx, but takes an hourlong subway ride to the center so she can see her favorite doctor.

"These community health services around the whole community of these five boroughs are needed — it's really needed," she said. "I just hope that they don't do too much cutbacks, because we need every service we can get."

Dr. Sindhura Manubolu, director of the family medicine program at the center, said she's sensing "a lot of anxiety" from her patients, especially those who rely on Medicaid.

"Most of the questions from our patients have been around, 'Oh, will we lose coverage?'" said Manubolu, who is an immigrant from India. "For someone to be here in an advanced country like America, and then not being able to access the health care that probably is even available to a person in a less developed country is not acceptable."

## Bipartisan support

On Capitol Hill, community health centers are an increasingly rare example of bipartisan agreement.

In May, Republican U.S. Sen. Roger Wicker of Mississippi and Democratic U.S. Sen. Jack Reed of Rhode Island wrote a joint letter to the chairperson and ranking member of the Senate health appropriations subcommittee, urging them "to provide robust funding" for community health centers, describing them as "a bipartisan solution to keeping Americans healthy and saving taxpayer dollars."

Wicker and Reed argued in the letter that the centers save the overall health care system billions of dollars by reducing the burden of chronic disease through prevention and early intervention, and lower long-term Medicaid and Medicare spending by curbing expensive emergency department visits, hospital admissions and invasive procedures. The senators also noted that the centers employ more than 310,000 people and generate more than \$118 billion in economic activity.

"Republicans in particular have always argued that one of the reasons for not pushing for more insurance coverage was the fact that we have these centers," said Dr. Georges Benjamin, executive director of the American Public Health Association, which advocates for broader health care access.

Benjamin noted that the centers' importance to rural, mostly Republican communities has heightened their broad-based appeal. He said draining money from them "is not a rational decision."

"The administration has a nonsensical and uncoordinated health policy overall," Benjamin said. "These important things that keep people alive and keep them healthy are getting caught in this very bad public policy time we're having."

But Robert Hayes, president and CEO of the Community Healthcare Network, the largest network of community health centers in New York City, said the centers there are determined to do what they have always done, regardless of the current challenges.

"We are secure. We're obeying the law. We're doing the right thing," Hayes said. "I don't mean to dismiss the anxiety that is around health care for the vulnerable these days, but our job is to not let it distract us from what we have to do, which is important and very hard to do: [provide] the most fundamental and primary and preventative health care for people who are basically excluded from the health care system."

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

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



## National parks, public lands feared at risk of long-term harm as shutdown drags on

BY: JACOB FISCHLER-OCTOBER 16, 2025 8:17 PM

Bare-bones staffing during the government shutdown across the Interior Department and the U.S. Forest Service is leaving America's treasured natural assets vulnerable to lasting damage, according to advocates for public lands, including current and former agency employees.

National parks and most public lands remain accessible to visitors, including those run by the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management and Fish and Wildlife Service.

But the lack of staff already has led to reports of bad behavior, like illegal camping and BASE jumping at California's Yosemite National Park, and parks advocates and workers told States Newsroom they fear more to come as the shutdown that began Oct. 1 continues with no end in sight.

Adjustments to park staff meant to "front-load visitor services" hide some of the long-term harms, said John Garder, the senior director of budget and appropriations at the advocacy group National Parks Conservation Association.

The NPS furloughed more than 9,000 of its roughly 14,500 workers, according to a planning document published just before the shutdown began on Oct. 1.

That has left the people responsible for protecting "irreplaceable resources" and trail management workers needing to instead clean visitor centers and oversee parking, Garder said.

"What that's done is created this facade for the visitors, so that in many cases they don't see the damage that's happening behind the scenes," he said in a phone interview Wednesday.

### Should parks be closed?

The NPCA, a nonprofit that advocates for national parks, has called for parks to close during the shutdown to avoid lasting damage. Others in the conservation community have joined in.

Aaron Weiss, the deputy director of the conservation advocacy group Center for Western Priorities, likened the situation to allowing visitors to ramble through an unstaffed Smithsonian museum.

"The national parks are effectively museums," he said. "This would be like the Smithsonian saying, 'Well, you know, we don't have the staff to keep the Smithsonian museum staffed, but we'll go ahead and leave the gates, the doors open, and come in and take a look, do what you want.'"

"That would be horrifically irresponsible of the Smithsonian, but that is exactly what the National Park Service is saying."

The nature of many park sites makes closing difficult.

The largest parks, comprising sprawling lands, often lack comprehensive fencing or other ways to keep



**A U.S. National Park Service lock keeps John Brown's Fort shut and secured in the Harpers Ferry National Historical Park Lower Town on Oct. 2, 2025 in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, during the government shutdown.** (Photo by Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images)



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people out. Public lands outside the Park Service, including those managed by BLM and the Forest Service, are even less likely to have barriers to entry.

Still, the Interior Department under President Donald Trump has prioritized keeping parks open to an extent other administrations have not planned for during shutdowns, by transferring funds meant for park maintenance to be used for operations.

Interior Secretary Doug Burgum has downplayed reports of improper behavior in the parks while blaming the closures on congressional Democrats who have mostly opposed a stopgap spending bill that would reopen the government. Democrats want Republicans to negotiate on expiring health care tax credits.

"Of course, all of our many sites.... would be better operated and better staffed if the Senate would just get us back in the government," Burgum said in a Fox News interview Tuesday. "Way to go, Senate Democrats."

Spokespeople for the NPS did not return messages seeking comment this week. Many communications staff across the federal government have been furloughed during the shutdown and are not legally allowed to respond to messages.

BLM spokeswoman Alyse Sharpe said in an email that the agency would "keep public lands as accessible as possible" during the shutdown.

"Critical functions that protect life, property, and public health will remain in place, including visitor access in many locations, law enforcement, and emergency response," she wrote.

Sharpe did not respond to questions about the concerns over lands' long-term health.

## **'Demoralizing' atmosphere**

Meanwhile, the shutdown has accelerated a drop in morale for the federal workforce responsible for public lands, at least some of whom are exasperated by what they see as the Trump administration's failure to value their work.

More than half of Interior's nearly 60,000 employees have been furloughed during the shutdown. That reality, on top of staff reductions earlier this year and threatened additional layoffs by Trump and White House budget director Russ Vought, have added to a sense for many resource managers that the administration doesn't place a priority on their jobs.

Chris Tollefson, a former communications official at the BLM and the Fish and Wildlife Service who took a buyout this year after a nearly 27-year run at the Interior agencies, said the administration's posture was "demoralizing" for the agencies' career employees who consider their work on behalf of public lands a calling.

"The people I know get into this because they care passionately about the land and about the resources they protect," he said. "Most of them have deep roots in the communities they come from, and it's really demoralizing to feel like your life's work has been devalued and that what you're doing doesn't matter, that the people in charge feel like it doesn't matter. So it's been really hard."

One furloughed Interior Department worker, who requested her identity be withheld because she is not authorized to speak to reporters, said the department may have trouble attracting qualified employees in the future.

"I came to the government to get a little bit more stability, thinking that it was going to be a safer bet," the furloughed worker said. "And that has definitely not been the case. It's not felt as stable as other positions. ... I think a lot of folks that are with the federal government are there because of the perception of stability. When you take away that perception of stability, those positions aren't going to be quite as attractive to talent that you would have attracted."

## **Oil and gas permitting continues**

Further irritating advocates of conservation, the shutdown has not slowed oil and gas development despite furloughs of staff responsible for science and recreation.

As of Oct. 15, the BLM had issued an average of 19.8 oil and gas permits per day since the shutdown began at the start of the month. That's roughly on par with a typical month during Trump's second administration, and represents the highest per-day average since May, according to an analysis of publicly

available data by Weiss.

"It's a statement of values," Weiss said. "The Interior Department is telling the agency and telling America, 'The folks who manage drilling on public lands are more important than the folks who actually do the day-to-day caring for our public lands.' You don't have the biologists, you don't have the land managers, you don't have the folks doing the trail maintenance. Those folks have all been furloughed, but the folks doing the oil and gas permitting are somehow essential."

Agencies and departments can list some workers as exempt from furloughs. Those employees are kept on the job, though they generally do not receive paychecks until the government is reopened.

In a post to Instagram on the first day of the shutdown, the Interior Department said it would continue issuing permits "and other efforts related to American Energy Dominance" despite a lapse in appropriations.

*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.*

## Trump critic and former aide John Bolton indicted for mishandling classified documents

BY: JACOB FISCHLER-OCTOBER 16, 2025 6:11 PM

A federal grand jury indicted former National Security Advisor John Bolton, a one-time staffer to President Donald Trump who turned publicly against the president by the end of his first term, on charges he mishandled classified information.

The 18-count indictment in district court in Maryland accuses Bolton of wrongfully storing and sharing classified documents.

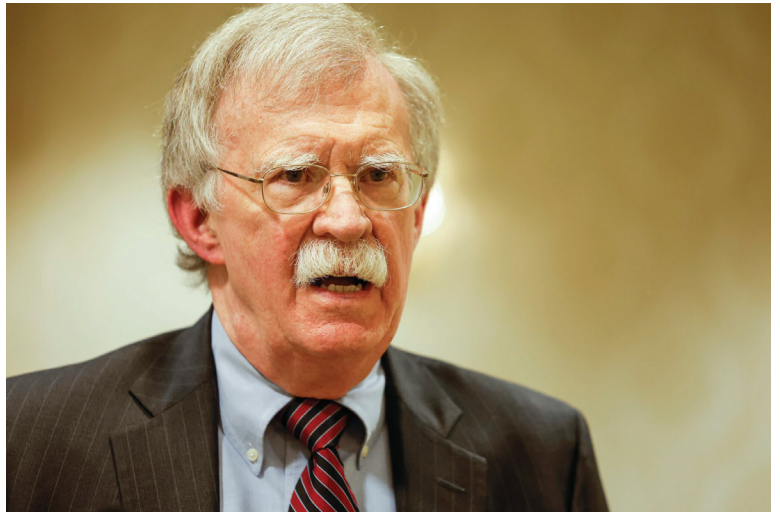
"Bolton abused his position as National Security Advisor by sharing more than a thousand pages of information about his day-to-day activities as the National Security Advisor—including information relating to the national defense which was classified up to the TOP SECRET/SCI level—with two unauthorized individuals," the indictment reads.

Both unauthorized individuals were related to Bolton. One also lived, as Bolton does, in Montgomery County, Maryland.

According to the indictment, Bolton would write near-daily "diary-like" emails to the pair from a commercial email account, hosted on AOL and Google, describing his day-to-day activities as national security advisor, apparently taking them from private notes and rewriting them into a word processor, the indictment said.

The communications contained classified information that the pair was not authorized to receive, and was transmitted through web services that were not authorized to host them, according to the indictment.

And the use of a commercial email server increased the chances of a cyber attack, which eventually happened in July 2021.



**Former National Security Advisor John Bolton speaks to reporters after speaking in a panel hosted by the National Council of Resistance of Iran – U.S. Representative Office (NCRI-US) at the Willard InterContinental Hotel on Aug. 17, 2022 in Washington, DC.** (Photo by Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images)

Images)

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A hacker believed to be associated with the government of Iran hacked Bolton's private email, the indictment said.

"A representative for Bolton notified the U.S. Government of the hack in or about July 2021, but did not tell the U.S. Government that the account contained national defense information, including classified information," the indictment said.

## Raid on Bolton home in Maryland

FBI agents raided Bolton's home earlier this year, leading to speculation that charges were coming.

According to the indictment, Bolton had printed out and stored much of the correspondence he had sent to relatives while in the White House.

The documents Bolton is accused of sharing were redacted from in the indictment. His misconduct is alleged from early in his time as national security advisor in April 2018 to August 2025.

After campaigning against "lawfare" — the targeting of political opponents through the legal system — Trump has encouraged prosecutions of several rivals, including Bolton.

Trump's Justice Department has also won indictments against former FBI Director James Comey and New York Attorney General Letitia James.

Wednesday, Trump called for investigations into U.S. Sen. Adam Schiff, a Democrat from California, and former DOJ special prosecutor Jack Smith.

In a Thursday statement, U.S. Justice Department officials sought to rebut any accusations the investigation was politically charged.

"There is one tier of justice for all Americans," said Attorney General Pamela Bondi. "Anyone who abuses a position of power and jeopardizes our national security will be held accountable. No one is above the law."

FBI Director Kash Patel said the indictment was secured through "meticulous work from dedicated career professionals at the FBI who followed the facts without fear or favor. Weaponization of justice will not be tolerated, and this FBI will stop at nothing to bring to justice anyone who threatens our national security."

*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.*

## With funding for courts in question, Congress stuck in shutdown gridlock for day 16

**BY: JENNIFER SHUTT AND ARIANA FIGUEROA-OCTOBER 16, 2025 3:47 PM**

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate left for its customary long weekend Thursday afternoon, following a brief three days in session despite the ongoing government shutdown.

The House remained on an extended break from Capitol Hill, where neither Democrats nor Republicans seemed motivated to talk to each other despite mounting repercussions from the funding lapse.

Federal courts, for example, reported just as the shutdown began Oct. 1, they could use "fee balances and other funds not dependent on a new appropriation" to keep up and running through Friday, Oct. 17.

"If the shutdown continues after Judiciary funds are exhausted, the courts will then operate under the terms of the Anti-Deficiency Act, which allows work to continue during a lapse in appropriations if it is necessary to support the exercise of Article III judicial powers," the announcement stated. "Under this scenario, each court and federal defender's office would determine the staffing resources necessary to support such work."

A spokesperson for the courts wrote in an email to States Newsroom there were no updates to offer on funding or operations as of Thursday but signaled there could potentially be an announcement Friday.

## Trump spending cuts, layoffs

The shutdown has had widespread ramifications across all three branches of government, including the



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Trump administration's decision to cut spending approved by Congress and lay off thousands of federal employees, though that was temporarily halted by a federal judge this week.

Federal workers who are categorized as essential will not receive their paychecks until after the shutdown ends. Furloughed employees may never receive the back pay authorized in a 2019 law if the Trump administration reinterprets it, as officials have said they might.

None of the consequences produced any real

sense of urgency this week on Capitol Hill, where West Virginia Republican Sen. Jim Justice organized a birthday party for his dog, or at the White House, where President Donald Trump held a ball for donors to his ballroom and focused on foreign policy.

Just as they have for the last several weeks, members of Congress and administration officials continued holding separate press conferences and TV news appearances, lambasting their political opponents, none of which will help move the two sides closer together to reopen government.

## Failed vote No. 10

Senators failed for the 10th time to advance the stopgap government spending bill on a 51-45 vote, short of the 60 needed to move forward under the chamber's legislative filibuster. Republicans control the chamber with 53 seats.

The Senate was also unable to move past a procedural hurdle on the full-year Defense Department funding bill after a 50-44 vote. The Senate Appropriations Committee approved the bill this summer on a broadly bipartisan 26-3 vote.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer told reporters ahead of the vote that Democrats want some of the other annual appropriations bills added on to create a larger bill, though he didn't say which of the dozen he prefers.

"It's always been unacceptable to Democrats to do the Defense bill without other bills that have so many things that are important to the American people in terms of health care, in terms of housing, in terms of safety," Schumer said.

He added later that leaders from both political parties "have always negotiated these appropriations agreements in a bipartisan way. Once again, they're just going at it alone."



**A sign with a notice of closure is seen pinned on the fence to the National Zoo on Oct. 12, 2025, in Washington, D.C. . The closure affects all the Smithsonian's 21 museums, its research centers and the National Zoo.**

(Photo by Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images)



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Senate Appropriations Chairwoman Susan Collins, R-Maine, appeared to offer a package of bills negotiated between the parties before the vote on the defense bill.

"We want this to be an open process with an opportunity to add additional bipartisan bills that address vital domestic priorities, including biomedical and scientific research and infrastructure," Collins said. "And we want members to have a voice in the funding decisions that affect all of our states and constituents back home."

## Stopgap bills in 2025

Senate Majority Leader John Thune said during a floor speech earlier in the day the short-term government funding bill is needed to give lawmakers more time to negotiate final versions of the full-year spending bills.

"We're simply asking them to extend current funding bills for a few weeks while we work on full-year appropriations," Thune said.

Congress is supposed to work out a bipartisan agreement between the House and Senate on those bills by the start of the fiscal year on Oct. 1, but hasn't finished on time since the 1990s.

So every September, once back from their August recess, the House and Senate write a stopgap spending bill that typically keeps the lights on until mid-December.

Those short-term measures, sometimes called continuing resolutions or CRs, were traditionally negotiated among Republican and Democratic leaders in both chambers until earlier this year.

House Republicans, bolstered by a sweep in last year's elections, decided in March to write a six-month stopgap spending bill on their own, after two bipartisan short-term bills were approved earlier in the fiscal year.

Senate Democrats voiced frustration with the process but ultimately helped Republicans get past a procedural vote that required the support of at least 60 lawmakers, allowing the March stopgap to advance toward a simple majority passage vote.

House Republicans repeated their previously successful maneuver last month, writing a stopgap spending bill on their own that would fund the government through Nov. 21.

Senate Democrats, however, changed tactics and have voted repeatedly to block the House-passed stopgap bill from advancing.

## Health care standoff

Democrats maintain that Republican leaders must negotiate to extend the enhanced tax credits that are set to expire at the end of the year for people who buy their health insurance from the Affordable Care Act Marketplace.

Republican leaders have said publicly over and over that they will, but cannot guarantee Democrats a final agreement will be able to pass both chambers. They also say talks will only begin after the stopgap bill becomes law and the government reopens.

"Despite the fact we're only in this position because of Democrats' poor policy choices, Republicans are ready for that discussion," Thune said. "But only once we've reopened the government."

Thune also raised concerns over what message it would send for GOP leaders to negotiate during the shutdown, which he said would endorse the use of funding lapses to achieve policy or political goals.

## Shutdowns in history

Republicans forced the last two government shutdowns; the first in 2013 over efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act and the second in 2019 over Trump's insistence lawmakers approve more funding for the border wall. Both were unsuccessful.

Schumer, D-N.Y., said in a floor speech Thursday that Republicans drafting the stopgap spending bill on their own is a stark contrast to how things have worked for years and that they can't expect Democrats to vote for something in which they had no say.

"For the last month, the Republican leader's favorite number has been 13. He keeps citing 13 CRs that we passed when I was majority leader. Of course we did," Schumer said.

"What he fails to mention — I'm not sure if he forgets, or he's deliberately trying to ignore it — is that those 13 CRs were the product of bipartisan negotiation, of serious conversation. We had to make changes

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in those bills when our Republican colleagues suggested it," he added. "They were in the minority, but they had the right to be heard, a right that has been completely shut out for Democrats under this new Republican majority."

Schumer warned Republicans about open enrollment for the Affordable Care Act Marketplace beginning on Nov. 1, saying tens of millions of Americans will soon realize what congressional inaction means for their family budgets.

He said Republicans' unwillingness to negotiate before the shutdown began or since shows they "either don't understand it or they're brutally callous."

## **'I want to be happy Mike'**

House Speaker Mike Johnson said during a Thursday morning press conference that Republicans "have no idea" how the government shutdown will end, and blamed Democrats in the Senate for not voting to advance the stopgap bill.

House Homeland Security Committee Chair Andrew R. Garbarino of New York said the government shutdown is undermining the day-to-day operations of the Department of Homeland Security.

