

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, November 20, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 169 ~ 1 of 54

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- 1440 News Headlines](#)
- [3- 2025 Frosty Clues](#)
- [4- Groton Angel Trees](#)
- [5- Ace of Hearts Drawing Tonight](#)
- [6- With so much polluted water, SD lawmaker says state can no longer 'dance around' ag regulations](#)
- [7- SD SearchLight: South Dakota attorney general convenes task force to review open meetings laws](#)
- [8- SD SearchLight: Trump signs bill requiring DOJ release of Epstein files](#)
- [9- SD SearchLight: US House votes to cancel big payouts for senators' 'Arctic Frost' phone subpoenas](#)
- [11- SD SearchLight: Stock trading by members of Congress could be banned in bipartisan push](#)
- [13- SD SearchLight: Spiraling health insurance costs stymie members of US Senate panel](#)
- [15- SD SearchLight: Shortage of rural doctors won't end anytime soon, report says](#)
- [16- Weather Pages](#)
- [20- Daily Devotional](#)
- [21- Upcoming Events](#)
- [21- Subscription Form](#)
- [22- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [23- News from the Associated Press](#)

## Thursday, Nov. 20

Senior Menu: Baked fish, au gratin potato, 3-bean salad, peach cobbler, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Biscuits.

School Lunch: Turkey gravy and mashed potatoes, dressing.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Praise and Thanksgiving, 1:30 p.m. (Program: Sarah, Hostess: Nigeria)

4th grade GBB practice, 4 p.m.

3rd grade GBB practice, 5 p.m.

State Volleyball at Rapid City

## Flags Raised to Full-Staff Following the Funeral of Former Vice President Dick Cheney

PIERRE, S.D. – Governor Larry Rhoden ordered that flags be raised to full-staff statewide after sunset on Thursday, November 20, 2025, following the funeral of former Vice President Dick Cheney. Flags were initially lowered as a mark of respect for the former Vice President, who passed away on November 3, 2025.



## Friday, Nov. 21

Senior Menu: Creamed chicken over biscuits, peas and carrots, pineapple.

School Breakfast: Doughnuts.

School Lunch: Garlic cheese bread, green beans.

State Volleyball at Rapid City

MS GBB at Milbank (7th at 4 p.m., 8th at 5 p.m.)

## Saturday, Nov. 22

State Volleyball at Rapid City

**Groton Daily Independent**  
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**Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460**

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# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, November 20, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 169 ~ 2 of 54

# 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.**

## **Comey Indictment Questioned**

Justice Department lawyers revealed yesterday they never presented a revised indictment against former FBI Director James Comey to a full grand jury—an unusual error that threatens to derail the federal government's case.

In September, interim US Attorney Lindsey Halligan presented three counts against Comey to a grand jury stemming from his 2020 testimony over the Trump-Russia investigation. The grand jury rejected one false statement charge but voted to indict on the other two: a separate false statement charge and one count of obstruction. However, instead of presenting a revised, two-count indictment to the grand jury for approval, Halligan revealed yesterday that she presented the updated charging document only to the foreperson, who signed it.

Comey was indicted on Sept. 25, days before the statute of limitations was set to expire. The case relates to his denying having authorized anyone at the FBI to serve as an anonymous source to news reports.

## **Netherlands Drops Nexperia**

The Dutch government announced yesterday that it will hand back control of semiconductor chip company Nexperia to its Chinese owners, Wingtech Technology.

The Netherlands' economic minister seized control of Nexperia—headquartered in the country's eastern city of Nijmegen—in September. The decision followed a threat by the United States that it would place Nexperia on a trade blacklist unless the company shed its Chinese leadership. After the Netherlands used a Cold War-era law to seize the plant, China—which packages the chips—moved to block exports. The standoff sent ripples across the auto industry as Nexperia controls an estimated 40% of the global market share for a certain semiconductor used in cars. Honda last month was among the companies forced to reduce output due to the supply chain disruption.

China lifted the export ban earlier this month, following President Donald Trump's meeting with Chinese leader Xi Jinping. The Netherlands cited "constructive" dialogue with China in yesterday's decision.

## **Record-Ready Kahlo**

A Frida Kahlo self-portrait could become the most expensive artwork by a female or Latin American artist at auction tonight in New York. Sotheby's estimates "El sueño (La cama)" will fetch \$40M to \$60M, potentially surpassing the \$44.4M woman's record set by a Georgia O'Keeffe painting and \$34.9M Latin American record held by another Kahlo self-portrait.

"El sueño (La cama)" depicts Kahlo asleep beneath a skeleton wrapped in explosives, a nod to a Mexican Easter effigy. While most Kahlo pieces are in Mexico under a law barring their sale, this self-portrait is privately owned abroad. The piece appears in a surrealist-themed auction, although Kahlo rejected the surrealist label.

Separately, a Gustav Klimt painting sold for \$236.4M Tuesday, making it the second most expensive artwork auctioned after Leonardo da Vinci's \$450.3M "Salvator Mundi." Art auction sales this week could exceed \$1.4B, potentially marking a 50% increase from 2024 and a rebound for the market after three years of declines.

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

Retired Swiss tennis star Roger Federer—first man to win 20 Grand Slam singles titles—elected to International Tennis Hall of Fame in first year of eligibility.

Women's Pro Baseball League inaugural draft kicks off tonight at 8 pm ET; season starts August 2026 and will be played at Illinois' Robin Roberts Stadium.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, November 20, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 169 ~ 3 of 54

At least two Miss Universe judges resign days before pageant, with one accusing organizers of rigged selection process.

Singer D4vd identified as suspect in death of 15-year-old girl found dead in vehicle he owned.

## Science & Technology

OpenAI rolls out ChatGPT built for K-12 educators, offering it to teachers and schools for free through June 2027.

Researchers identify rapidly growing supermassive black hole in galaxy that formed relatively soon after the Big Bang, suggesting black holes expanded at accelerated pace in the early universe.

Scientists develop topical ointment capable of delivering insulin through skin, a potential alternative to invasive insulin injections for people with diabetes.

## Business & Markets

US stock markets close up (S&P 500 +0.4%, Dow +0.1%, Nasdaq +0.6%), snapping losing streak ahead of Nvidia earnings.

Nvidia shares rise in after-hours trading on stronger-than-expected Q3 revenue and Q4 guidance.

Labor Department confirms canceled October jobs report due to government shutdown; September jobs report to be released today.

Federal Reserve's October meeting minutes sow doubt over December rate cut.

US trade deficit drops nearly 24% month-over-month in August as Trump administration's global tariffs reduce imports by 5% month-over-month.

## Politics & World Affairs

Larry Summers resigns from the board of OpenAI, leaves Harvard University instructor role following the release of email exchanges between him and late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

President Donald Trump signs bill compelling the Justice Department to release unclassified Epstein records within 30 days.

Justice Department charges Rep. Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick (D, FL-20) for allegedly stealing \$5M in Federal Emergency Management Agency funds, funneling the money to support her congressional campaign.

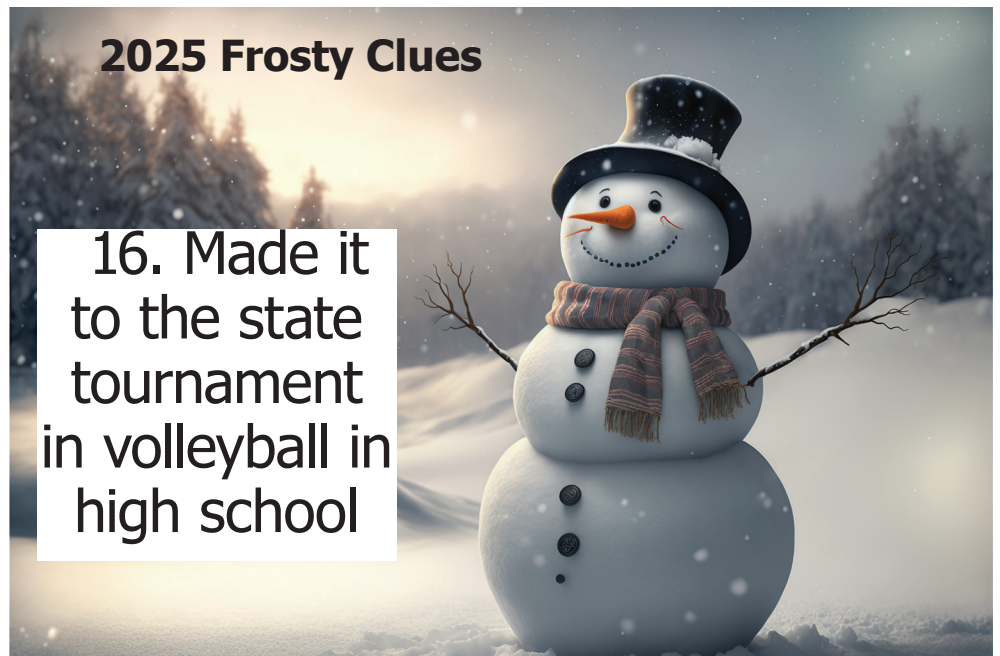
Japan's largest urban fire in nearly 50 years burns through the city of Oita on the southwestern island of Kyushu, damaging at least 170 buildings.