"This shutdown is making our country less safe," he said.

Garbarino said roughly 90% of federal employees at the Department of Homeland Security are required to continue working because they have essential roles such as vetting customs at ports of entry and monitoring air space at airports.

He said those working without pay include 63,000 U.S. Customs and Border Protection employees; more than 61,000 Transportation Security Administration agents; and 8,000 Secret Service agents.

Garbarino added that he was grateful Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem was using funds from the "One Big Beautiful Bill" to pay the roughly 49,000 Coast Guard personnel.

In a statement to States Newsroom, DHS said it would be able to continue hiring U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents and "deploy law enforcement across the country to make America safe again" due to funding from the "One Big Beautiful Bill." Amid the government shutdown, the Trump administration has continued its aggressive immigration crackdown.

Johnson expressed his frustration that some Homeland Security employees were working without pay. "We should not have Border Patrol agents not (being) paid right now because Chuck Schumer wants to play political games to cover his tail," the Louisiana Republican said. "I don't like being mad Mike, I want to be happy Mike ... but I am so upset about this."

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

## **Midterm elections will likely see increased effects of misinformation, reduced federal security activity, experts say**

**BY: PAIGE GROSS-OCTOBER 16, 2025 10:57 AM**

A year after the 2024 presidential election, technologists and election experts are wrestling with their new reality; tech-aided misinformation and disinformation campaigns are and will continue to be a part of the United States' democratic process.

Technology has always played a role in information dissemination in elections, said Daniel Trielli, an assistant professor of media and democracy at the University of Maryland. Mass use of the internet in the early 2000s gave everyday people the ability to be "publishers," which increased the amount of misinformation, he said.

But the rise of social media platforms and the evolving technologies, like generative artificial intelligence, in the last five years have brought it to new levels.

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"We have had much more volume of misinformation, disinformation grabbing the attention of the electorate," Trielli said. "And quickly following through that, we see a professionalization of disinformation ... The active use of these social media platforms to spread disinformation."

That professionalization of disinformation, or targeted attacks to spread inaccurate information about candidates or elections, was a major concern ahead of the 2024 election. Through various means — false information spread by bots, AI-generated text messages and AI-generated photos and video likeness of candidates, among others — bad actors attempted to bring apathy and confusion to voters.

In 2025, experts say technology is only getting better at aiding misinformation campaigns, and that such campaigns are embedded in the fabric of our society. The midterm elections in 2026 will face existing and new

challenges, they say, some thanks to a rollback of security-focused programs by the Trump administration.

"We've seen kind of reporting that the goal of those sorts of attacks is to seek to influence, not only individual electoral processes, but to scale it in a way that makes it much more difficult to detect that they are seeking to influence (our) election activity," said Tim Harper, project lead for Elections and Democracy at the Center for Democracy and Technology.

## Misinformation vs. Disinformation

The difference between misinformation and disinformation, Trielli said, is intent. Misinformation is false information that is incidentally shared, often without the sharer realizing it is false.

"All of us are subject to seeing or even sharing misinformation because we might share something that we're not careful with," Trielli said. "Disinformation, however, usually describes a more concerted effort related to propaganda, and sometimes even international political communication to intentionally spread lies, to either favor a side in an election or a political process or just cause chaos."

Though technology like generative AI makes it easier to produce disinformation, and social platforms make it easier to spread, there wouldn't be such an issue if people weren't so primed to receive and believe it, Trielli said.

Adam Darrah, vice president of intelligence at cybersecurity platform ZeroFox, said one of the biggest takeaways from the 2024 election was how the general public was unintentionally involved in spreading misinformation. Darrah, who joined the private sector after working as an intelligence analyst for the Central Intelligence Agency, said much of the mis- and disinformation we spread is based on feelings or perceptions stirred up by an already divided political landscape.

Division is one of the best tools of our foreign adversaries, like Russia, Darrah said.

"They're very good at finding niche societal fissures in any civilized government," Darrah said. "They're like, 'Okay, let's have another meeting today about things we can do, to just like, keep Americans at each other's throat.'"

Darrah added that a lot of misinformation plays to longstanding tropes or stereotypes. Paying atten-



**Tech experts say moves by the Trump administration and social media platforms to reduce cybersecurity and content moderation online will make it easier for misinformation to spread ahead of the 2026 midterms.** (Photo by Seth Tupper/South

Dakota Searchlight)



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tion to your own reactions to political content is an important step in identifying misinformation and not furthering its spread, he said.

"If I see something that's obviously crazy and it's trying to manipulate me to either dig in harder on my political position at the expense of maybe, my next door neighbor, who likely holds a different opinion than me, then I need to take a deep breath and know I'm being manipulated and just move on," Darrah said.

## U.S. elections

In the 2024 presidential election, Russia reportedly hired right-wing influencers to spread Kremlin talking points on TikTok, that they created and spread AI-generated videos alleging ballot tampering and election fraud, and created hoax bomb threats. The Chinese government has also been found to have produced AI-generated content stoking conspiracy theories about the U.S. government, and to have targeted down-ballot races in the 2024 presidential election.

Though the American electoral process garnered so much attention last year, tech-aided and targeted disinformation was a global problem last year, said Ken Jon Miyachi, founder of deepfake detection tool BitMind.

AI-generated content played huge roles in India's general election, in Taiwan's, and in Indonesia, where the political party Golkar used AI to reanimate Suharto, the longtime dictator who died in 2008, to make political endorsements.

In the earliest days of generative AI, fake content was easier to spot, Miyachi said. Everyone knew that an extra finger or unrealistic background meant you were probably looking at a deepfake. But with better technology, generated content is spreading undetected like wildfire across various social platforms.

Miyachi founded BitMind in January 2024, anticipating how big a role deepfakes and synthetic AI content could play in the election. The platform works as an app or browser extension, and allows a user to review content for a real-time assessment of AI-generated material.

"I think it's more important than ever, especially, with the midterms coming up and then the next election cycles, and even just, world conflict, world news," Miyachi said. "You really need a more proactive, real-time strategy to be able to combat misinformation and be able to identify it."

Trielli said some aspects of the U.S.' electoral system make it more vulnerable to small shifts in voter behavior. Not making voting mandatory, as in some countries, leaves the door open for people to choose to be uninvolved, he said.

A lack of competitiveness in congressional elections, or the mechanism of the electoral college, which can allow for a presidential candidate to win the popular vote but lose the general election, can create apathy in voters.

"All of those things are hard to manipulate," Trielli said. "But if you have small numbers that are willing to do just a couple of those things, you can sway an election."

## Changing content moderation rules

Evolving content moderation rules on social media platforms were one of the biggest factors that allowed misinformation to spread during the 2024 presidential election, Harper said.

Many platforms feared being seen as "influencing the election" if they flagged or challenged misinformation content. In 2023, Facebook and Instagram's parent company Meta, as well as X, began allowing political advertisements that perpetuated election denial of the 2020 election. X and YouTube both stripped back flagging of misinformation, and Meta got rid of fact checking and rules around its hate speech policy in January, after Donald Trump's win.

Before and after the 2024 election, the Trump administration has been trying to link the identification and eradication of misinformation to attempts to suppress conservative speech.

Conservatives pushed that narrative in a Senate Commerce Committee hearing on Sept. 29, in which chairman Ted Cruz, the Republican from Texas, said "the Biden administration used (the Cyber and Infrastructure Security Agency) to strong arm social media companies into taking action against speech protected by the First Amendment."

But Harper said he believes Sen. Ed Markey, a Democrat from Massachusetts, did a good job of questioning the witness to show that the government does have a role in moderating and stopping foreign interference on social media platforms.

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"There is a distinction between the legitimate free speech that should be protected and must be protected, and the Cyber and Infrastructure Security Agency conducting operations to counter foreign interference," Harper said.

Up until 2024, social media users had a general idea of what was considered approved and appropriate content for social platforms, Darrah said. But the upheaval of content moderation policies have left the door open for misinformation to spread more easily.

"It looks like we're still kind of figuring out the new deal, the new contract between user and content moderators, technology, and free speech," Darrah said. "It seems to be we're renegotiating the contract about what's free, what's hateful, what's harmful. And it seems to be platform agnostic."

## **Will 2026 midterms be different?**

Since Trump took office, his administration has taken a step back in protecting the country from foreign interference campaigns. The Office of the Director of National Intelligence is looking to make reductions to the National Counterintelligence and Security Center and the National Counterterrorism Center, and the White House is massively downsizing CISA, which could shrink the U.S.'s already weakened cyber-defense force.

The administration also cut funding for the Elections Information Sharing and Analysis Center, and the Election Assistance Commission is moving towards making modifications to the voluntary voting standards and guidelines, setting more requirements on Americans in order to cast a ballot.

"There are a number of ways across the federal government where resourcing and capacity for cyber-security and information sharing has been depleted this year," Harper said. "All that is to say we're seeing that AI-based and boosted mis- and disinformation campaigns may take off in a much more serious way in coming years."

Harper said he's seen state election officials losing trust in the diminished federal agencies.

In June, Iran successfully hacked Arizona's Secretary of State website, changing candidate profile photos to an image of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, leader of the 1979 revolution that established Iran as an Islamic republic.

Secretary of State Adrian Fontes didn't report the incident to CISA, and both Arizona senators later sent a letter to Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem telling her it was "deeply troubling" to hear from Arizona officials that they no longer trust the department's CISA to help them during cyberattacks.

State laws focusing on AI in elections have been passed over the last three years and primarily either ban messaging and images created by AI, or at least require specific disclaimers about the use of AI in campaign materials. But Miyachi says digital problems like misinformation need some sort of global agreement in place to properly regulate them.

Looking at midterms next year, Harper said he believes they're less likely to look like the 2024 election, but rather the 2016 election.

In 2024, the state and federal governments and law enforcement agencies were receiving a lot of support from the Biden administration on digital security, Harper said. Information about threats was shared quickly, and there were coordinated efforts across agencies to secure a safe election.

The Trump administration has withdrawn many of those safeguarding federal resources, which may make bad actors "feel more empowered to meddle," in 2026, Harper said.

Miyachi believes faster advancements in AI may mean the midterms suffer from more advanced attack strategies that hadn't fully developed in 2024. He emphasized that individuals will need to take on more of the burden of identifying and stopping the spread of misinformation.

"Bad actors have understood what works and what doesn't work," he said. "Yeah, it will be much more sophisticated going into the 2026 midterms and then the 2028 election."

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

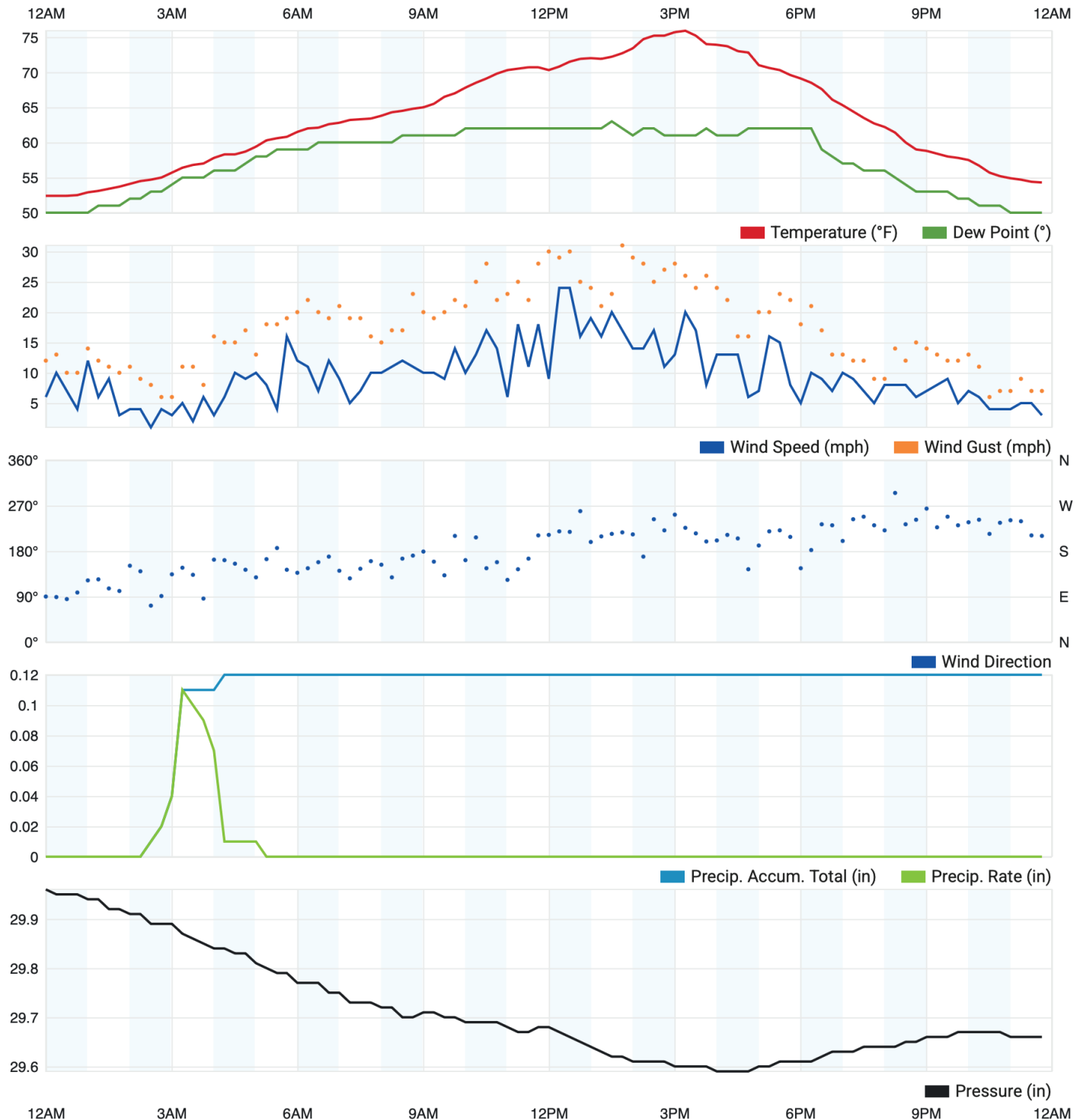
*Paige Gross is a Philadelphia-based reporter covering the evolving technology industry for States Newsroom. Her coverage involves how congress and individual states are regulating new and growing technologies, how technology plays a role in our everyday lives and what people ought to know to interact with technology.*

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

October 16, 2025





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Today



**High: 65 °F**

Sunny

Tonight



**Low: 41 °F**

Increasing  
Clouds

Saturday



**High: 57 °F**

Slight Chance  
Showers and  
Breezy

Saturday Night



**Low: 33 °F**

Mostly Clear

Sunday



**High: 61 °F**

Sunny

## Into the Weekend

**Today**



**Highs: 59-68°F**

**Winds: W 15-30  
mph**

**Saturday**



**Highs: 52-58°F  
Lows: 39-46°F**

**Winds: NW 15-25  
mph**

**20-40% chance of  
showers**

**Sunday**



**Highs: 57-67°F  
Lows: 30-38°F**

**Winds: W/S 10-20  
mph**

A mix of sun and clouds are expected today with temperatures a tad cooler than yesterday thanks to gusty westerly winds. Dry conditions are expected to persist into this evening, before a quick moving disturbance delivers some showers to the area overnight into Saturday. Dry conditions will return by late in the day through the end of the weekend. Breezy conditions are expected the next few days.



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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 76 °F at 3:12 PM**

**Low Temp: 52 °F at 12:00 AM**

**Wind: 32 mph at 1:43 PM**

**Precip: : 0.12**

## Today's Info

Record High: 92 in 1910

Record Low: 15 in 1976

Average High: 59

Average Low: 33

Average Precip in Oct.: 1.29

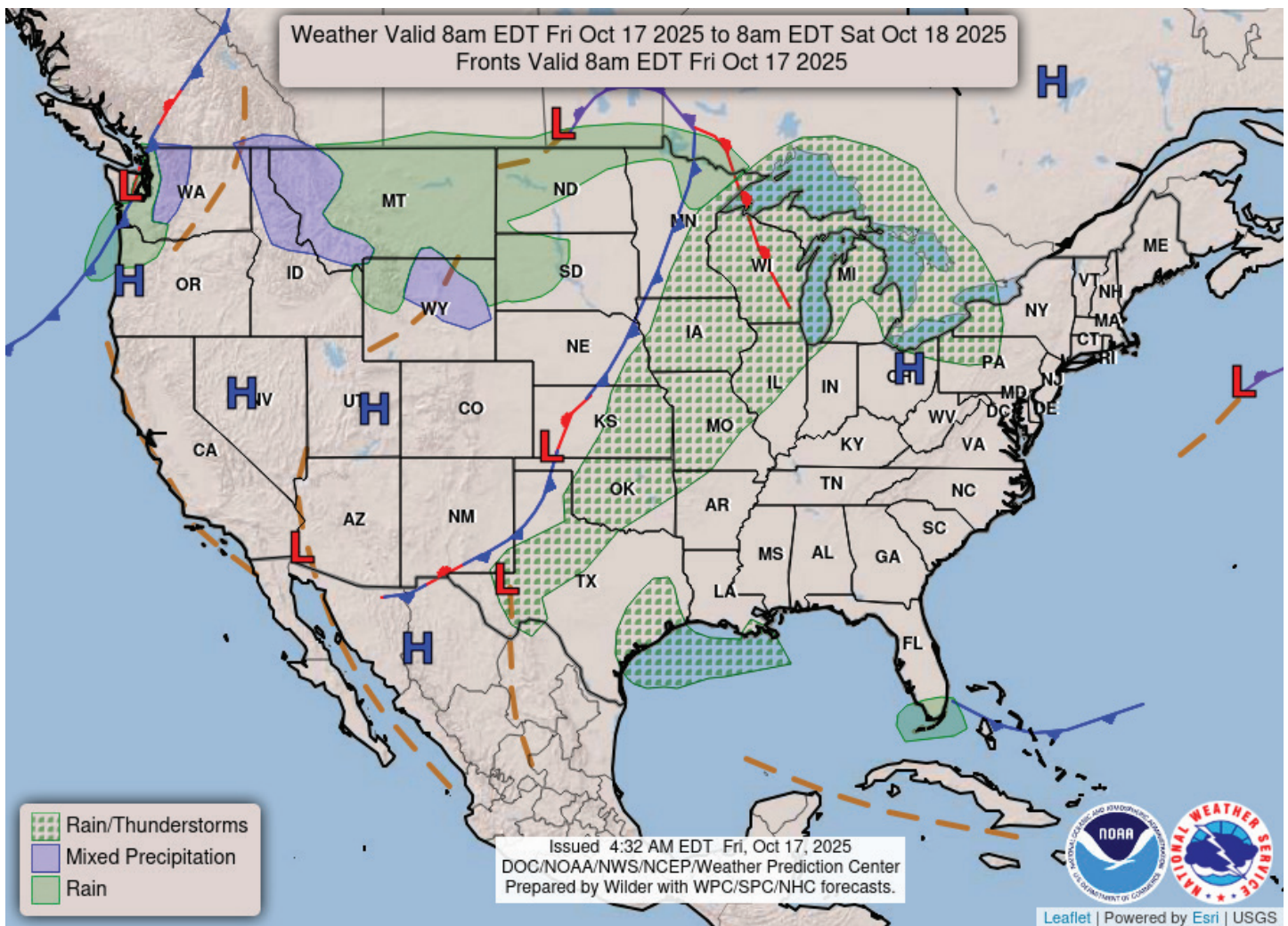
Precip to date in Oct.: 0.48

Average Precip to date: 19.62

Precip Year to Date: 23.40

Sunset Tonight: 6:43 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:52 am





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## Today in Weather History

October 17, 1910: The temperature in Aberdeen, South Dakota, warmed to 90 degrees on this day. This reading is the latest day in the calendar year in which the high temperature reached 90 degrees.