## Frosty is Back!!!

Please check the Groton Daily Independent for daily clues as to who the Groton Area Mystery Frosty is. The unveiling of Frosty will take place at the Groton Area Snow Queen Contest on Sunday, November 30th, at 4:00 pm.

## 2025 Frosty Clues

16. Made it to the state tournament in volleyball in high school



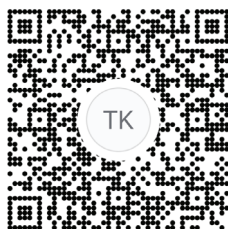
# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, November 20, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 169 ~ 4 of 54



**Be an angel this holiday season by bringing joy to those in need!**

Tina Kosel  
@Tina-Kosel-1



**venmo**

**If you want to donate to the Angel Tree Fund and want us to buy the presents for you, scan the Venmo code to the left. Thanks for your support of the Groton Angel Tree!**

**Any questions Call/Text Tina at**

# Groton Daily Independent

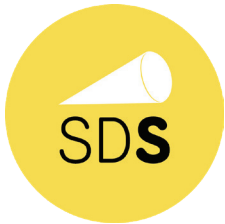
Thursday, November 20, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 169 ~ 5 of 54



Chase  
the **A**ce



Anyone want Ace of Hearts tickets? Five for \$20. I do take Venmo (@paperpaul - phone is 7460). Put your number (s) in the comment of your Venmo payment. Jackpot is close to \$15,000. Half to the winner and half split between the golf course and Legion. Drawing is Thursday at 6:00. If your ticket is drawn and you don't get the Ace of Hearts you get 10% of the ticket sales for the week! Or stop at the Legion. Ticket deadline is 5:30 on Thursday. Do not need to be present to win.



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### **With so much polluted water, SD lawmaker says state can no longer 'dance around' ag regulations**

**BY: JOSHUA HAIAR**

One of South Dakota's top lawmakers said Wednesday that it may be time to move beyond financial incentives and consider new regulations on agriculture to address the state's polluted rivers and lakes.

"I think it takes more than the carrot to address this," said state Senate President Pro Tempore Chris Karr, R-Sioux Falls.

Karr said he doubts the problem will be appropriately addressed "until we get serious about some different types of regulations."

"And that's pretty scary for folks, especially for those that are in the community that starts with the letter 'A' and ends with 'G,'" Karr said. "We can sit here and talk about it, and dance around it all day. I think you can have some incentives, but we're going to have to look at some restrictions as well, and regulate."

He made the comments during a meeting of the Legislature's Executive Board at the Capitol in Pierre.

The board had requested a report from the Legislative Research Council on surface water quality in South Dakota. Council analyst Lance Nixon presented the memo to the board. It says that over three-quarters of monitored river and stream miles in the state fail to fully support at least one of their intended uses — such as swimming, fishing or boating — with similar problems in many lakes.

House Majority Leader Scott Odenbach, R-Spearfish, pointed to long-running concerns such as high bacteria levels in surface water and the draining of wetlands. He said the state's approach feels a century out of date, and he urged his colleagues to consider a more in-depth, future study on water quality.

Nixon's memo highlights pollutants including sediment from highly erodible soils, fertilizers and chemicals from farm fields, mercury that falls from coal power plant emissions, and bacteria from livestock waste. It also flags emerging concerns about Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS, aka "forever chemicals"), the potential loss of federal environmental funding, and a U.S. Supreme Court ruling that makes it easier to drain wetlands.