October 17, 2011: A strong low-pressure system to the northwest and a strong high-pressure system to the southeast brought stiff southerly winds across central and north-central South Dakota from the late morning until the early evening. South winds of 30 to 40 mph with gusts over 60 mph caused spotty damage across the region. The high winds created large waves on Lake Oahe near Pierre, which damaged several docks along with some boats at a marina. There were also some tree branches downed across the region, along with some damage to a few structures. With the high winds, warm temperatures, and low humidity, several grassland fires also broke out across parts of the region. The maximum wind gust of 68 mph occurred in Corson County.

1781 - General Cornwallis attempted to escape encirclement by crossing York River, "but a violent storm arose" dispersing his boats causing him to ask for an armistice. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1910: A category 4 hurricane moved north-northeast, passing just east of the Dry Tortugas. The maximum storm surge observed in Key West was 8 feet, with 15-foot waves at what is now Fort Zachary Taylor State Park.

1950 - Small but powerful Hurricane King struck Miami, FL. The hurricane packs winded to 122 mph, with gusts to 150 mph. Hurricane King then moved up the Florida peninsula to Georgia. Four persons were killed and damage was 28 million dollars. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1971: Great balls of fire were observed just ahead of a tornado moving down the main street of Wray, Colorado. However, little other electrical activity accompanied the storm. Nine people were injured in the storm, all at a trailer court at the edge of town.

1984: A snowstorm struck northern Utah producing a record 18 inches in 24 hours at Salt Lake City and 40 inches at the nearby Alta Ski Resort. The town of Magna, located ten miles west of Salt Lake City, did not receive any snow at all. The storm was responsible for a fifty-vehicle pile-up along Interstate 15 near Farmington, Utah.

1987 - It was a great day for an Oktoberfest, or to enjoy the colors of autumn, as much of the nation enjoyed sunny and mild weather. Columbia SC dipped to 34 degrees, marking their third morning in a row of record cold. Bakersfield CA reached 80 degrees for the 143rd day in a row to break a record established in 1940. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather in the Middle Mississippi Valley and the Lower Ohio Valley. Severe thunderstorms spawned three tornadoes in Indiana, including one which injured four persons. Strong thunderstorm winds at Connerville IND caused three million dollars damage. Thunderstorms in Illinois produced hail two inches in diameter Colfax. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Showers and thunderstorms representing the remnants of Hurricane Jerry deluged southeast Kentucky with four to six inches of rain in 18 to 24 hours, resulting in widespread flash flooding. Flooding resulted in more than five million dollars damage. Temperatures again warmed into the 80s and lower 90s in the southeastern U.S. Lakeland FL and Orlando FL reported record highs of 95 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1997: Late on October 17, Super Typhoon Ivan attained its peak intensity with winds of 185 mph and an official barometric pressure of 905 mbar. On the same day, while near peak intensity, Typhoon Joan was located about 1300 miles east of Typhoon Ivan. 1998: During the weekend of October 17-18, 1998, torrential rains fell over southern and southeast Texas. Up to 22 inches of rain fell, which first resulted in deadly flash flooding from San Antonio to Austin followed by record-breaking river floods along several South Texas rivers the following week. Based on provisional data from the USGS, which is subject to revision, the flood peak for this event was the highest known peak stage at 15 locations. Tragically, a total of 31 people died during the event (26 drownings, two tornado deaths, two heart attacks, and one electrocution/drowning). At least 17 of the drowning victims were in vehicles that were either driven into water or were swept away by rapidly rising water. Preliminary property damage estimates approached three-quarters of a billion dollars.





## Building Lasting Friendships

**Genuine friendship is built upon a foundation of mutual love, respect, and commitment.**

Romans 12:10-11: 10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

How many true friends do you have? At first, lots of names may come to mind, but the longer you think about it, that number will likely dwindle. Many of us do not have a great quantity of genuine friends—the ones who remain loyal no matter what.

This dependable, intimate closeness is what the Lord wants for us, but it's a rare treasure. The biblical account of David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 18:1-30; 1 Samuel 19:1-24; 1 Samuel 20:1-42) can help us learn how to foster such a relationship. Their story demonstrates that genuine friendships are built upon a foundation of mutual respect, love, and authentic commitment. Today, let's explore the first component.

For true companionship, there must be appreciation by both parties of the other's godly qualities. This starts with an attitude of valuing all people, knowing that they were created in God's image and are loved by Him. But at the same time, the regard that David and Jonathan displayed toward one another was greater than mere respect; it revealed admiration for the attributes each had that were commended in Scripture.

Consider your friends. Do they exhibit godly characteristics that you respect? And do they, in turn, have admiration for the biblical qualities they see in you? This mutual respect is a necessary foundation for genuine friendship.

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

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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 10.14.25

12 22 49 57 58 19

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$625,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 42 Mins 13 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 DRAW: 1 Days 15 Hrs 57 Mins 13 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 10.16.25

4 7 42 43 46 11

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 12 Mins 13 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 10.15.25

8 20 26 33 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$51,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 12 Mins 13 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 10.15.25

5 20 27 44 51 21

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 41 Mins 13 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 DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 41 Mins 13 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)



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## **Upcoming Groton Events**

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

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## News from the Associated Press

### PREP VOLLEYBALL

Aberdeen Christian def. Leola-Frederick High School, 25-20, 25-11, 25-10  
Canton def. Vermillion, 22-25, 25-22, 25-22, 25-22  
Castlewood def. Estelline-Hendricks, 26-24, 25-15, 25-23  
Chester def. Madison, 25-22, 27-25, 25-22  
Clark-Willow Lake def. Sisseton, 25-10, 25-6, 25-20  
Colman-Egan def. Oldham-Ramona-Rutland, 25-10, 25-23, 25-12  
Groton def. Deuel, 25-17, 25-7, 25-14  
Hamlin def. Britton-Hecla, 25-11, 25-12, 25-7  
Harrisburg def. Aberdeen Central, 25-6, 25-16, 25-11  
Highmore-Harrold def. Crow Creek Tribal School, 25-14, 25-15, 25-20  
Hills-Beaver Creek, Minn. def. Garretson, 25-12, 25-18, 21-25, 25-12  
Hitchcock-Tulare def. Ipswich, 25-12, 25-19, 25-20  
Hulett, Wyo. def. Edgemont, 25-21, 25-17, 25-21  
Huron def. Sioux Falls Jefferson, 20-25, 25-22, 25-21, 25-8  
Kadoka def. Jones County, 25-11, 25-21, 25-22  
Lemmon High School def. Mott-Regent, N.D., 25-23, 25-13, 18-25, 25-11  
Lyman def. Philip, 18-25, 25-16, 25-10, 20-25, 15-9  
Milbank def. Tiospa Zina, 25-9, 25-11, 25-14  
Mitchell def. Watertown, 25-22, 25-23, 27-25  
North Central def. Wakpala, 25-7, 25-11, 25-10  
Northwestern def. Gettysburg, 25-6, 25-12, 25-17  
Parkston def. Parker/Marion, 25-19, 25-15, 25-23  
Sanborn Central-Woonsocket def. Kimball-White Lake, 25-20, 25-14, 25-15  
Sioux Falls Christian def. Tri-Valley, 25-13, 25-14, 25-14  
Sioux Falls Lutheran def. Freeman, 25-14, 25-15, 25-20  
St Thomas More def. Custer, 25-9, 26-24, 26-24  
Sturgis Brown High School def. Lead-Deadwood, 25-16, 25-20, 25-8  
Tripp-Delmont-Armour def. Scotland, 25-10, 25-16, 25-13  
Warner def. Faulkton, 25-11, 25-8, 25-22  
Webster def. Redfield, 28-26, 17-25, 25-23, 19-25, 15-13  
West Central def. Mt. Vernon/Plankinton, 25-14, 29-27, 25-20  
Wolsey-Wessington def. Wessington Springs, 25-17, 25-20, 25-20  
Yankton def. T F Riggs High School, 25-22, 25-14, 17-25, 25-13

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

### PREP FOOTBALL

Little Wound 52, Crow Creek Tribal School 0  
Lower Brule 46, Tiospa Zina 14  
Mahpíya Lúta Red Cloud 56, Crazy Horse 0  
Marty 12, St. Francis Indian 6  
McLaughlin 72, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte/Tiospaye Topa 22  
Sioux Falls Washington 28, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 7

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

## Ahead of Zelenskyy meeting, Trump shows signs he might not be ready to send Kyiv Tomahawk missiles

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is set to host Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy for talks at the White House on Friday, with the U.S. leader signaling he's not ready to agree to sell Kyiv a long-range missile system that the Ukrainians say they desperately need.

Zelenskyy gets his one-on-one with Trump a day after the U.S. president and Russian President Vladimir Putin held a lengthy phone call to discuss the conflict.

In recent days, Trump had shown openness to selling Ukraine long-range Tomahawk cruise missiles, even as Putin warned that such a move would further strain the U.S.-Russian relationship.

But following Thursday's call with Putin, Trump appeared to downplay the prospects of Ukraine getting the missiles, which have a range of about 995 miles (1,600 kilometers.)

"We need Tomahawks for the United States of America too," Trump said. "We have a lot of them, but we need them. I mean we can't deplete our country."

Zelenskyy had been seeking the weapons that would allow Ukrainian forces to strike deep into Russian territory and target key military sites, energy facilities and critical infrastructure. Zelenskyy has argued such strikes would help compel Putin to take Trump's calls for direct negotiations to end the war more seriously.

But Putin warned Trump during the call that supplying Kyiv with the Tomahawks "won't change the situation on the battlefield, but would cause substantial damage to the relationship between our countries," according to Yuri Ushakov, Putin's foreign policy adviser.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha said that talk of providing Tomahawks had already served a purpose by pushing Putin into talks. "The conclusion is that we need to continue with strong steps. Strength can truly create momentum for peace," Sybiha said on the social platform X late Thursday.

It will be the fourth face-to-face meeting for Trump and Zelenskyy since the Republican returned to office in January, and their second in less than a month.

Trump announced following Thursday's call with Putin that he would soon meet with the Russian leader in Budapest, Hungary, to discuss ways to end the war. The two also agreed that their senior aides, including Secretary of State Marco Rubio, would meet next week at an unspecified location.

Fresh off brokering a ceasefire and hostage agreement between Israel and Hamas, Trump has said finding an endgame to the war in Ukraine is now his top foreign policy priority and has expressed new confidence about the prospects of getting it done.

Ahead of his call with Putin, Trump had shown signs of increased frustration with the Russian leader.

Last month, he announced that he believed Ukraine could win back all territory lost to Russia, a dramatic shift from the U.S. leader's repeated calls for Kyiv to make concessions to end the war.

Trump, going back to his 2024 campaign, insisted he would quickly end the war, but his peace efforts appeared to stall following a diplomatic blitz in August, when he held a summit with Putin in Alaska and a White House meeting with Zelenskyy and European allies.

Trump emerged from those meetings certain he was on track to arranging direct talks between Zelenskyy and Putin. But the Russian leader hasn't shown any interest in meeting with Zelenskyy and Moscow has only intensified its bombardment of Ukraine.

Trump, for his part, offered a notably more neutral tone about Ukraine following what he described a "very productive" call with Putin.

He also hinted that negotiations between Putin and Zelenskyy might have to be conducted indirectly.

"They don't get along too well those two," Trump said. "So we may do something where we're separate. Separate but equal."

## World shares retreat after worries over bank lending pull Wall Street lower

By TERESA CERJANO Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — World shares skidded Friday following a retreat on Wall Street driven by concerns over banks' loan portfolios.

The future for S&P 500 fell 1.3% while that for the Dow Jones Industrial Average shed 1%. Oil prices were lower while the price of gold climbed to over \$4,383 an ounce, and was last trading at \$4,356.50 per ounce, as Washington and Beijing swapped harsh words over trade.

In early European trading, a sell-off of bank and financial shares weighed on regional indexes. Germany's DAX slumped 2% to 23,783.64. Britain's FTSE 100 fell 1.5% to 9,293.24 while in Paris, the CAC 40 shed nearly 0.8% to 8,126.52.

In Asia, Japan's Nikkei 225 fell 1.4% to 47,582.15, tracking U.S. losses. Uncertainty over the choice of a new prime minister has also weighed on investor sentiment.

Conservative lawmaker Sanae Takaichi was elected to head the ruling Liberal Democratic Party but last week's collapse of its coalition with the Buddhist-backed Komeito cast doubt over whether she would garner enough support in the lower house of parliament to prevail in a vote expected next week.

Takaichi has led efforts to form a new alliance with the Osaka-based Japan Innovation Party, which would improve her chances of becoming Japan's first female prime minister.

In Chinese markets, shares fell as trade tensions with Washington intensified. Hong Kong's Hang Seng index slumped 2.5% to 25,247.10, while the Shanghai Composite index slid nearly 2% to 3,839.76.

Traders also remained cautious ahead of Monday's release of economic data and an important meeting of the ruling Communist Party leadership next week.

South Korea's Kospi closed nearly flat at 3,748.89, erasing earlier gains amid optimism over progress in trade talks with the U.S.

Data released on Friday showed South Korea's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate slid to 2.5% in September from 2.6% in August.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 lost 0.8% to 8,995.30, retreating from the previous day's record high. Energy and tech stocks led the decline.

Taiwan's Taiex dropped nearly 1.3% while in India, the Sensex rose 0.4%.

On Wall Street, stocks fell Thursday as worries flared over the financial health of midsized banks.

The S&P 500 slid 0.6% to 6,629.07, in its latest up-and-down day. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 0.7% to 45,952.24, and the Nasdaq composite lost 0.5% to 22,562.54.

Salt Lake City-based Zions Bancorp. tumbled 13.1% after the bank said its profit for the third quarter will take a hit because of a \$50 million charge-off related to loans made to a pair of borrowers. Zions said it found "apparent misrepresentations and contractual defaults" by the borrowers and several people who guaranteed the loans, along with other irregularities.

Another bank, Western Alliance Bancorp, dropped 10.8% after saying it has sued a borrower, alleging fraud. It also said it's standing by its financial forecasts given for 2025.

Scrutiny is rising on the quality of loans that banks and other lenders have broadly made following last month's Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection filing of First Brands Group, a supplier of aftermarket auto parts. The question is whether the hiccups are just a collection of one-offs or a signal of something larger threatening the industry.

"The Street's been dining on rate cut and AI optimism for months, but this week the waiter brought something no one ordered: the return of the credit bogeyman," Stephen Innes of SPI Asset Management said in a commentary.

"Regional banks have become the canaries in the credit coal mine, and their chirping sounds suspiciously weak," he said.

U.S. companies broadly are under pressure to deliver stronger profits after the S&P 500 surged 35% from a low in April. To justify those gains, which critics say made their stock prices too expensive, companies



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will need to show they're making much more in profit and will continue to do so.

In other dealings on Friday, benchmark crude oil lost 61 cents to \$56.85 per barrel. Brent crude, the international standard, gave up 64 cents to \$60.42 per barrel.

The U.S. dollar fell to 149.70 Japanese yen from 150.44 yen. The euro rose to \$1.1703 from \$1.1688.

## Madagascar's coup leader is sworn in as president after a military takeover condemned by UN

By GERALD IMRAY and NQOBILE NTSANGASE Associated Press

ANTANANARIVO, Madagascar (AP) — An army colonel who seized power in a military coup was sworn in as Madagascar's new leader Friday in a lightning-fast power grab that ousted the president and sent him fleeing from the country into hiding.

Col. Michael Randrianirina, the commander of an elite army unit, took the oath of office to become the new president at a ceremony in the main chamber of the nation's High Constitutional Court and in front of its nine red-robed judges.

His ascent to the presidency came just three days after he announced that the armed forces were taking power in the sprawling Indian Ocean island of around 30 million people off Africa's east coast.

The United Nations has condemned the military takeover as an unconstitutional change of government but there has been little significant reaction from other countries, including Madagascar's former colonial ruler, France.

The takeover — which came after three weeks of anti-government protests by mainly young people — led to Madagascar being suspended from the African Union.

President Andry Rajoelina's whereabouts are unknown after he left the country claiming his life was in danger following the rebellion by soldiers loyal to Randrianirina. He reportedly escaped on a French military plane. In his absence, Rajoelina was impeached in a vote in parliament on Tuesday, right before the colonel announced the military was taking power.

Randrianirina, who is believed to be 50 or 51 years old, swapped his military camouflage for a dark suit and blue tie for the swearing-in ceremony, which was attended by military officers, civilian officials and foreign diplomats. He took his oath with ceremonial military guards of honor on either side of the room.

The colonel, who emerged from relative obscurity to lead the rebellion by his CAPSAT military unit less than a week ago, was briefly imprisoned two years ago for an attempted mutiny. He said he spent most of the three months he was detained in late 2023 and early 2024 at a military hospital.

Madagascar has high rates of poverty, which affect around 75% of the population, according to the World Bank. The former French colony also has a tumultuous history of political instability since gaining independence in 1960 that has included several coups and attempted coups.

Rajoelina himself came to power as a transitional leader in 2009 after the military-backed coup.

Randrianirina has said Madagascar will be run by a military council with him as president for between 18 months and two years before any new elections, meaning the young people who inspired the uprising against Rajoelina may have a long wait before they are able to choose their new leader.

The protests, which began last month, have echoed other Gen Z-led uprisings in Nepal, Sri Lanka and elsewhere. Young Madagascans first took to the streets last month to rail against regular water and power outages, but have raised other issues, including the cost of living, the lack of opportunities and alleged corruption and nepotism by the elite.

Randrianirina seized on the momentum last weekend by turning against Rajoelina and joining the anti-government protests that called for the president and government ministers to step down. There was a brief clash between his soldiers and members of the gendarmerie security forces still loyal to Rajoelina, during which one CAPSAT soldier was killed, the colonel said.

But there has been no major violence on the streets and Randrianirina's troops have been cheered and their takeover celebrated by Madagascans.

Randrianirina said in an interview with The Associated Press on Wednesday that the military takeover

was a move to "take responsibility as citizens and patriots."

"From now on, we will restore the country to its former glory, fight against insecurity, and gradually try to solve the social problems that Malagasy people experience," he said in an interview at his unit's barracks, where he announced his intention to take up the position of president.

Rajoelina's office has said a move earlier this week by the High Constitutional Court to invite Randrianirina to become the new president was flawed and claimed that some of the court's judges had been threatened.

On Thursday, U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres condemned the unconstitutional change of government and called "for the return to constitutional order and the rule of law," his spokesperson, Stéphane Dujarric, said. The African Union said it "totally rejects" the takeover.

## Evacuees detail harrowing scenes of flooding in coastal Alaska villages as airlift continues

By MARK THIESSEN and GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — The house rocked as if an earthquake had struck, and suddenly it was floating. Water seeped in through the front door, and waves smacked the big glass window.

From the lone dry room where Alexie Stone and his brothers and children gathered, he could look outside and see under the water, like an aquarium. A shed drifted toward them, threatening to shatter the glass, but turned away before it hit.

The house came to rest just a few feet away from where it previously stood, after another building blocked its path. But it remains uninhabitable, along with most of the rest of Stone's Alaska Native village of Kipnuk, following an immense storm surge that flooded coastal parts of western Alaska, left one person dead and two missing, and prompted a huge evacuation effort to airlift more than 1,000 residents to safety.

"In our village, we'd say that we're Native strong, we have Native pride, and nothing can break us down. But this is the hardest that we went through," Stone said Thursday outside the Alaska Airlines Center, an arena in Anchorage, where he and hundreds of others were being sheltered. "Everybody's taking care of everybody in there. We're all thankful that we're all alive."

The remnants of Typhoon Halong brought record high water to low-lying Alaska Native communities last weekend and washed away homes, some with people inside. Makeshift shelters were quickly established and swelled to hold about 1,500 people, an extraordinary number in a sparsely populated region where communities are reachable only by air or water this time of year.

Many of the evacuees were flown first to Bethel, a regional hub of 6,000 people. But authorities sought to relocate them as shelters there approached capacity. Stone and his family spent several nights sleeping on the floor of the Kipnuk school library before being flown to Bethel and then on to Anchorage, about 500 miles (805 kilometers) east of the villages. They arrived strapped into the floor of a huge military transport plane with hundreds of other evacuees.

A military plane took 266 evacuees from Bethel to Anchorage on Wednesday and another 210 on Thursday, said Col. Christy Brewer of the Alaska National Guard. Another flight transported 96 passengers Thursday night, according to Alex Pena, with the National Guard. More flights were expected over the next two days.

Anchorage officials were working with the Red Cross to also shelter people at the Egan Center, a convention venue, as well as possibly two recreation centers, Mayor Suzanne LaFrance's office said.

2 villages were hit hard

The hardest-hit communities, Kipnuk and Kwigillingok, saw water levels more than 6 feet (1.8 meters) above the highest normal tide line. Some 121 homes were destroyed in Kipnuk, a village of about 700 people, and in Kwigillingok, three dozen homes drifted away.

Cellphone service had been restored in Kwigillingok by Thursday, authorities said, and restrooms were again working at the school there, where about 350 people had sheltered overnight Tuesday.

Damage was also serious in other villages. Water, sewer and well systems were inoperable in Napaskiak, according to a statement from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

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Jeremy Zidek, a spokesperson with the state emergency management office, said he did not know how long the evacuation would take and said authorities were looking for additional shelters. 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. 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.

Determined to rebuild

While still in Kipnuk, Stone spent his days trying to help out, he said. He would make trips to the airport to pick up water or food that had been sent by other villages, and deliver it to the school. He worked to help rebuild the boardwalks on which residents get around. And when he had time, he would return to his battered house, trying to clean up some of the waterlogged clothing and electronics the floodwaters had tossed about.

But the damage is extensive. Fuel and stove oil leaked from tanks, and the odor of petroleum permeates the entire town, he said. Like other villagers in the region, his family lost stores of food intended to help them get through the winter — the refrigerator and three freezers full of halibut, salmon, moose and goose.

Stone's mother, Julia Stone, is a village police officer in Kipnuk. She was working at the school last weekend when the winds suddenly picked up, people suddenly began arriving at the building, and her on-call police cellphone began ringing with calls from people in need — some reporting that their houses were floating.

She tried to reach search and rescue teams and others to determine if there were available boats to help, but the situation was "chaos," she said.

Her voice broke during an interview Thursday in Anchorage as she thanked those at the school who helped with the response. "It's a nightmare what we went through, but I thank God we are together," she said.

Stone said he evacuated with the clothes on his back. Most of the rest of what he owned was soaked and reeked of fuel. The Red Cross provided cots, blankets and hygiene supplies in Anchorage, he said, and he went out to a thrift store on Thursday to get more clothes: two shirts, a sweater, two pairs of pants, and tennis shoes.

He is not sure when it might be safe to return to Kipnuk.

"Everybody here that came from Kipnuk, they're pretty strong," Stone said. "If we have to start over, we have to start over."

## **Peru's president refuses to resign after Gen Z protests leave at least 1 dead, 100 injured**

By FRANKLIN BRICEÑO Associated Press

LIMA, Peru (AP) — Peru's new President José Jerí refused to resign on Thursday following the death of a protester during a massive demonstration led by Gen Z activists demanding he step down.

About 100 people were also injured, including 80 police officers and 10 journalists, according to authorities, who said they were investigating the shooting and killing of the protester.

"My responsibility is to maintain the stability of the country; that is my responsibility and my commitment," Jerí told the local press after visiting Peru's Parliament, where he said he would request powers to combat crime.

The protests began a month ago calling for better pensions and wages for young people and expanded to capture the woes of Peruvians tired of crime, corruption and decades of disillusion with their government.

After Jerí, the seventh president in less than a decade, was sworn in on Oct. 10, protesters called for him and other lawmakers to resign.

Protests turn violent

Peru's prosecutor's office announced Thursday that it was investigating the death of 32-year-old protester



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and hip-hop singer Eduardo Ruíz, who prosecutors said was shot by firearm during the mass demonstration of thousands of young people. It wrote on the social media platform X that it has ordered the removal of Ruíz's body from a Lima hospital and the "collection of audiovisual and ballistic evidence in the area where the incident occurred, in the context of serious human rights violations."

Local media and security cameras showed video of Ruíz collapsing in a Lima street after a man fleeing from several protesters fired a shot. Witnesses said the shooter was running away because he was accused of being a plainclothes police officer infiltrated among the demonstrators.

At least 24 protesters and 80 police officers were injured in the demonstrations, according to Peru's Ombudsman's Office. Six journalists were struck by pellets and another four were assaulted by police, according to the National Association of Journalists.

The president expressed regret over the protester's death.

Global trend

The Peruvian protests comes amid a wave of protests unfolding across the world, driven by generational discontent against governments and anger among young people. Protests have broken out in Nepal, the Philippines, Indonesia, Kenya, Peru and Morocco, with protesters often carrying black flags with the "One Piece" anime symbol — a pirate skull wearing a straw hat.

In Lima's main plaza 27-year-old electrician David Tafur said he decided to join the demonstration after learning about it on TikTok.

"We're fighting for the same thing — against the corrupt — who here are also killers," he said, referring to violent 2022 protests and government crackdown in which 50 people were killed.

Controversial new president

The escalating tensions come just days after Peru's Congress ousted President Dina Boluarte, was known as one of the least popular presidents in the world for repressing protests and failing to control crime.

Jerí, the 38-year-old president of Congress, then took office, promising to get a recent crime wave under control. He swore in Ernesto Álvarez, a ultraconservative former judge active on social media, as prime minister.

Álvarez has not yet commented on it, but previously claimed said that Peru's Gen Z is a "gang that wants to take democracy by storm" and does not represent "the youth who study and work."

Criticisms of Jerí and his government quickly emerged because he previously faced an investigation after being accused of a woman of raping her. The prosecutor's office dismissed the case in August, though authorities continue to investigate another man who was with Jerí the day of the alleged rape. Protesters also condemned Jerí because as a legislator he voted in favor of six laws that experts say weaken the fight against crime.

Protesters demanded Jerí and other lawmakers resign and repeal the laws they say benefit criminal groups.

During the protest, more than 20 women shouted "The rapist is Jerí" or "Jerí is a violin" — a slang expression in Peru where "violin" means rapist. Protesters launched fireworks at police, who responded with tear gas and rubber pellets.

Frustrations grow

That anger was built upon decades of frustration by Peruvians, who have seen their leaders, year after year, plagued by corruption scandals, fueling a feeling of cynicism and deception in many of Peru's youth.

"After the pension issue, other frustrations followed — linked to insecurity, the erosion of state capacity in Peru, and corruption," said Omar Coronel, a sociology professor at the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru, who studies social movements.

Violent scenes from the protest drew back memories of violent protests in the early months of Boluarte's government, when 50 protesters were killed.

Protesters held signs reading "Protesting is a right, killing is a crime." One woman carried a poster that read "From a murderess to a rapist, the same filth," criticizing the change in government.

"For me, it's about outrage over abuse of power, corruption and killings," said Tafur, the protester.

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## Democrats say Trump needs to be involved in shutdown talks. He's shown little interest in doing so

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI and SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is showing little urgency to broker a compromise that would end the government shutdown, even as Democrats insist no breakthrough is possible without his direct involvement.

Three weeks in, Congress is at a standstill. The House hasn't been in session for a month, and senators left Washington on Thursday frustrated by the lack of progress. Republican leaders are refusing to negotiate until a short-term funding bill to reopen the government is passed, while Democrats say they won't agree without guarantees on extending health insurance subsidies.

For now, Trump appears content to stay on the sidelines.

He spent the week celebrating an Israel-Hamas ceasefire deal he led, hosted a remembrance event for conservative activist Charlie Kirk and refocused attention on the Russia-Ukraine war. Meanwhile, his administration has been managing the shutdown in unconventional ways, continuing to pay the troops while laying off other federal employees.

Asked Thursday whether he was willing to deploy his dealmaking background on the shutdown, Trump seemed uninterested.

"Well, look, I mean, all we want to do is just extend. We don't want anything, we just want to extend, live with the deal they had," he said in an exchange with reporters in the Oval Office. Later Thursday, he criticized Democratic health care demands as "crazy," adding, "We're just not going to do it."

Spokesperson Karoline Leavitt told Fox News that Democrats must first vote to reopen the government, "then we can have serious conversations about health care."

Senate Majority Leader John Thune echoed that approach before leaving for the weekend, saying Trump is "ready to weigh in and sit down with the Democrats or whomever, once the government opens up."

Still, frustration is starting to surface even within Trump's own party, where lawmakers acknowledge little happens in Congress without his direction.

Leaving the Capitol on Thursday, GOP Sen. Lisa Murkowski said, "We're not making much headway this week." For things to progress, Murkowski acknowledged Trump may need to get more involved: "I think he's an important part of it."

"I think there are some folks in his administration that are kind of liking the fact that Congress really has no role right now," she added. "I don't like that. I don't like that at all."

Trump has not been slowed by the shutdown

While Congress has been paralyzed by the shutdown, Trump has moved rapidly to enact his vision of the federal government.

He has called budget chief Russ Vought the "grim reaper," and Vought has taken the opportunity to withhold billions of dollars for infrastructure projects and lay off thousands of federal workers, signaling that workforce reductions could become even more drastic.

At the same time, the administration has acted unilaterally to fund Trump's priorities, including paying the military this week, easing pressure on what could have been one of the main deadlines to end the shutdown.

Some of these moves, particularly the layoffs and funding shifts, have been criticized as illegal and are facing court challenges. A federal judge on Wednesday temporarily blocked the administration from firing workers during the shutdown, ruling that the cuts appeared politically motivated and were carried out without sufficient justification.

And with Congress focused on the funding fight, lawmakers have had little time to debate other issues.

In the House, Johnson has said the House won't return until Democrats approve the funding bill and has refused to swear in Rep.-elect Adelita Grijalva. Democrats say the move is to prevent her from becoming the 218th signature on a discharge petition aimed at forcing a vote on releasing documents related to the sex trafficking investigation into Jeffrey Epstein.

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So far, the shutdown has shown little impact on public opinion.

An AP-NORC poll released Thursday found that 3 in 10 U.S. adults have a "somewhat" or "very" favorable view of the Democratic Party, similar to an AP-NORC poll from September. Four in 10 have a "somewhat" or "very" favorable view of the Republican Party, largely unchanged from last month.

Democrats want Trump at the table. Republicans would rather he stay out.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer and House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries have said Republicans have shown little seriousness in negotiating an end to the shutdown.

"Leader Thune has not come to me with any proposal at this point," Schumer said Thursday.

Frustrated with congressional leaders, Democrats are increasingly looking to Trump.

At a CNN town hall Wednesday night featuring Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Sen. Bernie Sanders, both repeatedly called for the president's involvement when asked why negotiations had stalled.

"President Trump is not talking. That is the problem," Sanders said.

Ocasio-Cortez added that Trump should more regularly "be having congressional leaders in the White House."

Democrats' focus on Trump reflects both his leadership style — which allows little to happen in Congress without his approval — and the reality that any funding bill needs the president's signature to become law.

This time, however, Republican leaders who control the House and Senate are resisting any push for Trump to intervene.

"You can't negotiate when somebody's got a hostage," said South Dakota Sen. Mike Rounds, who added that Trump getting involved would allow Democrats to try the same tactic in future legislative fights.

Trump has largely followed that guidance. After previously saying he would be open to negotiating with Democrats on health insurance subsidies, he walked it back after Republican leaders suggested he misspoke.

And that's unlikely to change for now. Trump has no plans to personally intervene to broker a deal with Democrats, according to a senior White House official granted anonymity to discuss private conversations. The official added that the only stopgap funding bill that Democrats can expect is the one already on the table.

"The President is happy to have a conversation about health care policy, but he will not do so while the Democrats are holding the American people hostage," White House spokesperson Abigail Jackson said Thursday.

A product of the Congress Trump has molded

In his second term, Trump has taken a top-down approach, leaving little in Congress to move without his approval.

"What's obvious to me is that Mike Johnson and John Thune don't do much without Donald Trump telling them what to do," said Democratic Sen. Mark Kelly of Arizona.

His hold is particularly strong in the GOP-led House, where Speaker Mike Johnson effectively owes his job to Trump, and relies on his influence to power through difficult legislative fights.

When Republicans have withheld votes on Trump's priorities in Congress, he's called them on the phone or summoned them to his office to directly sway them. When that doesn't work, he has vowed to unseat them in the next election. It's led many Democrats to believe the only path to an agreement runs through the White House and not through the speaker's office.

Democrats also want assurances from the White House that they won't backtrack on an agreement. The White House earlier this year cut out the legislative branch entirely with a \$4.9 billion cut to foreign aid in August through a legally dubious process known as a "pocket rescission." And before he even took office late last year, Trump and ally Elon Musk blew up a bipartisan funding agreement that both parties had negotiated.

"I think we need to see ink on paper. I think we need to see legislation. I think we need to see votes," said Ocasio-Cortez. "I don't accept pinky promises. That's not the business that I'm in."

Both parties also see little reason to fold under public pressure, believing they are winning the messaging battle.



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"Everybody thinks they're winning," Murkowski said. "Nobody is winning when everybody's losing. And that's what's happening right now. The American public is losing."

## Many swings, few knockout hits as Cuomo and Mamdani trade jabs in heated first NYC mayoral debate

By ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Former Gov. Andrew Cuomo entered Thursday evening's first New York mayoral debate trying to blunt Democratic front-runner Zohran Mamdani's momentum. Instead he spent much of the contentious face-off on defense, batting away criticisms over his long tenure in office from Mamdani and Republican Curtis Sliwa.

Cuomo, now running as an independent, continued to try to cast Mamdani's agenda as too extreme, saying he lacks the experience to lead America's biggest city. Mamdani, a self-described democratic socialist, countered with attacks on the former governor's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and sexual harassment allegations that Cuomo denies.

But after two hours that touched on how the next mayor would deal with President Donald Trump, quality of life issues and affordability, it was unclear whether anyone did enough to move the needle.

For Cuomo the stakes of the face-off were especially high. The debate was one of his last chances to try to convince voters that going with Mamdani, who already defeated the once-powerful governor in the primary this summer, would be a mistake. The race is also Cuomo's attempt at a political comeback after he resigned four years ago following the sexual harassment allegations.

Mamdani, who spent much of the debate smiling as he tried to maintain the hopeful, charming persona that has characterized his campaign, pushed his affordability agenda and sought to portray himself as a pragmatic liberal rather than a radical ideologue.

The race has catapulted him to national political stardom, with Republicans, including Trump, trying to turn him into the face of the Democratic Party by highlighting his most controversial past comments and positions and casting him as dangerous, a communist and an antisemite.

Meanwhile Sliwa, a Republican and the colorful creator of the Guardian Angels crime patrol group, tried to vault his underdog campaign to the fore amid calls for him to drop out. Though he could have helped Cuomo by ganging up on Mamdani, he instead spent much of his time undercutting the former governor.

Incumbent Mayor Eric Adams, a Democrat, suspended his reelection campaign late last month after being deeply wounded by a now-dismissed federal corruption case and his relationship with the Trump administration.

Here are some key takeaways from tonight's debate:

Mamdani on defense

Mamdani came under attack straight out the gate, as Cuomo highlighted the 33-year-old's relative lack of job experience and painted his agenda as unrealistic and unachievable.

Cuomo, stressing his own lengthy resume, said being mayor "is no job for on-the-job training"

"This is not a job for a first timer," he said, while trying to cast Mamdani as "Bill de Blasio light," a reference to the unpopular former mayor.

Mamdani hit back at Cuomo's integrity and decision-making during the pandemic and repeatedly raised the sexual harassment investigation and legal bills related to his defense.

"What I don't have in experience, I make up for in integrity. What you don't have in integrity, you can never make up for with experience," he charged.

Cuomo also sought to cast himself as the only true Democrat onstage, despite the fact that he is not running on the Democratic Party line.

Mamdani's brand of economic populism and laser focus on lowering costs in the astronomically expensive city has generated buzz and excitement. At the same time, the state assemblyman's calls to raise taxes on wealthy people and intense criticisms of the Israel's military actions in Gaza have unnerved some centrists and conservatives, as well as many Jewish New Yorkers.

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Mamdani pressed on past Israel comments

During an appearance on Fox News Channel this week, Mamdani sidestepped a question about whether Hamas should lay down arms as part of a fragile truce that has paused the two-year Israel-Hamas war.

On Thursday he did not equivocate, saying, "Of course I believe that they should lay down their arms."

The comment came as Cuomo again highlighted Mamdani's past reluctance to condemn the use of the phrase "Globalize the intifada," which is seen by many Jews as a call to violence.

Since the primary Mamdani has said he does not use the phrase and would discourage people from saying it.

But Sliwa said that wasn't enough. "Jews don't trust that you are going to be there for them when they are the victims of antisemitic attacks," he charged.

Mamdani, meanwhile, accused Cuomo of failing to represent the city's Muslim community, claiming that it took losing to a Muslim candidate for Cuomo to step inside a mosque.

"It took me to get you to even see Muslims as part of this city," Mamdani said.

Mamdani's walk-back comes as he has tried to distance himself from several of his more contentious past statements, such as calling the New York Police Department "racist" and "a major threat to public safety."

During his Fox appearance, he publicly apologized for his language after doing so behind closed doors.

"I am not running to defund the police. I am running to actually work with the police to deliver public safety," he said Thursday.

Trump front and center

The president, who has threatened to arrest Mamdani, to deport him and even to take over the city if he wins, was invoked early and often.

Pressed on how they would handle Trump, Mamdani — who walked to the debate venue at 30 Rockefeller Plaza from Trump Tower, accompanied by a brass band — said he would stand up to the president while also being willing to work with him on lowering costs and affordability.

"What New Yorkers need is a mayor who can stand up to Donald Trump and actually deliver," he said.

Cuomo warned that if Mamdani wins, "It will be Mayor Trump."