Sen. Liz Larson, D-Sioux Falls, said the report proves what she has observed for years on the Big Sioux River. She cited E. coli levels above safe thresholds in the river, noting that much of the problem stems from livestock waste entering the river upstream.

"It's been a problem for a long time, and I've not seen anybody interested in doing anything about it," Larson said.

Karr referenced a bill he successfully sponsored in 2021. It allocated \$3 million to help landowners contain livestock waste and plant buffer strips along streams that filter polluted runoff and reduce erosion. A recent final report on that program said it resulted in 67 buffer projects spanning 83 linear miles under 10-year contracts. The buffers prevent an estimated 1,500 pounds of phosphorus, 6,500 pounds of nitrogen and 1,000 tons of sediment from entering the Big Sioux River watershed each year.

Jay Gilbertson is the manager of the East Dakota Water Development District. In an interview with South Dakota Searchlight, he acknowledged the buffer program's success but said he worries about what will happen when the contracts expire.

"I don't know that we can sustainably keep giving out bigger carrots to the landowners who have participated," Gilbertson said.

During the public comment section of Wednesday's meeting, several people urged legislators to take

Black Hills water issues seriously, warning that things like degraded streams and low summer flows are undermining water quality and trout fisheries. Hans Stephenson, who owns Dakota Angler and Outfitter in Rapid City, said he hopes lawmakers treat watersheds as "critical infrastructure" worth restoring.

*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.*

## South Dakota attorney general convenes task force to review open meetings laws

BY: JOHN HULT

A 15-member task force established by South Dakota's attorney general will review the state's open meetings laws and ponder possible changes.

South Dakota already has an Open Meetings Commission that reviews alleged violations of the state's open meetings laws and can issue disciplinary letters to offending government bodies. The commission was established in 2004 and is made up of five state's attorneys.

The Advisory Task Force Committee on Open Meetings Laws, announced Tuesday in a press release from Attorney General Marty Jackley, will have a different focus on the laws themselves and will include a wider array of stakeholders.

Among the 15 members appointed by Jackley are the heads of the South Dakota News Media Association and South Dakota Broadcasters Association, a lawyer for the state Department of Revenue and representatives for townships, cities, counties and school boards.

"Government, funded by the taxpayers, should be transparent," Jackley said in the press release, adding that the goal is "to increase government transparency within our state."

The group's first meeting will be at 10 a.m. Central time on Tuesday at the George S. Mickelson Criminal Justice Training Center in Pierre. The meeting will also be streamed online. An agenda and meeting link are available online.

### Task force members

Michael Smith – Clay County State's Attorney

Austin Hoffman – McPherson County State's Attorney

Karla Engle – Chief Legal Counsel for the South Dakota Dept. of Transportation

Kirsten Jasper – Chief Legal Counsel for the South Dakota Dept. of Revenue

Tracey Kelley – Custer County State's Attorney

Dylan Kirchmeier – Roberts County State's Attorney

Dave Bordewyk – South Dakota News Media Association

Steve Willard – South Dakota Broadcasters Association

Shane Roth – DeSmet School District Board President and Associated School Boards of South Dakota President

Garret Bischoff – Huron School District Board Vice-President and Associated School Boards of South Dakota Immediate Past President

Geoffrey Gray-Lobe – Clay County Commissioner

Cole Heisey – Minnehaha County Commissioner

Kellen Willert – City Attorney for the City of Belle Fourche

Terry Sletten – South Dakota Association of Towns and Townships Executive Director

Jim Urban – South Dakota Association of Towns and Townships Board of Director Member

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

## Trump signs bill requiring DOJ release of Epstein files

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump signed into law late Wednesday a bill compelling the release of unclassified investigative files from the case against convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, with whom he shared a well-documented friendship, though Trump denies any involvement in the financier's crimes.

Epstein, who surrounded himself with the rich and powerful, died in a Manhattan jail cell in 2019 awaiting federal trial on sex trafficking charges.

Trump signed the bill the day after the House sent it to the Senate, which agreed by unanimous consent to accept the measure.

In a post on his own social media platform Truth Social, the president name-called several prominent figures in business and politics, including former President Bill Clinton.