"I'd like to work with you. I think we could do good things together. But No. 1, I will fight you every step of the way if you try to hurt New York," Cuomo pledged.

Sliwa warned that taking too contentious a tone with Trump would end up hurting the city.

"If you try to get tough with Trump," he said, "New Yorkers will suffer."

Sliwa tries to stand out

The underdog found himself caught in the middle — literally and figuratively — with the Republican's lectern positioned between his two opponents as they lobbed attacks at one another.

At one point Sliwa complained that he was not getting enough speaking time, saying, "I am being marginalized out of this."

But he often attacked Cuomo aggressively, including after the former governor stressed his willingness to take on Trump.

"The president is going to back down to you?" Sliwa said. "You think you're the toughest guy alive, but let me tell you something, you lost your own primary, rejected by your own Democratic Party."

A second and final debate is scheduled for next week.

## Ace Frehley, Kiss' original lead guitarist and founding member, dies at 74

By HANNAH SCHOENBAUM and ANDREW DALTON Associated Press

Ace Frehley, the original lead guitarist and founding member of the glam rock band Kiss, who captivated audiences with his elaborate galactic makeup and smoking guitar, died Thursday. He was 74.

Frehley died peacefully surrounded by family in Morristown, New Jersey, following a recent fall, according to his agent.

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Family members said in a statement that they are “completely devastated and heartbroken” but will cherish his laughter and celebrate the kindness he bestowed upon others.

Kiss, whose hits included “Rock and Roll All Nite” and “I Was Made for Lovin’ You,” was known for its theatrical stage shows, with fire and fake blood spewing from the mouths of band members dressed in body armor, platform boots, wigs and signature black-and-white face paint.

Kiss’ original lineup included Frehley, singer-guitarist Paul Stanley, tongue-wagging bassist Gene Simmons and drummer Peter Criss. Frehley’s is the first death among the four founding members.

Band members took on the personas of comic book-style characters — Frehley was known as “Space Ace” and “The Spaceman.” The New York-born entertainer and Rock & Roll Hall of Famer often experimented with pyrotechnics, making his guitars glow, emit smoke and shoot rockets from the headstock.

“We are devastated by the passing of Ace Frehley,” Simmons and Stanley said in a joint statement. “He was an essential and irreplaceable rock soldier during some of the most formative foundational chapters of the band and its history. He is and will always be a part of KISS’s legacy.”

Born Paul Daniel Frehley, he grew up in a musical family and began playing guitar at age 13. Before joining Kiss, he played in local bands around New York City and was a roadie for Jimi Hendrix at age 18.

Kiss was especially popular in the mid-1970s, selling tens of millions of albums and licensing its iconic look to become a marketing marvel. “Beth” was its biggest commercial hit in the U.S., peaking at No. 7 on the Billboard Top 100 in 1976.

As the Kennedy Center’s new chairman, President Donald Trump named Kiss as one of this year’s honorees.

In 2024, the band sold their catalog, brand name and intellectual property to Swedish company Pophouse Entertainment Group in a deal estimated to be over \$300 million.

Frehley frequently feuded with Stanley and Simmons through the years. He left the band in 1982, missing the years when they took off the makeup and had mixed success. Stanley later said they nearly replaced Frehley with Eddie Van Halen, but Vinnie Vincent assumed the lead guitar role.

Frehley performed both as a solo artist and with his band, Frehley’s Comet.

But he rejoined Kiss in the mid-1990s for a triumphant reunion and restoration of their original style that came after bands including Nirvana, Weezer and the Melvins had expressed affection for the band and paid them musical tributes.

He would leave again in 2002. When the original four entered the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 2014, a dispute scrapped plans for them to perform. Simmons and Stanley objected to Criss and Frehley being inducted instead of then-guitarist Tommy Thayer and then-drummer Eric Singer.

Simmons told Rolling Stone magazine that year that Frehley and Criss “no longer deserve to wear the paint.” “The makeup is earned,” he added. “Just being there at the beginning is not enough.”

Frehley and Kiss also had a huge influence on the glammy style of 1980s so-called hair metal bands including Mötley Crüe and Poison.

“Ace, my brother, I surely cannot thank you enough for the years of great music, the many festivals we’ve done together and your lead guitar on Nothing But A Good Time,” Poison front man Bret Michaels said on Instagram.

Harder-edged bands like Metallica and Pantera were also fans, and even country superstar Garth Brooks joined the band members for a recording of their “Hard Luck Woman” on a 1994 compilation.

Frehley would appear occasionally with Kiss for shows in later years. A 2023 concert at Madison Square Garden was billed as the band’s last. While Stanley and Simmons said they would not tour again, they’ve been open to the possibility of more concerts, and they’ve stayed active promoting the group’s music and memorabilia.

## Russian barrage causes blackouts in Ukraine as Zelenskyy seeks Trump's help

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia battered Ukraine's energy facilities with hundreds of drones and dozens of missiles in its latest heavy bombardment of the country's power grid, authorities said Thursday, as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy prepared to ask President Donald Trump at a White House meeting for more American-made air defenses and long-range missiles.

As he considers Zelenskyy's push for U.S. missiles, Trump said after Thursday's call with Russian President Vladimir Putin that they will meet in Budapest, Hungary to try to bring the war to an end. No date for the meeting has been set.

Trump said in a post on Truth Social that he will discuss his call with Putin "and much more" when he meets Zelenskyy on Friday, adding that "I believe great progress was made with today's telephone conversation."

Meanwhile, eight Ukrainian regions experienced blackouts after the barrage, Ukraine's national energy operator, Ukrenergo, said. DTEK, the country's largest private energy company, reported outages in the capital, Kyiv, and said it had to stop its natural gas extraction in the central Poltava region due to the strikes. Natural gas infrastructure was damaged for the sixth time this month, Naftogaz, Ukraine's state-owned oil and gas company, said.

Russia fires hundreds of drones and 37 missiles

Zelenskyy said Russia fired more than 300 drones and 37 missiles at Ukraine overnight. He accused Russia of using cluster munitions and conducting repeated strikes on the same target to hit emergency crews and engineers working to repair the grid.

"This fall, the Russians are using every single day to strike our energy infrastructure," Zelenskyy said on Telegram.

The Ukrainian power grid been one of Russia's main targets since its invasion of its neighbor more than three years ago. Attacks increase as the bitterly cold months approach in a Russian strategy that Ukrainian officials call "weaponizing winter." Russia says it aims only at targets of military value.

Ukraine has hit back by targeting oil refineries and related infrastructure that are crucial for Russia's economy and war effort. Ukraine's general staff said Thursday its forces struck Saratov oil refinery, in the Russian region of the same name, for the second time in two months. The facility is located some 500 kilometers (300 miles) from the Ukrainian border. Moscow made no immediate comment on the claim.

Ukraine seeks air defenses and attack missiles

Ukrainian forces have resisted Russia's bigger and better-equipped army, limiting it to a grinding war of attrition along the roughly 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line snaking through eastern and southern regions.

But Ukraine, which is almost the size of Texas, is hard to defend from the air in its entirety, and Kyiv officials are seeking more Western help to fend against aerial attacks and strike back at Russia.

Zelenskyy was expected to arrive in the United States on Thursday, ahead of his Oval Office meeting with Trump on Friday.

Ukraine is seeking cruise missiles, air defense systems and joint drone production agreements from the United States, Kyiv officials say. Zelenskyy also wants tougher international economic sanctions on Moscow.

The visit comes amid signs that Trump is leaning toward stepping up pressure on Russian President Vladimir Putin to break the deadlock in U.S.-led peace efforts.

U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said Wednesday in Brussels that if Russia won't budge from its objections and refuses to negotiate a peace deal, Washington "will take the steps necessary to impose costs on Russia for its continued aggression."

Also, Trump said Wednesday that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi personally assured him that his country would stop buying Russian oil. That would deny Moscow income it needs to keep fighting in Ukraine.

Washington has hesitated over providing Ukraine with long-range missiles, such as Tomahawks, out of



concern that such a step could escalate the war and deepen tensions between the United States and Russia.

But Trump has been frustrated by his inability to force an end to the war in Ukraine and has expressed impatience with Putin, whom he increasingly describes as the primary obstacle to a resolution.

The Institute for the Study of War, a Washington think tank, said in an assessment published late Wednesday that sending Tomahawks to Ukraine would not escalate the war and would only "mirror Russia's own use of ... long-range cruise missiles against Ukraine."

Ukraine engages with American defense companies

Meanwhile, Ukraine's Economy Ministry said Thursday it has signed a memorandum of understanding with U.S. company Bell Textron Inc. to cooperate in aviation technology.

The Fort Worth, Texas-based aerospace and defense company will open an office in Ukraine and establish a center for assembly and testing, while exchanging know-how and training Ukrainians in the United States, according to a ministry statement.

Ukraine, unsure what it can expect from Western allies, is keen to develop its own arms industry.

On Wednesday, a Ukrainian government delegation met during a U.S. visit with prominent American weapons manufacturers Lockheed Martin and Raytheon.

## **Ex-Trump national security adviser Bolton charged with storing and sharing classified information**

By ERIC TUCKER, ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

GREENBELT, Md. (AP) — John Bolton, who served as national security adviser to President Donald Trump during his first term and later became a vocal critic of the Republican leader, was charged Thursday with storing top secret records at home and sharing with relatives diary-like notes about his time in government that contained classified information.

The 18-count indictment also suggests classified information was exposed when operatives believed to be linked to the Iranian regime hacked Bolton's email account and gained access to sensitive material he had shared. A Bolton representative told the FBI in 2021 that his emails had been hacked, prosecutors say, but did not reveal he had shared classified information through the account or that the hackers now had possession of government secrets.

The indictment sets the stage for a closely watched court case centering on a longtime fixture in Republican foreign policy circles who became known for his hawkish views on American power and who served for more than a year in Trump's first administration before being fired in 2019 and publishing a scathingly critical book about the president.

The case, the third against a Trump adversary in the last month, will also unfold against the backdrop of concerns that the Justice Department is pursuing the president's political enemies while at the same time sparing his allies from scrutiny. Bolton foreshadowed that argument in a defiant statement Thursday in which he denied the charges and called them part of an "intensive effort" by Trump to "intimidate his opponents."

"Now, I have become the latest target in weaponizing the Justice Department to charge those he deems to be his enemies with charges that were declined before or distort the facts," he said.

Even so, the indictment is significantly more detailed in its allegations than earlier cases against former FBI Director James Comey and New York Attorney General Letitia James. Unlike the other two cases filed over the last month by a hastily appointed U.S. attorney, this one was signed by career national security prosecutors. And though the investigation burst into public view in August when the FBI searched Bolton's home in Maryland and his office in Washington, the inquiry was already well underway by the time Trump took office a second time this past January.

Sharing of classified secrets

The indictment, filed in federal court in Greenbelt, Maryland, alleges that between 2018 and this past August, Bolton shared with two relatives more than 1,000 pages of information about his day-to-day

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activities in government.

The material included "diary-like" entries with information classified as high as top secret that he had learned from meetings with other U.S. government officials, from intelligence briefings or talks with foreign leaders, according to the indictment. After sending one document, Bolton wrote in a message to his relatives, "None of which we talk about!!!" In response, one of his relatives wrote, "Shhhhhh," prosecutors said.

The indictment says that among the material shared was information about foreign adversaries that in some cases revealed details about sources and methods used by the government to collect intelligence. One document related to a foreign adversary's plans for a missile launch, while another detailed U.S. government plans for covert action and included intelligence blaming an adversary for an attack, court papers say.

The two family members were not identified in court papers, but a person familiar with the case, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss non-public details, identified them as Bolton's wife and daughter.

"There is one tier of justice for all Americans," Attorney General Pam Bondi said in a statement. "Anyone who abuses a position of power and jeopardizes our national security will be held accountable. No one is above the law."

The indictment also suggests Bolton was aware of the impropriety of sharing classified information with people not authorized to receive it, citing an April news media interview in which he chastised Trump administration officials for using Signal to discuss sensitive military details. Though the anecdote is meant by prosecutors to show Bolton understood proper protocol for government secrets, Bolton's legal team may also point to it to argue a double standard in enforcement since the Justice Department is not known to have opened any investigation into the Signal episode.

Bolton's attorney, Abbe Lowell, said in a statement that the "underlying facts in this case were investigated and resolved years ago."

He said the charges stem from portions of Bolton's personal diaries over his 45-year career in government and included unclassified information that was shared only with his immediate family and was known to the FBI as far back as 2021.

"Like many public officials throughout history, Amb. Bolton kept diaries — that is not a crime. We look forward to proving once again that Amb. Bolton did not unlawfully share or store any information," Lowell said.

## Controversy over a book

Bolton suggested the criminal case was an outgrowth of an unsuccessful Justice Department effort after he left government to block the publication of his 2020 book "The Room Where It Happened," which portrayed Trump as grossly misinformed about foreign policy.

The Trump administration asserted that Bolton's manuscript contained classified information that could harm national security if exposed. Bolton's lawyers have said he moved forward with the book after a White House National Security Council official, with whom Bolton had worked for months, said the manuscript no longer had classified information.

"These charges are not just about his focus on me or my diaries, but his intensive effort to intimidate his opponents, to ensure that he alone determines what is said about his conduct," Bolton said in a statement.

Bolton also served in the Justice Department during President Ronald Reagan's administration and was a State Department point person on arms control during George W. Bush's presidency.

Bolton was nominated by Bush to serve as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, but the strong supporter of the Iraq war was unable to win Senate confirmation and resigned after serving 17 months as a Bush recess appointment. That allowed him to hold the job on a temporary basis without Senate confirmation.

In 2018, Bolton was appointed to serve as Trump's third national security adviser. But his brief tenure was characterized by disputes with the president over North Korea, Iran and Ukraine.

Those rifts ultimately led to Bolton's departure, with Trump announcing on social media in September 2019 that he had accepted Bolton's resignation.

Bolton subsequently criticized Trump's approach to foreign policy and government in his book, includ-

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ing by alleging that Trump directly tied providing military aid to Ukraine to that country's willingness to conduct investigations into Joe Biden, who was soon to be Trump's Democratic 2020 election rival, and members of his family.

Trump responded by slamming Bolton as a "washed-up guy" and a "crazy" warmonger who would have led the country into "World War Six."

## **Venezuela floated a plan for Maduro to slowly give up power, but was rejected by US, AP source says**

By AAMER MADHANI and DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Venezuelan government officials have floated a plan in which President Nicolás Maduro would eventually leave office, a bid aimed at easing mounting U.S. pressure on the government in Caracas, according to a former Trump administration official.

The proposal, which was rejected by the White House, calls for Maduro to step down from power in three years and hand over authority to his vice president, Delcy Rodríguez, who would complete Maduro's current six-year term that runs until January 2031, according to the official who was briefed on the plan but was not authorized to comment publicly on the matter and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Rodríguez would not run for reelection under the plan, the official said, adding that the White House had rejected the proposal because it continues to question the legitimacy of Maduro's rule and accuse him of overseeing a narco-terrorist state.

The revelation of Maduro's attempts to offer a plan to slowly ease himself out of power comes amid growing unease in the Venezuelan leader's government that President Donald Trump could order military action to try to oust him.

Aspects of the Venezuelan effort were first reported by the Miami Herald earlier Thursday. The White House did not respond to a request for comment.

Speaking at a televised event Thursday, Maduro ridiculed reports that Rodríguez would be part of a plan to replace him as an attempt "to divide our people."

He also mocked Trump's confirmation Wednesday that the U.S. president had authorized the CIA to operate in Venezuela.

"Can anyone believe the CIA hasn't been operating in Venezuela for the past 60 years?" Maduro said.

Rodríguez described the alleged plan for Maduro to step down as fake news Thursday.

"FAKE!!" Rodríguez wrote in English on her Telegram account. "More media that add to the garbage dump of the psychological war against the Venezuelan people."

She added that Venezuela's leadership is united.

Since early September, the U.S. military has carried out a series of strikes on alleged drug smuggling vessels in the Caribbean Sea, including against at least four boats that originated from Venezuela.

Those strikes followed Trump deploying three Aegis guided-missile destroyers to the waters off Venezuela as part of what the administration has framed as an effort to combat threats from Latin American drug cartels.

'Psyops' in play as White House tries to 'create a fracture' in Venezuela: expert

Trump on Wednesday took the unorthodox step of confirming to reporters that he had authorized covert CIA action in Venezuela. He added the administration "is looking at land" as it considers further strikes in the region. But he declined to say whether the CIA has authority to take action specifically against Maduro.

The Republican president's acknowledgement that he had greenlit CIA action further escalated tensions with the South American nation, already heightened because of the strikes on boats.

A commander-in-chief publicly addressing covert CIA operations is unlikely to be found in any spy manual. But analysts says it may have spurred a desired effect for the White House: creating even more unease among Maduro and his allies that their days may be numbered.

"It's psyops," said Brian Fonseca, a scholar at Florida International University who studies Venezuela, using shorthand for psychological operations. "This is about putting pressure on the Maduro regime and

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trying to create a fracture among the country's political and military elite, and see if you can then get that fracture into dislodging Maduro from power."

Maduro was sworn in for a third six-year term in January despite credible evidence that he lost last year's election.

Tom Cotton, the chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, noted that U.S. opposition to the Maduro government is not new, but declined to comment on Trump saying he's approved covert CIA operations in Venezuela.

"It was, and is, however, the policy of the Trump and Biden Administrations that Maduro is not the legitimate leader of Venezuela," Cotton said in a statement.

Trump's pressure campaign on Venezuela is likely designed to encourage Venezuela's military leaders to drop their support for Maduro, leaving him with few allies and few options but to resign, said Vanda Felbab-Brown, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and an expert on drug trafficking and security issues.

That's likely one reason why Trump took the step of announcing the CIA's involvement publicly, she said.

"It's clearer and clearer by the day that the purpose of these actions in the Caribbean is to bring down the Maduro regime," Felbab-Brown said. "The administration is trying to create enough pressure on the military to abandon Maduro."

A small group of top administration officials — including Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau and Trump aide Stephen Miller — have driven the push to carry out the fatal strikes.

Rubio, dating back to his days in the Senate, has advocated for taking a harder line on Maduro.

During Trump's first term, Maduro was indicted on U.S. federal drug charges, including narcoterrorism and conspiracy to import cocaine. This year, the Justice Department doubled a reward for information leading to Maduro's arrest to \$50 million, accusing him of being "one of the largest narco-traffickers in the world."

Trump has focused attention on the Venezuelan gang Tren de Aragua, which he claims is serving as a "front" for Maduro, and said members of the gang were in the first boat targeted last month. No details on alleged affiliations have been released in the other strikes.

## Indiana announces new 8-year contract with coach Curt Cignetti worth nearly \$93 million

BLOOMINGTON, Ind. (AP) — Curt Cignetti's new deal shows Indiana isn't content with being known as just a basketball school.

Indiana announced a new eight-year contract with its football coach worth at least \$92.8 million on Thursday, rewarding him for pushing the Hoosiers into national championship contention in just two seasons.

The school said the average annual compensation for Cignetti will be approximately \$11.6 million — a massive amount in a world of programs navigating financial challenges in the world of name, image and likeness. The deal runs through Nov. 30, 2033

"At Indiana University, we are committed to performing at the highest levels in everything we do, and no one has exemplified that more than Coach Cignetti," Indiana University President Pamela Whitten said. "Put simply, Cig is a winner."