"Perhaps the truth about these Democrats, and their associations with Jeffrey Epstein, will soon be revealed, because I HAVE JUST SIGNED THE BILL TO RELEASE THE EPSTEIN FILES!" Trump wrote.

In the lengthy post, Trump credits himself and Republican leaders in Congress for the legislation, though the bipartisan bill was forced to the House floor via a discharge petition.

After months of loud cries to release the files, even from his base, Trump changed his position Sunday night and directed Republicans to support the measure.

In July, Trump's Department of Justice issued a memo that it would not publicly release any further records about the Epstein case.

The legislation overwhelmingly passed the House Tuesday in a 427-1 vote. GOP Rep. Clay Higgins, R-La., was the lone no vote.

The legislation compels the Justice Department to publicly disclose "all unclassified records, documents, communications, and investigative materials in its possession that relate to Epstein or (co-conspirator Ghislaine) Maxwell."

They include records related to Epstein's detention and death; flight logs from Epstein's planes; names of those connected with Epstein's alleged crimes; records of civil settlements, and sealed and unsealed immunity deals and plea bargains; records pertaining to entities with ties to Epstein's trafficking or financial networks; and internal DOJ communications "concerning decisions to investigate or charge Epstein or his associates."

The bill carves out exceptions for records containing victims' identities, images of death or physical abuse, and information that could jeopardize a federal investigation.

The bill also notes that the "DOJ may not withhold or redact records on the basis of embarrassment, reputational harm, or political sensitivity."

The bill's passage and Trump's signature came less than a week after lawmakers on the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform released some 20,000 pages of emails from Epstein's estate that repeatedly mentioned Trump's name.

In one email from Epstein to convicted co-conspirator Ghislaine Maxwell, the financier and sex offender claimed Trump "knew about the girls."

Many other names turned up in the thousands of pages of correspondence, including that of Democratic Delegate Stacey Plaskett, who represents the U.S. Virgin Islands, where Epstein owned a residence, and former Treasury Secretary Larry Summers.

A House Republican effort to censure Plaskett narrowly failed in the House Tuesday night. Summers announced Wednesday that he would resign from prominent board and other positions.

*Ashley Murray covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.*

## US House votes to cancel big payouts for senators' 'Arctic Frost' phone subpoenas

**Thune defends measure: 'You need to have some sort of accountability and consequence'**

**BY: JENNIFER SHUTT**

WASHINGTON — The U.S. House approved legislation Wednesday that would revoke part of a law Congress approved just last week, which for the first time allows senators to sue the federal government, potentially for millions of dollars, if their data is subpoenaed without their knowledge.

The 426-0 vote sent the bill to the Senate, where Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., doesn't appear inclined to put the measure on the floor for a vote, though he hasn't entirely ruled it out.

"You have an independent, co-equal branch of the government whose members were, through illegal means, having their phone records acquired, spied on if you will, through a weaponized Biden Justice Department," Thune said. "That, to me, demands some accountability."

Thune said he understands why several Republican senators were frustrated they didn't know the provision was added to the funding package that ended the government shutdown.

"I take that as a legitimate criticism in terms of the process," Thune said. "But I think, on the substance, I believe that you need to have some sort of accountability and consequence for that kind of weaponization against a co-equal branch of the government."

Thune declined to say if he thinks it's appropriate for senators to sue for millions in taxpayer dollars for having their phone call records pulled as part of the investigation into President Donald Trump's efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election.

"I don't think there's anybody that was targeted for whom the money matters," Thune said. "I think it's more about the principle."

GOP Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, one of eight senators who could benefit, said shortly after the House wrapped up debate he plans to sue Verizon as well as the Department of Justice under the new provision.

"The subpoena that was issued, I think, was fatally flawed. The judicial order saying if you told me (about the subpoena) I would tamper with witnesses or tamper with evidence is legally offensive," Graham said. "I'm not going to take this crap anymore. I am going into court, and we'll see what happens."

### Dispute among Republicans

Senate Republicans' decision to include the lawsuit provision in the stopgap spending law that ended the 43-day government shutdown represented a rare public break between GOP congressional leaders.

Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., said last week just after the House passed the funding law he was "very angry" the lawsuit language was added to the package without his knowledge or sign off.

"I think that was way out of line. I don't think that was the smart thing to do. I don't think that was the right thing to do," Johnson said at the time. "And the House is going to reverse it. We're going to repeal that. And I'm going to expect our colleagues in the Senate to do the same thing."