The Hoosiers might have been trying to get ahead of possible suitors. Penn State, UCLA, Arkansas and Oklahoma State are among the schools that have already fired their coaches this season.

Cignetti talked big when he arrived, and he has backed it up. He is 17-2 since arriving from James Madison, with his only losses coming last year against Ohio State and Notre Dame teams that ended up in the College Football Playoff championship game. He led the Hoosiers to the College Football Playoff for the first time and was rewarded by being named AP Coach of the Year last season.

Indiana showed it meant business this season by rolling past then-No. 9 Illinois 63-10 on Sept. 20.

Cignetti's biggest win yet came last week, when the seventh-ranked Hoosiers won 30-20 at No. 3 Oregon on Saturday. It ended the FBS' longest regular-season win streak at 23 games and Oregon's 18-game home winning streak. It was Indiana's first victory against a top-five team since 1967.



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Now, the Hoosiers (6-0, 3-0 Big Ten) have a No. 3 national ranking — the highest in program history. Cignetti chose not to make too big a deal about the victory.

"Well, it depends on what we do with it from here," he said after the win at Oregon. "You know, it's a great win ... and it puts us in position, if we can continue to be successful, which means we have to show up to work on Monday as a team, humble and hungry."

While Cignetti plays it safe, others around the program are thinking big.

"We are committed to investing in IU Football in such a way that we can compete at a championship level, and the No. 1 priority in doing that is ensuring that Coach Cignetti is the leader of our program," Indiana athletic director Scott Dolson said. "His accomplishments during the last season and a half have been nothing short of remarkable. As much as anyone, he believed in what was possible with our program, and he's turned that belief into reality."

## Judge wants immigration agents in Chicago area to wear body cameras after clashes with public

By CHRISTINE FERNANDO Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Troubled by clashes between agents and the public, a judge on Thursday said she will require federal immigration officers in the Chicago area to wear body cameras, and she also summoned a senior official to court next week to discuss an enforcement operation that has resulted in more than 1,000 arrests.

U.S. District Judge Sara Ellis said she was a "little startled" after seeing TV images of street confrontations that involved tear gas and other tactics during an immigration crackdown by President Donald Trump's administration.

"I live in Chicago if folks haven't noticed," Ellis said. "And I'm not blind, right?"

Separately, hours later, a federal appeals court ruled against the Trump administration and said a lower court's temporary ban on deploying the National Guard to assist immigration officers in Illinois would stay in place while the government pursues an appeal.

Community efforts to oppose U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement have ramped up in Chicago, where neighborhood groups have assembled to monitor ICE activity and film incidents involving agents. More than 1,000 immigrants have been arrested since September.

An immigration enforcement building in Broadview, outside Chicago, has been the site of regular protests. The Trump administration has tried to deploy Guard troops, in part to patrol at the Broadview location, but the strategy was halted on Oct. 9 for at least two weeks by a different federal judge.

Ellis last week said agents in the area must wear badges, and she banned them from using certain riot control techniques against peaceful protesters and journalists.

"I'm having concerns about my order being followed," the judge said.

"I am adding that all agents who are operating in Operation Midway Blitz are to wear body-worn cameras, and they are to be on," Ellis said, referring to the government's name for the crackdown.

U.S. Justice Department attorney Sean Skedzielewski laid blame with "one-sided and selectively edited media reports." He also said it wouldn't be possible to immediately distribute cameras.

"I understand that. I would not be expecting agents to wear body-worn cameras they do not have," Ellis said, adding that the details could be worked out later.

"DHS will continue to oppose all efforts to vilify law enforcement and prop up the cause of violent rioters," said Tricia McLaughlin, spokesperson for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. "Were a court to enter such an order in the future, that would be an extreme act of judicial activism."

Ellis said cameras would provide evidence to back up how agents handle confrontations with protesters. Ellis said the field director of the enforcement effort must appear in court Monday.

Gov. JB Pritzker praised the judge's ruling, saying the government's statements about arrests and other incidents, including last month's fatal shooting of a suburban Chicago man, have often been inaccurate.

"They clearly lie about what goes on," he told reporters. "It's hard for us to know right away what the

truth is.”

In 2024, Immigration and Customs Enforcement began deploying about 1,600 body cameras to agents assigned to Enforcement and Removal Operations.

At the time, officials said they would be provided to agents in Baltimore, Philadelphia, Washington, Buffalo, New York and Detroit. Other Homeland Security Department agencies require some agents to wear cameras. U.S. Customs and Border Protection has released body-camera video when force has been used by its agents or officers.

Earlier this week, a Cook County judge barred ICE from arresting people at courthouses in Chicago and the suburbs.

## **US prosecutors charge Smartmatic in alleged \$1M Philippines bribery case**

By JOSHUA GOODMAN undefined

MIAMI (AP) — Federal prosecutors have charged voting technology firm Smartmatic with money laundering and other crimes arising from more than \$1 million in bribes that several executives allegedly paid to election officials in the Philippines.

The payments, between 2015 and 2018, were made to obtain a contract with the Philippines government to help run that country’s 2016 presidential election and secure the timely payment for its work, according to a superseding indictment filed Thursday in a Florida federal court.

Three former executives of Smartmatic, including co-founder Roger Pinate, were previously charged in 2024 but at the time South Florida-based Smartmatic was not named as a defendant. Pinate, who no longer works for Smartmatic but remains a shareholder, has pleaded not guilty.

The criminal case is unfolding as Smartmatic is pursuing a \$2.7 billion lawsuit accusing Fox News of defamation for airing false claims that the company helped rig the 2020 U.S. presidential election in which Joe Biden defeated Donald Trump.

Smartmatic in a statement denied the allegations and said it believed the U.S. Attorney’s Office in Miami had been misled and politically influenced by unnamed powerful interests.

“This is again, targeted, political, and unjust,” the company said. “Smartmatic will continue to stand by its people and principles. We will not be intimidated by those pulling the strings of power.”

As part of the criminal case, prosecutors in August sought the court’s permission to introduce evidence they argue shows that revenue from a \$300 million contract with Los Angeles County to help modernize its voting systems was diverted to a “slush fund” controlled by Pinate through the use of overseas shell companies, fake invoices and other means.

They also accused Pinate of secretly bribing Venezuela’s longtime election chief by giving her a luxury home with a pool in Caracas. Prosecutors say the home was transferred to the election chief in an attempt to repair relations following Smartmatic’s abrupt exit from Venezuela in 2017 when it accused President Nicolas Maduro’s government of manipulating tallied results in elections for a rubber-stamping constituent assembly.

A hearing on the purported evidence tied to Los Angeles and Venezuela will be held next month however none of the accusations are mentioned in the superseding indictment signed by Jason Reding Quinones, the new Trump-appointed U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Florida.

Smartmatic was founded more than two decades ago by a group of Venezuelans who found early success running elections while the late Hugo Chavez, a devotee of electronic voting, was in power. The company later expanded globally, providing voting machines and other technology to help carry out elections in 25 countries, from Argentina to Zambia.

But Smartmatic has said its business tanked after Fox News gave Trump’s lawyers a platform to paint the company as part of a conspiracy to steal the 2020 election.

Fox said it was legitimately reporting on newsworthy events but eventually aired a piece refuting the allegations after Smartmatic’s lawyers complained. Nonetheless, it has aggressively defended itself against

the defamation lawsuit in New York — arguing that the company was facing imminent collapse over its own internal misconduct, not due to any negative coverage.

## Trump warns Hamas 'we will have no choice but to go in and kill them' if bloodshed persists in Gaza

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Thursday warned Hamas "we will have no choice but to go in and kill them" if internal bloodshed persists in Gaza.

The grim warning from Trump came after he previously downplayed the internal violence in the territory since a ceasefire and hostage deal between Israel and Hamas went into effect last week in the two-year war.

Trump later clarified he won't send U.S. troops into Gaza after launching the threat against Hamas.

"It's not going to be us," Trump said in an exchange with reporters. "We won't have to. There are people very close, very nearby that will go in and they'll do the trick very easily, but under our auspices."

The president did not specify if he was speaking of Israel, but action by Israeli forces could risk violating terms of the ceasefire agreement.

The president's shift in tone with Hamas was notable.

Trump said Tuesday that Hamas had taken out "a couple of gangs that were very bad" and had killed a number of gang members. "That didn't bother me much, to be honest with you," he said.

The Republican president did not say how he would follow through on his threat posted on his Truth Social platform, and the White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment seeking clarity.

But Trump also made clear he had limited patience for the killings that Hamas was carrying out against rival factions inside the devastated territory.

"They will disarm, and if they don't do so, we will disarm them, and it'll happen quickly and perhaps violently," Trump said.

The Hamas-run police maintained a high degree of public security after the militants seized power in Gaza 18 years ago, while also cracking down on dissent. They largely melted away in recent months as Israeli forces seized large areas of Gaza and targeted Hamas security forces with airstrikes.

Powerful local families and armed gangs, including some anti-Hamas factions backed by Israel, stepped into the void. Many are accused of hijacking humanitarian aid and selling it for profit, contributing to Gaza's starvation crisis.

The ceasefire plan introduced by 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.

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.

The United States announced last week that it is sending about 200 troops to Israel to help support and monitor the ceasefire deal in Gaza as part of a team that includes partner nations and nongovernmental organizations. But U.S. officials have stressed that U.S. forces would not set foot in Gaza.

Israeli officials have also been angered by the pace of the return of the remains of dead hostages the militant group had been holding in captivity. Hamas had agreed to return 28 bodies as part of the ceasefire deal in addition to 20 living hostages, who were released earlier this week.

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.

## **Trump says he'll meet with Putin in Hungary. He first meets Friday with Zelenskyy at the White House**

By AAMER MADHANI, SEUNG MIN KIM and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is redoubling his efforts to end the war in Ukraine, announcing a second meeting with Russia's Vladimir Putin one day before sitting down with Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the White House.

Trump's announcement came shortly after finishing a call with Putin on Thursday. A date has not been set, but Trump said the meeting would take place in Budapest, Hungary, and suggested that it could happen in about two weeks.

"I believe great progress was made with today's telephone conversation," Trump wrote on social media. The two leaders previously met in Alaska in August, which did not produce a diplomatic breakthrough, a source of frustration for the U.S. leader who had expected that his longstanding relationship with Putin could pave the way to resolving a conflict that began nearly four years ago.

Yuri Ushakov, Putin's foreign affairs adviser, said the Russian president initiated the call, which he described as "very frank and trusting." He said Putin emphasized to Trump that selling long-range Tomahawk missiles to Ukraine, something the U.S. president has publicly discussed, would "inflict significant damage to the relations between our countries."

Trump was already scheduled to meet Friday with Zelenskyy, who has been seeking weapons that would allow Ukrainian forces to strike deeper into Russian territory. Zelenskyy has argued such strikes would help compel Putin to take Trump's calls for direct negotiations to end the war more seriously.

Trump previously said that the U.S. has "a lot of Tomahawks," but on Thursday he said stockpiles were limited and may not have missiles to spare.

"We have a lot of them, but we need them" he said. "I mean, we can't deplete for our country."

Trump tries to turn campaign promises into reality

Trump's renewed focus on the war in Ukraine comes after forging a ceasefire that could end the war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, a diplomatic accomplishment that he celebrated with a whirlwind trip to Israel and Egypt on Monday.

Ending the wars in Ukraine and Gaza was central to Trump's campaign pitch last year, when he persistently pilloried President Joe Biden for his handling of the conflicts.

Although there has been fragile progress in Gaza, Trump has been stymied by Putin, unable to persuade the Russian leader to hold direct talks with Zelenskyy.

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. 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

Friday's meeting with Trump and Zelenskyy will be their fourth face-to-face encounter this year. After their initial Oval Office conversation devolved into recriminations, they've forged a more amicable relationship.

Trump has said he's considering selling long-range Tomahawk missiles to Kyiv, something Putin has said could further damage relations between Moscow and Washington.

Although such a sale would be a splashy move, it could take years to provide the equipment and training necessary for Ukraine to use Tomahawks, said Mark Montgomery, an analyst at the hawkish Foundation for Defense of Democracies in Washington.

Montgomery said Ukraine could be better served in the near term with a surge of Extended Range Attack Munition, or 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.



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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 can be very effective."

Signs of White House interest in new Russia sanctions

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. Senate Majority Leader John Thune on Thursday offered the most upbeat prospects yet for the bill, saying senators will consider it "in the next 30 days."

However, Trump suggested that he wanted to tap the brakes.

"I'm not against anything," he said. "I'm just saying, it may not be perfect timing."

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.

Thune said Graham will introduce a revised bill shortly. 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."

Maria Snegovaya, a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said there would need to be significant pressure on Russia to deter Putin from continuing the war.

"We should be prepared that this war is not going to come to an end anytime soon, unfortunately," she said.

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

By STEPHEN GROVES and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Democrats rejected for the 10th time Thursday 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 vote failed on a 51-45 tally, well short of the 60 needed to advance with the Senate's filibuster rules.

The repetition of votes on the funding bill has become a daily drumbeat in Congress, underscoring how intractable the situation has become. It has been at times the only item on the agenda for the Senate floor, while 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.

"As we are positioning as two sides that are seemingly dug in on this 16th day of a shutdown, real people are wondering is their government going to be there for them?" said GOP Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska.

The shutdown is on track to surpass the 16-day closure in 2013, which was also a debate over the Affordable Care Act. The longest shutdown ended in 2019, after 35 days.

While the military was paid this week, it's unclear how long that will last. The White House budget office told Congress that it cost \$6.5 billion to cover this one pay period. The next one is two weeks.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune again and again has tried to pressure Democrats to break from

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their strategy of voting against the stopgap funding bill. It hasn't worked. And while some bipartisan talks have been ongoing about potential compromises on health care, they haven't produced any meaningful progress toward reopening the government.

"The Democratic Party is the party that will not take yes for an answer," Thune, a South Dakota Republican, said in an angry speech on the Senate floor.

He had also offered to hold a later vote on extending subsidies for health plans offered under Affordable Care Act marketplaces, but said he would not "guarantee a result or an outcome."

Democrats say they won't budge until they get a guarantee on extending the tax credits for the health plans. They warn 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.

"The ACA crisis is looming over everyone's head, and yet Republicans seem ready to let people's premiums spike," said Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer in a floor speech.

Meanwhile, Thune tried a different tack Thursday with a vote to proceed to appropriations bills — daring Democrats to vote against funding legislation for the Department of Defense. They also voted that down.

## 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.

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."

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.

## Appropriations bills vote

Meanwhile, Senate Republicans held a vote to proceed to a bill to fund the Defense Department and possibly several other areas of government. This would have turned the Senate to Thune's priority of working through spending bills and potentially paved the way to paying salaries for troops, though the House would have eventually needed to come back to Washington to vote for a final bill negotiated between the two chambers.

It would have potentially put a crack in Democrats' resolve, but the vote on the procedure failed 50-44 with Sens. Catherine Cortez Masto, John Fetterman and Jeanne Shaheen the only Democrats voting in favor.

"This is politics. If anything was needed to demonstrate just how fundamentally uninterested Democrats are in supporting our troops and defending our country, just take a look at this vote," Thune yelled on the Senate floor following the vote.

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Democrats charged that Republicans had abandoned bipartisanship in the appropriations process, potentially leaving out funding for other areas of government that are priorities for them.

"We believe that we need a strong defense, but we believe we need strong health care, we need strong safety for the American people, we need strong programs that help them with so many other issues, mental health and education," Schumer said Thursday.

Connecticut Sen. Chris Murphy, a Democratic member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, said that he wouldn't vote to "move forward on appropriations bills until they're serious about stopping health care premiums from going up."

The episode made it clear that the Senate leaders are not talking with each other and left Capitol Hill with a growing sense that an end to the stasis is nowhere in sight.

"So many of you have asked all of us, how will it end?" Johnson said, "We have no idea."

## US stocks drop on worries about banks

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. stocks fell on Thursday, hurt by drops for midsized banks as worries flare about the loans they've made.

The S&P 500 slid 0.6% in its latest up-and-down day after erasing a morning gain. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 301 points, or 0.7%, and the Nasdaq composite lost 0.5%.

Zions Bancorp. tumbled 13.1% after the bank said its profit for the third quarter will take a hit because of a \$50 million charge-off related to loans made to a pair of borrowers. Zions said it found "apparent misrepresentations and contractual defaults" by the borrowers and several people who guaranteed the loans, along with "other irregularities."

Another bank, Western Alliance Bancorp, dropped 10.8% after saying it has sued a borrower, alleging fraud. It also said it's standing by its financial forecasts given for 2025.

Scrutiny is rising on the quality of loans that banks and other lenders have broadly made following last month's Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection filing of First Brands Group, a supplier of aftermarket auto parts. The question is whether the hiccups are just a collection of one-offs or a signal of something larger threatening the industry.

Thursday's swings on Wall Street, where the Dow bounced from an early gain of 169 points to an afternoon loss of 472, fit the pattern of the week for stocks. They've been shaky since the end of last week, when President Donald Trump shattered a monthslong calm in the U.S. stock market by threatening much higher tariffs on China.

Thursday's swoon erased an early morning gain driven by an encouraging signal about the artificial-intelligence boom.

Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. reported a bigger jump in profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected. Chief Financial Officer Wendell Huang also said TSMC expects "continued strong demand for our leading-edge process technologies" going into the end of the year.

That's important for the U.S. stock market because TSMC is a critical player in the AI frenzy, making chips for such companies as Nvidia. And Nvidia and other AI stocks have been central to Wall Street's surge to records this year, even though inflation is still high and the job market is slowing.

AI-related stocks have shot so high that critics worry about a possible bubble, like the one that imploded for dot-com stocks in 2000.

U.S. companies broadly are under pressure to deliver stronger profits after the S&P 500 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.

Travelers dropped 2.9% Thursday even though the insurer reported a stronger profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected. Its revenue fell short of forecasts.

Hewlett Packard Enterprise fell 10.1% after detailing long-term financial targets that some analysts found underwhelming.

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They helped overshadow a 4% gain for Salesforce, which unveiled a plan to deliver more than 10% in compounded annual revenue growth in coming years.

J.B. Hunt Transport Services trucked 22.1% higher after the freight company breezed past Wall Street's profit targets in the third quarter.

All told, the S&P 500 fell 41.99 points to 6,629.07. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 301.07 to 45,952.24, and the Nasdaq composite sank 107.54 to 22,562.54.

In the oil market, crude prices swung lower after Trump agreed to meet with Russia's Vladimir Putin in Hungary in hopes of resolving the war in Ukraine. The war has had the United States trying to cut off purchases of Russian oil.

A barrel of U.S. crude gave up an early gain to drop 1.4% to \$57.46. Brent crude, the international standard, fell 1.4% to \$61.06 per barrel.

In stock markets abroad, indexes climbed across much of Asia and Europe.

South Korea's Kospi soared 2.5% on hopes that a trade deal may be coming between Seoul and Washington. Samsung Electronics and automakers Hyundai Motor and Kia Corp. were among the big gainers.

In the bond market, Treasury yields dropped as investors herded toward investments considered safer. The yield on the 10-year Treasury sank to 3.97% from 4.05% late Wednesday.

Gold also rose in the hunt for safer investments. It climbed 2.5% to \$4,304.60 per ounce, bringing its stunning gain for the year so far to roughly 63%.

A report in the morning said manufacturing activity in the mid-Atlantic region is unexpectedly shrinking. It's one of the few windows into the economy that the Federal Reserve has been getting recently as it tries to figure out whether high inflation or the weak job market should be the bigger concern for the economy.

The U.S. government's shutdown is delaying important updates on the economy, such as a weekly update on unemployment claims that typically helps guide Wall Street's trading each Thursday. A day earlier, an important report on inflation was also delayed.

## California to begin selling affordable state-branded insulin beginning next year

By CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Gov. Gavin Newsom said Thursday that California will begin selling affordable insulin under its own label on Jan. 1, nearly three years after he first announced a partnership to sell state-branded generic drugs at lower prices.

But California won't be the only state making lower-cost insulin available. The nonprofit Civica said it will also distribute its economical diabetes medication to pharmacies nationwide. California began partnering with Civica in 2023 for its "CalRx" brand of insulin and put \$50 million toward its development, the company said.

Starting in the new year, insulin pens will be available at a recommended price of \$11 per pen, or a maximum of \$55 for a five-pack, Civica said.

"You don't need a new prescription," Newsom said at a news conference in Los Angeles. "It's access on the basis of affordability."

It is one piece of California's effort to lower prescription drug costs by offering generics as a cheaper alternative. Newsom announced in April that the state will sell the overdose medication Naloxone. The drug, available as a nasal spray and in an injectable form, is considered a key tool in the battle against a nationwide overdose crisis.

For the insulin development, the state entered a 10-year deal with Civica and Biocon Biologics in early 2023. Officials said then that they hoped California's emergence as an insulin-maker would prompt prices to collapse.

The new pens will be interchangeable with glargine, the generic alternative for more expensive once-a-day injections that regulates blood sugar. As a comparison, the equivalent of a five-pack of Eli Lilly's Rezvoglar sells to pharmacies for more than \$88, according to data compiled by the governor's office, but



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consumers may pay a different price based on their insurance.

About 38 million Americans — and roughly 3.5 million Californians — have diabetes, according to the American Diabetes Association.

Chris Noble, organizing director of Health Access California, a statewide consumer health care advocacy group, welcomed Newsom's announcement, saying efforts by California and others to develop a competing generic will bring relief to patients who have seen drug prices spike in recent years.

"California consumers need relief now, so health advocates are relieved to see CalRx moving quickly to lower insulin costs for the people of California while continuing to pursue other needed prescription drug cost solutions," Noble said in a statement Thursday.

There could be risks. State analysts have warned that California's entry into the market could prompt other manufacturers to reduce the availability of their drugs, a potential unintended consequence.

State lawmakers approved \$100 million for the project in 2022, with \$50 million dedicated to developing three types of insulin and the rest set aside to invest in a manufacturing facility.

According to state documents from 2023, the proposed program could save many patients between \$2,000 and \$4,000 a year. In addition, lower costs could result in substantial savings because the state buys the product every year for the millions of people on its publicly funded health plans.

## **UN condemns military takeover in Madagascar as coup leader to be quickly sworn in as president**

ANTANANARIVO, Madagascar (AP) — The United Nations chief on Thursday condemned the military takeover in Madagascar as an army colonel who led the coup was set to be quickly sworn in as president just three days after announcing soldiers had taken charge.

U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres "condemns the unconstitutional change of government in Madagascar and calls for the return to constitutional order and the rule of law," his spokesperson, Stéphane Dujarric, said.

Col. Michael Randrianirina is due to be sworn in as Madagascar's leader at a ceremony at the High Constitutional Court on Friday, according to a statement by the colonel, which he signed as the president of the "refounded" republic of Madagascar.

Ousted President Andry Rajoelina fled the Indian Ocean nation off the east coast of Africa following the military rebellion, claiming his life was in danger. His whereabouts are unknown.

Madagascar has been suspended from the African Union, which said it "totally rejects" the takeover.

Randrianirina announced Tuesday that the armed forces were taking control after three weeks of deadly anti-government protests led mainly by disaffected young people, who have railed against government service failures, poverty and a lack of opportunities while accusing the elite of corruption and nepotism.

The protesters have mobilized under the title "Gen Z Madagascar" and their uprising echoed youth-led protest movements that have toppled leaders in Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

Randrianirina and soldiers from his elite CAPSAT military unit rebelled against Rajoelina and joined the protests last weekend. Other military units also turned against Rajoelina after CAPSAT's defection.

Randrianirina said a council made up of military officers would be in charge of the country with him as president for up to two years before new elections are held.

Madagascar, a nation of around 30 million, has struggled with poverty, drought, hunger and political instability since gaining independence from France in 1960.

There have been several coups and attempted coups, including a military takeover in 2009 that first brought Rajoelina to power. Then, the army handed power to Rajoelina, who was in charge as president of a transitional government for five years before new elections.

## **A look at the Tomahawk, a US cruise missile that could come into play in the Ukraine war**

By KONSTANTIN TOROPIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Tomahawk cruise missile has been in the U.S. military's inventory since the 1980s. While slow by missile standards, the cruise missile flies around 100 feet (about 30 meters) off the ground, making it harder to detect by defense systems.

The missile also boasts an impressive range of around 1,000 miles and precision guidance systems that make it the go-to weapon for striking targets that are deep inland or in hostile territory. President Donald Trump has hinted that he might give Tomahawks to Ukraine, which could make a key difference for Kyiv in its war with Moscow.

Last year, The Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank based in Washington, estimated that the Navy had roughly 4,000 Tomahawk missiles in its inventory in 2023. However, they noted that this estimate would have predated the significant military action against Houthi rebels in Yemen.

In defending from Houthi attacks and launching counterattacks, the Navy said ships from the Eisenhower Carrier Strike group launched 135 Tomahawk missiles. That figure has likely only grown after the strike group returned home in the summer of 2024 since Trump ordered a month-long campaign of strikes against the group in the spring of 2025.

Meanwhile, the US Navy has not been ordering many new Tomahawk missiles. Pentagon budget documents show that in 2023 the Navy and Marine Corps only bought 68 new missiles. The most recent budget documents show the Navy hadn't purchased any new missiles in the following years and the Marine Corps only bought 22 missiles last year. Neither the Marines nor the Navy requested to buy any new Tomahawk missiles in the latest budget.

Aside from dwindling stocks, several defense officials who spoke on condition of anonymity to more candidly discuss military policy also expressed skepticism about offering the missile to Ukraine because of questions about how it would be employed.

While the United States launched Tomahawk missiles almost exclusively from ships or submarines, Ukraine doesn't possess a Navy with ships capable of carrying the 20-foot-long missile. The U.S. Army has been developing a platform to launch the missile from the ground, but one official said that the capability was still far from ready, even for U.S. forces.

## **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 pub-

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lished 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 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.

## **MI5 chief says China is a security threat to UK as officials trade blame over spy case collapse**

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — China poses a daily threat to Britain's security, the head of the country's domestic intelligence agency said Thursday, remarks that step up pressure on authorities to explain why the prosecution of two men charged with spying for Beijing collapsed just before they were due to stand trial.

The government, prosecutors and opposition politicians, who were in power until last year, have traded blame over the failed criminal case as the United Kingdom tries to balance between challenging and engaging with the Asian superpower.

"Do Chinese state actors present a U.K. national security threat? The answer is of course yes they do, every day," MI5 Director-General Ken McCallum told reporters during a rare public appearance. He said his agency had intervened to stop a threat from Beijing as recently as the past week.

McCallum said Beijing-backed meddling has included cyberespionage, stealing technology secrets and "efforts to interfere covertly in U.K. public life."

China spying allegations

Academic Christopher Berry and parliamentary researcher Christopher Cash were charged last year with providing information or documents to China that could be "prejudicial to the safety or interests" of the U.K.

Then, last month, prosecutors dropped the charges.

Director of Public Prosecutions Stephen Parkinson pointed at the government, saying officials refused to testify under oath that China was a threat to national security at the time of the alleged offenses, between 2021 and 2023.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer denies interfering, and late Wednesday the government published witness statements submitted by Deputy National Security Adviser Matthew Collins describing China as "the biggest state-based threat to the U.K.'s economic security" and saying Beijing's espionage activities "harm the interests and security of the U.K."

McCallum called Britain's relationship with China a "complex" mix of risk and opportunity, and said MI5 agents "detect and deal, robustly, with activity threatening U.K. national security."

"Of course I am frustrated when opportunities to prosecute national security-threatening activity are not followed through for whatever reason," he said, but added that prosecution decisions were out of MI5's hands.

Cash and Berry were charged under the Official Secrets Act, a century-old statute that covers spying for countries deemed enemies of the U.K. It has since been replaced by new national security legislation.

The two men deny wrongdoing, and the Chinese Embassy on Thursday called the allegations "pure fabrication and malicious slander."

"China never interferes in other countries' internal affairs," an embassy spokesperson said.

British intelligence authorities have ratcheted up warnings about Beijing's covert activities, and Parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee labeled Beijing a "strategic threat" in 2023.

Starmer's center-left Labour Party government has tried cautiously to reset ties with Beijing after years of frosty relations over spying allegations, human rights concerns, China's support for Russia in the Ukraine war and a crackdown on civil liberties in Hong Kong.

The spying controversy erupted as British officials consider China's application to build a huge new embassy near the Tower of London that would be the biggest diplomatic complex in Europe. Critics say its scale and central location bring heightened risks of spying and sabotage.

On Thursday the government postponed the deadline for a final decision from Oct. 21 until Dec. 10.

Russia and Iran



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In his annual speech outlining major threats to the U.K., McCallum painted a stark picture, saying the U.K. faces "multiple overlapping threats on an unprecedented scale" from both terror groups and states. He said China is one of the "big three" state threats, along with the more reckless Russia and Iran.

"State threats are escalating," he said, with a 35% increase in the past year in the number of people MI5 is investigating for espionage.

He alleged that Russia and Iran are increasingly using "ugly methods," including "surveillance sabotage, arson or physical violence."

"Russia is committed to causing havoc and destruction," he said. "In the last year, we and the police have disrupted a steady stream of surveillance plots with hostile intent aimed at individuals Russian leaders perceive as their enemies."

He said Tehran is also plotting to injure and kill its enemies on British soil, with more than 20 "potentially lethal Iran-backed plots" disrupted in the past 12 months.

## AI risks

The U.K.'s official terror threat level stands at "substantial," meaning an attack is likely, and McCallum said MI5 has disrupted 19 late-stage attack plots since 2020.

He said attacks increasingly tend to come from small groups or individuals rather than broad networks, and suspects are getting younger, with one in five of those arrested last year under the age of 17.

Some plotters are motivated by al-Qaida and the Islamic State group – which are "once again becoming more ambitious" – and others by extreme right-wing ideology, he said. Still others reflect a messy stew of motivations bred in "squalid corners of the internet."

The spy chief also said MI5 was looking at potential threats from out-of-control AI.

"Artificial intelligence may never 'mean' us harm," he said. "But it would be reckless to ignore the potential for it to cause harm."

## Vatican report calls for reparations for sex abuse victims and tougher sanctions for abusers

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — The Vatican's child protection board said Thursday the Catholic Church has a moral obligation to help victims of clergy sexual abuse heal. Financial reparations for the abused and tougher sanctions for the abusers and their enablers are essential remedies, it said.

The Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors focused on the issue of reparations in its second annual report — an often sensitive topic for the church, given the financial, reputational and legal implications involved.

The report was significant — an official Vatican publication prepared with the input of 40 abuse survivors from around the world. It gave a voice to their complaints of how badly the church had handled their cases and highlighted measures they need to heal.

It contained the shocking revelation that the Vatican office responsible for one-third of the world's Catholic dioceses had received only a "small number of cases," and only two reports of bishops who covered up child sex crimes. Such data suggests that clergy abuse is happening unchecked and unreported in vast parts of the developing world, more than three decades after the scandal first exploded publicly in the West.

## Pope Leo signals commitment to commission

The report covers 2024, a period before Pope Leo XIV was elected. History's first American pope has acknowledged that the abuse scandal remains a "crisis" for the church.

Leo has signaled a commitment to the commission, which Pope Francis created in 2014 to advise the church on best practices to prevent abuse.

The report said monetary settlements were necessary to provide victims with needed therapy and other assistance to help them recover from the trauma of their abuse.

But it said the church owed a far greater debt to victims, the broader church community and God. The hierarchy must listen to victims and provide them with spiritual and pastoral assistance. Church leaders

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must apologize for the harm done, tell victims what they are doing to punish those who harmed them and what measures they are taking to prevent future abuse, the report said.

"The church bears a moral and spiritual obligation to heal the deep wounds inflicted from sexual violence perpetrated, enabled, mishandled, or covered up by anyone holding a position of authority in the church," it said.

The report itself was prepared with victims in a focus group setting who listed priorities for their healing. They identified the need for accountability for church leaders, information about their cases, true reform of church structures to adequately punish abusers and their enablers.

A legal process that brings back the trauma

Significantly, the 2024 report said the church's way of handling abuse cases, and its "decades-long pattern of mishandling reports, including abandoning, ignoring, shaming, blaming, and stigmatizing" victims, was itself retraumatizing for them.

It was a reference to the church's dysfunctional in-house canonical code, where it can take years to process a case and the most severe punishment meted out to a serial rapist priest amounts to being fired.

The process is cloaked in secrecy, such that victims have no rights to information about their case other than learning its outcome.

The report called for sanctions that were "tangible and commensurate with the severity of the crime." While laicization is a possible outcome for priests who rape children, the church frequently gives out lesser sanctions, such as a period of retreat away from active ministry.

Even when a bishop is removed for bungling cases, the public is only told that he has retired. The report called for the church to "clearly communicate reasons for resignation or removal."

An audit of countries and Vatican office

Anne Barrett Doyle of the online resource BishopAccountability.org said the report should serve as a wake-up call to Leo, who she noted had seemed to minimize the enormity of the scandal in an interview in which he stressed the need to ensure the rights of priests.

"The global church has hundreds of millions of children under its care, and it is still failing to prioritize their safety," she said in a statement.

The report provided an audit of child protection policies and practices in over a dozen countries, as well as within two religious orders, a lay movement and the Vatican office responsible for the church in the developing world.

It gave high marks to the church leadership in Malta, South Korea and Slovakia, where most if not all dioceses responded to the commission's questionnaire about prevention policies and practices.

But even in Italy, the Vatican's backyard, only 81 of 226 dioceses responded to the questionnaire. In places like Mali, the challenges seem even greater: the bishops conference website "does not seem to be functioning and accessible."

The report contained the stunning fact that the Dicastery for Evangelization's missionary office, which is responsible for 1,124 dioceses in Asia, Africa, Oceania and parts of Latin America — or a third of the church's dioceses — had received only a "small number of cases," and only two reports of bishops who covered up.

That is a staggeringly low number given the size of the territory involved. It suggests the Vatican still has a long way to go in parts of the world where abuse, especially same-sex abuse, remains a taboo topic in the wider society and where the church is confronting broader issues of war, conflict and poverty.

Commission member Benyam Dawit Mezmur, an Ethiopian jurist, said he cringes when he hears the church claim there are no abuse cases in Africa, when the truth is that cases are not being reported. A lack of resources in these poor churches and societal and cultural impediments are mostly to blame.

"I know for a fact that there are cases," he said. "But we need to look deeper and see why are they not being reported. Are the structures in place? Are there issues about reprisals? Are there issues that we need to address about power relations?"

He said key to encouraging a culture of reporting was empowering minors and their families to report abuse and educating them about child protection and prevention.

## UK court opens inquest into death of boxer Ricky Hatton

By JAMES ROBSON AP Sports Writer

MANCHESTER, England (AP) — A court in Manchester on Thursday opened and adjourned an inquest into former boxing world champion Ricky Hatton's death.

Hatton died last month aged 46.

Details of the moment Hatton was found unresponsive were given at a hearing at Stockport Coroner's Court as the inquest into his death was opened briefly and adjourned until March 20.

"This is a straightforward legal step that the law does require you to take to move on to the inquest next year," said Alison Mutch, senior coroner for Manchester South.

Hatton was discovered by his manager and long-time friend Paul Speak at his home in Hyde, Greater Manchester, on Sept. 14.

Speak drove there to take the former two-weight world champion to the airport for a flight to Dubai where he was due to make a comeback fight in December.

"The provisional cause of death is given as hanging," Mutch said.

The court was told Hatton was last seen by his family on Sept. 12 and he appeared "well."

But he did not attend an event he was expected to be at the following day. Speak went to his house on the morning of Sept. 14 where he was found unresponsive, police coroner's officer Alison Catlow said.

Fans lined the streets of Manchester for Hatton's funeral procession last week. Sporting stars Tyson Fury, Amir Khan and Wayne Rooney, as well as Oasis frontman Liam Gallagher were among mourners who attended the service at the city cathedral.

News of his death came two months after the surprise announcement he would make a return to boxing in December in a professional bout against Eisa Al Dah in Dubai.

He hadn't fought since losing for the third time in his career, against Vyacheslav Senchenko in 2012.

At the height of his career he won world titles at light-welterweight and welterweight and shared the ring with the best boxers of his generation including Kostya Tszyu, Floyd Mayweather and Manny Pacquiao.

Later he was open about his struggles with mental health.

In a statement after his death, Hatton's family said he was "in a good place" and "excited for the future."

## The greatest women's college basketball players: Who made the list?

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

For many college basketball experts, selecting the greatest players of the women's poll era sounds easy — until they try it.

Of course, USC's Cheryl Miller and Diana Taurasi of UConn are relatively easy choices. But narrowing the list from there gets tricky, inevitably leaving out talented players, including those who sharpened their skills during later professional careers.

In honor of the 50th anniversary of the women's basketball poll, The Associated Press assembled a list of the greatest players since the first poll in 1976. And in the spirit of the Top 25 rankings, the choices are certain to spark a debate and prompt plenty of handwringing among those who were in a position to vote.

"Nearly impossible," Rebecca Lobo, a former UConn standout and NCAA champion, said of the assignment. "As I'm looking down the list, I'm like no-brainer, no-brainer, no-brainer. But then I'm like wait, there's too many no-brainers and not enough slots."

Lobo was one of 13 members of a panel of former players and AP sportswriters who voted on the greatest players. They were instructed to consider only the athletes' college careers. Other factors, however, were up to their discretion, including championship pedigree, record-breaking statistics or simply their ability to will their teams to victory.

"It was extraordinarily difficult especially to try to hone in on a players' college career and eliminate their pro career from your brain," Lobo added. "There are going to be players who are Hall of Fame caliber

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players who aren't on the list."

Joining Miller in the frontcourt on the first team are Breanna Stewart and Candace Parker. Caitlin Clark joins Taurasi as the guards.

Taurasi helped UConn win three national championships, including carrying the Huskies to the last two basically on her own during her junior and senior season.

"What an accomplishment and what an honor," Taurasi said. "To think about the history of the game and where it's gone. You always have to look at the past to go into the future. There's so many great women who paved the way."

Clark led Iowa to back-to-back NCAA championship game appearances while setting the career scoring record for any Division I women's or men's basketball player.

Her play on the court, including her logo 3-point shots, helped lift women's basketball to unprecedented levels of attention and energy during her last two seasons.

"Being named an AP All-American is one of the most storied honors in college sports," Clark said. "It means a lot to be named to this all-time list alongside players I looked up to. It's fun to think about what it would have been like if we all played together."

The frontcourt of Miller, Stewart and Parker dominated the game during their eras.

Stewart won four NCAA championships at UConn and earned Most Outstanding Player of the Final Four all four years. Parker led Tennessee to back-to-back titles in 2007-08. Miller, one of the original NCAA greats, starred for USC and led the Trojans to consecutive championships in 1983-84.

"I grew up watching Cheryl Miller play," Parker said. "She'd be No. 1. My dad was like 'This is who we wanted you to be.' I'm honored to be on this list with her."

The second team's backcourt is UConn's Sue Bird and Virginia's Dawn Staley. The former Cavaliers guard and current South Carolina coach is the only women's player to win the Most Outstanding Player of the Final Four on a losing team when her Cavaliers fell to Tennessee. Bird helped UConn win championships in 2000 and 2002.

The Lady Vols' Chamique Holdsclaw, UConn's Maya Moore and Lusia Harris of Delta State are on the second team frontcourt. Holdsclaw was a three-time NCAA champion and twice earned the tournament's MOP honor. Moore was part of the Huskies' dynasty that won a then-record 89 consecutive games. She helped the Huskies to consecutive titles in 2009-10.

Harris led Delta State to three AIAW titles in the mid-1970s and was the tournament's MVP each year.

"I'd watch these two teams play and I'm not sure who would win," UConn coach Geno Auriemma said of the first and second teams selected by the panel.

Auriemma has four former players on the first two teams, but would enjoy looking to the bench at a group of reserves that includes:

UCLA's Ann Meyers Drysdale, Kansas' Lynette Woodard and Texas Tech's Sheryl Swoopes in the backcourt. For the frontcourt, there is USC's Lisa Leslie, Baylor's Brittney Griner and South Carolina's A'ja Wilson.

"I am always asked if players today could play back in the '70s or '80s or vice versa. When you're great in one generation, you're going to be great in any generation," said Meyers Drysdale, who also was a member of the voting panel. "I don't think there's any name that is wrong or there's any name that is right. There's so many great players that are going to be left off."

## Who's winning the blame game over the shutdown? Here's what a new AP-NORC poll shows

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI and LINLEY SANDERS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As the government shutdown drags on with no end in sight, a new AP-NORC poll finds that most Americans see it as a significant problem — and all of the major players are being blamed.

Roughly 6 in 10 Americans say President Donald Trump and Republicans in Congress have "a great deal" or "quite a bit" of responsibility for the shutdown, while 54% say the same about Democrats in Congress,



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according to the poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. At least three-quarters of Americans believe each deserves at least a "moderate" share of blame, underscoring that no one is successfully evading responsibility.

The survey, conducted as the shutdown stretched into its third week, comes as leaders warn it could soon become the longest in history. Democrats are demanding an extension of tax credits that have helped millions of people afford health insurance since the coronavirus pandemic, while Republicans have refused to negotiate until Congress passes a funding bill to reopen the government.

The standoff has become a messaging battle, with each party betting the public will blame the other. The stakes are especially high for Democrats, now out of power and searching for a unifying fight to rally around ahead of pivotal 2026 midterm elections.

Slightly more of the public's frustration appears to be aimed at the party in power. The poll finds that about half of Americans say Trump has "a great deal" of responsibility for the shutdown, the very highest amount of responsibility offered in the poll. That's roughly the same share who fault Republicans in Congress, but higher than the 40% who say the same of Democrats.

Sophia Cole, a 38-year-old Republican mother from St. Louis, placed equal blame for the shutdown on Trump and Congress. Cole, who described herself as a Trump supporter, said both sides "should be able to come together" on a compromise but believes it is ultimately the Republican president's responsibility to broker a deal.

"We're dependent on him to get the House and everyone to vote the way that he needs them to vote," Cole said.

Democrats and independents more likely to call the shutdown a 'major issue'

The effects of the shutdown are beginning to be felt across the country. Flights have been delayed, and hundreds of thousands of federal employees who are furloughed or working without pay are starting to miss paychecks.

The poll finds that 54% of U.S. adults call the shutdown a "major issue," with just 11% saying it is "not a problem at all." Democrats are most likely, at 69%, to see it as a major problem, but 59% of independents and 37% of Republicans feel the same way.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., said this week the country is "barreling toward one of the longest shutdowns in American history." The last shutdown, during Trump's first term, went to for a record 35 days and drew similar public sentiment, with Democrats more likely than Republicans to see it as a major problem.

The White House has warned the impact of the shutdown could be worse this time. While roughly 2 million service members were paid on time this week, the administration has used the federal workforce as leverage, and last weekend it began following through on threats to lay off federal workers. But on Wednesday, a federal judge in California temporarily blocked the firings, saying they appeared to be politically motivated and were being carried out without much thought.

"Things are just going to keep getting worse for federal workers," said Angie Santiago, a 60-year-old Democrat from Miami. "If people like me are struggling, I can't imagine what federal workers are going through."

Santiago, who is on disability while her husband works, said she fears the shutdown will worsen economic hardship across the country. Santiago said during a phone interview that she began regularly going to food banks about a year ago.

"I'm calling you from a food line," she said. "You're going to see more of these lines popping up. It's going to get bad."

More favor than oppose extending health care subsidies

At the center of the shutdown is a stalemate over federal tax credits for people who buy health insurance through the Affordable Care Act marketplace. Democrats want the credits extended, while Republicans say they will discuss the issue only once the government reopens.

The poll shows that roughly 4 in 10 U.S. adults support extending the tax credits, while about 1 in 10 oppose it outright. A large share, 42%, have no opinion, suggesting many Americans are not closely fol-

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lowing the core dispute driving the shutdown.

Jason Beck, a Republican who is a self-employed insurance agent in Utah, uses the Affordable Care Act marketplace for his own insurance and supports extending the tax credits.

"I know a lot of the shutdown is over health insurance, and I'd rather just keep it the same way it is now," Beck said of the subsidies.

Democrats say that keeping health insurance prices the same is central to their fight and that prices will skyrocket if Congress doesn't do anything. But even Beck, who is on the Democrats' side with the subsidies, still places equal blame for the shutdown on Democrats, Republicans and Trump.

"Trump's blaming the Democrats, and the Democrats are blaming the Republicans," Beck said. "We're stuck because there's no middle ground anymore."

Neither party sees a substantial bump in favorability

Both parties have framed the shutdown as a prelude to the 2026 midterms, with Democrats aiming to flip the House. So far, however, it doesn't appear to have meaningfully shifted opinions about either party.

About 3 in 10 U.S. adults have a "somewhat" or "very" favorable view of the Democratic Party, in line with an AP-NORC poll from September. Four in 10 have a "somewhat" or "very" favorable view of the Republican Party, similar to last month.

Confidence in Congress, meanwhile, remains extremely low. Only about 4% of Americans say they have "a great deal" of confidence in the way Congress is being run, while 43% have "only some" confidence and about half have "hardly any" confidence.

But the poll suggests that health care could be a helpful issue for Democrats down the road. The poll found that 38% of Americans trust Democrats to do a better job handling health care, while only 25% trust Republicans more. About 1 in 10 trust both equally, and 25% trust neither.

Rob Redding, a 49-year-old independent voter from New York, supports extending ACA subsidies and credits Democrats for defending them.

Redding said Democrats holding the line on the ACA subsidies is probably one of the most valiant and gutsy things he's ever seen them do.

"And," Redding said, "I think that it's the right call."

## Trump's push for law and order shows he's no longer encumbered by government guardrails

By WILL WEISSERT and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump was telling a Rose Garden audience about his efforts to quell violence in the nation's capital when, as if on cue, his words were drowned out by the wail of sirens from passing vehicles.

"Listen to the beauty of that sound," Trump said, grinning. "They're not politically correct sirens."

The moment encapsulated how Trump's law-and-order-at-all-costs push has become a centerpiece of his second term — something he said has surprised him.

"Now it's like a passion for me," Trump said on Wednesday as he touted the results of a crackdown named "Operation Summer Heat" in the Oval Office, during which he said the FBI had made 8,000-plus arrests. He said his actions were "many, many steps above" what he'd pledged on the campaign trail last year.

He's deployed troops to Democratic-majority cities and directed federal officials, often with their faces obscured by masks, to round up people living in the country illegally. He's suggested urban areas could become military "training grounds" and toyed with invoking the Insurrection Act so political opponents can't use the courts to foil his plans.

Now settled into his second term, the Republican president has embraced the kind of tough-on-crime approach he was unable to achieve as naysayers checked his most extreme instincts during his first four years in office.

Trump's efforts have drawn resistance from local leaders. His plans to send soldiers to Chicago and

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Portland, Oregon, have been thwarted by legal challenges. He has said he's confident he'll win on appeal but hasn't ruled out using the Insurrection Act as a workaround, if needed.

But elsewhere, his moves have dramatically altered day-to-day lives. Earlier this year, he took control of the California National Guard in response to protests against immigration raids in Los Angeles and sent the National Guard into Washington, D.C., and Memphis, Tennessee.

Trump also has mused about taking similar action in Baltimore, New Orleans New York and Boston.  
'Bring Back Our Police'

Trump's embrace of the hardest possible line against crime suspects dates back to his days as a real estate mogul back in the gritty days of 1970s and '80s New York, when crime was rampant.

His mindset burst into public view when he stirred racial tensions by calling for the execution of the Central Park Five, a group of Black and Hispanic teenagers wrongly convicted of rape in 1989.

Trump took out full-page newspaper ads under the headlines: "Bring Back The Death Penalty. Bring Back Our Police!" Those convictions were vacated in 2002, after evidence linked a serial rapist to the crime. Today, the case is remembered by activists as evidence of a criminal justice system prejudiced against defendants of color.

"That's the very same spirit that's at work now," said the Rev. J. Lawrence Turner of the Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church in Memphis. Turner said Trump had "demonized" and "targeted" Memphis, which is 62% African American and has a Black mayor and county leader.

"We have this president unleashed in this second term," he said.

First-term flirtations

Trump covered some of the same political ground in his first term during the protests over racism and police brutality sparked by the 2020 killing of George Floyd, when he sent troops to the streets of Washington and to Portland. But his advisers at the time staunchly opposed many of his calls to more broadly deploy the military to beat back unrest.

Trump's former defense secretary Mark Esper later told CBS' "60 Minutes" that Trump had asked during the protests whether the National Guard could be tougher on demonstrators. "Can't you just shoot them? Just shoot them in the legs, or something," Esper said he recalled Trump saying.

However, a Trump signature bipartisan achievement in his first term was a 2018 criminal justice reform measure meant to reduce federal prison populations and address disparities in sentencing, after lobbying from advocates including Kim Kardashian.

Trump was attacked from the right for that policy, though, during the 2024 Republican primary and rarely spoke about his criminal justice reform bill while campaigning. He instead drew cheers with calls for the death penalty for drug dealers and those who kill police officers.

'We're going to save all our cities'

Trump now sees getting tough on crime as a winning political issue heading into next year's midterm elections.

"We're going to save all of our cities, and we're going to make them essentially crime-free," he said Wednesday.

Recent polling from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found his administration's tough-on-crime approach has emerged as one of his best issues, amid frustrations over his handling of the economy and immigration.

The vast majority of Americans, 81%, see crime as a "major problem" in large cities, even as statistics show violent crime is down across the nation following a coronavirus pandemic-era spike.

The shift also reflects a Trump no longer encumbered by chiefs of staff, generals and others who saw their duty as reining in his most extreme impulses and have long been replaced by loyalists.

"This time around, he has people around him that are not simply supporting what he's doing, they're encouraging him," said Patrick G. Eddington, a senior fellow at the libertarian Cato Institute.

'Making all Americans safer'

The White House rejects suggestions Trump's crackdown on crime has anything to do with race. It says the National Guard is being utilized in different cities for different reasons.

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Washington is a crime-fighting push that Republican state leaders in Tennessee asked be replicated in Memphis, it argues. In Portland and Chicago, as in Los Angeles previously, the goal is protection of federal authorities working on priorities like immigration enforcement.

"The president's bold actions in cities across the country are making all Americans safer," White House spokesperson Abigail Jackson said, describing Trump's actions as the fulfillment of a campaign promise.

Still, deploying troops to cities gives Trump the opportunity to paint Democratic opponents as soft on crime while overstating — often in apocalyptic terms — how bad the problem really is. He then exaggerates the results.

He spent weeks suggesting Portland is "on fire" and declared Washington "a raging hellhole." He now suggests Washington crime has fallen to zero, which also isn't true.

Maya Wiley, president and CEO of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, said the administration's efforts are an extension of Trump's brand, which she described as "using race overtly to drive division, to consolidate a base and to use that to usurp power a president does not have, or should not be deemed to have."

Indeed, Trump now routinely speaks of criminals as people without redemption.

"They're sick," he said recently, "and we're taking them out."

## Embattled French Prime Minister Sébastien Lecornu survives no-confidence votes in Parliament

By JOHN LEICESTER and JEFFREY SCHAEFFER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — French Prime Minister Sébastien Lecornu survived two votes of no-confidence Thursday that could have toppled his fragile new government and plunged France deeper into political chaos.

The National Assembly votes clear the way for the embattled Lecornu to pursue what could be an even greater challenge: getting a 2026 budget for the European Union's second-largest economy through Parliament's powerful but bitterly divided lower house before the end of the year.

Lecornu's survival also spares any immediate need for President Emmanuel Macron to dissolve the National Assembly and call snap legislative elections, a hazardous option that the French leader took in 2024 and which he had signaled that he might take again if Lecornu fell.

One tight vote

Lecornu, a close ally of the French president, faced two no-confidence motions filed by Macron's fiercest opponents — the hard-left France Unbowed party and Marine Le Pen of the far-right National Rally and her allies in Parliament.

The 577-seat chamber voted on the France Unbowed motion first — and it fell short by 18 votes, with 271 lawmakers supporting it. It needed a majority of 289 votes to succeed.

Le Pen's second motion got just 144 votes, well short of a majority, backed only by her party, its allied Union of the Right for the Republic and a handful of other lawmakers.

Yaël Braun-Pivet, the National Assembly president and a Macron loyalist, said the outcome left her "reasonably optimistic" about the chances of building consensus for the 2026 budget in Parliament despite its deep divisions.

"I am sure that there's a path," she said.

Opposition parties hold fire, for now

But Lecornu isn't out of the woods yet.

To get the votes he needed, Lecornu dangled the possibility of rolling back one of the flagship but most unpopular reforms of Macron's second term as president, which will gradually raise France's retirement age from 62 to 64.

Lecornu's proposed suspension of the 2023 pension reform helped convince lawmakers from the opposition Socialist Party to grudgingly decide not to back the efforts to topple him, at least for now.

With 69 lawmakers, Socialist backing for Lecornu's removal would have tipped the outcome against him. But just seven Socialists broke ranks in voting for the France Unbowed motion.



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The conservative Republicans, with 50 lawmakers, also withheld backing for Lecornu's removal, despite a fiery appeal for support from Éric Ciotti, a former Republicans leader who since 2024 has allied with Le Pen's far right.

"Don't compromise yourselves by supporting this government. Don't swallow this snake, this boa (constrictor), this pink alligator," Ciotti said. "No voter on the right will forgive you."

In the closest-run first motion, just one Republicans lawmaker backed Lecornu's removal. But for Le Pen's second motion, with lower stakes because it had little chance of succeeding, three Republicans broke ranks and voted against the prime minister, underscoring that conservative tolerance for Lecornu could quickly run dry in the coming weeks or months.

Lecornu gives up a special power

Lecornu's still fragile position could yet crumble if Socialist or Republicans lawmakers change tack and support any future no-confidence votes if they don't get what they want in the budget negotiations that are sure to be fractious.

Lecornu has promised not to use a special constitutional power to railroad the budget through Parliament without lawmakers' approval — which was the tool that Macron's government employed to impose the 2023 pension reform despite a firestorm of protests.

Building consensus in Parliament for tax hikes, spending cuts and other budget measures to start reining in France's ballooning state deficit and debt promises to be extremely difficult, with the National Assembly deeply divided since Macron dissolved it in June 2024. The ensuing legislative elections produced no outright winner and precipitated the political deadlock that has gripped France ever since, with Macron's prime ministers falling in quick succession.

The prospect of a hard-fought presidential race when Macron's second and last term ends in 2027 is also complicating consensus-building, with political parties already looking to score points with voters. Addressing lawmakers before they voted, Lecornu urged them to put those considerations aside for now.

"History, in any case, will judge these political maneuvers very harshly, where the platform of the National Assembly has essentially been confused with an advertising platform," he said. "The presidential election will come. You will have the opportunity to campaign. For now, do not hold the nation's budget and the Social Security budget hostage."

## **A bomb explodes on Syrian Defense Ministry bus, killing 4 soldiers and wounding others**

DAMASCUS, Syria (AP) — A bomb exploded Thursday on a Syrian Defense Ministry bus in the country's east, killing four soldiers and wounding others, the country's oil minister said.

Oil Minister Mohammed al-Bashir said on the social platform X that the soldiers were killed and wounded while on their way to work as guards at an oil facility.

State-run Al-Ikhbariah TV said the explosion occurred on the road linking the eastern cities of Deir el-Zour and Mayadeen. The report said the soldier worked at a 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.

## Lesotho finds its HIV care system unraveling and patients in despair in the wake of US cuts

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 Makhwanyane, 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.

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.

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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, 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

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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 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



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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.

## Today in History: October 17 Loma Prieta earthquake strikes California

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Friday, Oct. 17, the 290th day of 2025. There are 75 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Oct. 17, 1989, a magnitude-6.9 earthquake struck northern California, killing 63 people and causing up to \$10 billion worth of damage.

Also on this date:

In 1777, British forces under Gen. John Burgoyne surrendered to American troops in Saratoga, New York, in a turning point of the Revolutionary War.

In 1931, mobster Al Capone was convicted in Chicago of income tax evasion; he would be sentenced to 11 years in prison, fined \$50,000 and ordered to pay back taxes. Capone was released in 1939.

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In 1933, Albert Einstein arrived in the United States as a refugee from Nazi Germany.

In 1967, Puyi, the last emperor of China, died in Beijing at age 61.

In 1979, Mother Teresa of India was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

In 1989, Game 3 of the World Series was canceled as the Loma Prieta earthquake struck Northern California just 30 minutes before the game was scheduled to begin at Candlestick Park in San Francisco; the game would eventually be played 10 days later.

In 2024, Israel announced its forces in Gaza killed Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar, a chief architect of 2023's Hamas-led attack on southern Israel in which militants abducted 251 people and killed some 1,200 others, prompting Israel's retaliatory war that has killed tens of thousands of Palestinians in the small coastal strip.

Today's Birthdays: Singer Gary Puckett is 83. Actor-musician Michael McKean is 78. Astronaut Mae Jemison is 69. Country singer Alan Jackson is 67. Film director Rob Marshall is 65. Animator-filmmaker Mike Judge is 63. Reggae singer Ziggy Marley is 57. Actor Wood Harris is 56. Musician Wyclef Jean is 56. Golf Hall of Famer Ernie Els is 56. Singer Chris Kirkpatrick ('N Sync) is 54. Rapper Eminem is 53. Actor Matthew Macfadyen is 51. Actor Felicity Jones is 42. Singer-songwriter Nikki Lane is 42.