The provision, which will remain in effect unless the Senate passes the new bill and Trump signs it, allows senators who had their cell phone or other data subpoenaed without their knowledge to sue the federal government for \$500,000 "for each instance of a violation."

The language is retroactive until Jan. 1, 2022, and allows the eight senators who had their cell phone call logs subpoenaed as part of the FBI's 2023 investigation into efforts to overturn the 2020 election to sue for millions of dollars.

The FBI reportedly obtained data for cell phone use between Jan. 4 and Jan. 7, 2021, for Graham and Sens. Marsha Blackburn and Bill Hagerty of Tennessee, Josh Hawley of Missouri, Ron Johnson of Wisconsin, Cynthia Lummis of Wyoming, Dan Sullivan of Alaska and Tommy Tuberville of Alabama, as well as Pennsylvania Rep. Mike Kelly. All are Republicans.

The law allows judges to delay notification for 60 days if the information was pulled as part of a criminal

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, November 20, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 169 ~ 10 of 54

investigation and if telling the senator would endanger someone's safety or life, lead the lawmaker to flee prosecution, result in someone tampering with or destroying evidence, lead to witness intimidation, place the investigation in jeopardy, or unduly delay the trial.

A judge could keep renewing that 60-day notification delay in criminal investigations if one or several of those elements continued to exist.

## Both parties object

House debate on the two-page bill sponsored by Georgia GOP Rep. Austin Scott was broadly bipartisan, though Democrats and Republicans expressed frustration with the lawsuit language for different reasons.

Administration Committee Chairman Bryan Steil, R-Wis., said the "troubling provision" in the spending law must be stricken.

"These provisions are not the right path to address the true concerns over the separation of powers," Steil said. "Remember, Congress serves the American people, not the other way around."

Steil said the FBI pulling cell phone call records for senators as part of its investigation into efforts to overturn the 2020 election, known as Operation Arctic Frost, was an abuse of power that should be addressed. But he said allowing senators to sue for millions of dollars in taxpayer money was the wrong way to do that.

"I'm committed to holding those involved accountable. No one benefited by the failures of the Biden administration," Steil said. "However, that does not mean that elected officials should be financially benefiting from those failures now."

New York Rep. Joe Morelle, ranking Democrat on the committee, said those eight senators' cell phone logs were pulled because FBI agents believed the lawmakers "had knowledge of or even participated in efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election. Efforts that culminated in a violent attack on this very institution."

Morelle said anyone with a basic understanding of criminal investigations knows that phone records "are among the most routine tools used" to gain a better understanding of events.

"They do not reveal the content of any conversations. They simply show which numbers were called, which numbers called them and when those calls were made," Morelle said.

"If these Republican senators genuinely believe that their civil liberties were violated or if they are interested in changing the law relating to subpoenas, then they are better positioned than literally anyone on planet Earth to hold hearings, draft legislation and debate proposed changes in the open," Morelle added. "But that's not what this is all about. This is about ensuring the law applies to every other American, just not to them."

Scott said House Republicans voted for the spending law to end the government shutdown, not because they supported the lawsuit provision, which he called "the most self-centered, self-serving piece of language that I have ever seen in any piece of legislation."

He also rebuked Sen. Graham for saying during interviews that he plans to sue the federal government.

"We have one senator, one, who maintains that this provision is good and is currently saying that he is going to sue for tens of millions of dollars," Scott said. "I believe my side did the right thing in voting to open up the government. There are a select few people that did the wrong thing in putting language in the bill that would make themselves individually wealthy."

## Bombs, cows, the Postal Service and lawsuits

Graham, who was an Air Force Judge Advocate General officer before entering politics, compared having his cell phone data pulled as part of the investigation to a case he handled earlier in his career after the Air Force "dropped a bomb on a guy's barn and killed his cow. And he was able to make a claim."

Graham also compared it to someone suing the government after being hit by a U.S. Postal Service truck, when asked by a reporter what he plans to do with the millions of dollars he will likely receive if he were to win the case.

"You do whatever you want to do with the money if you've been wronged," Graham said.

In addition to filing a lawsuit, Graham hopes to broaden the language so that organizations and private individuals can file suit against the government under the Federal Tort Claims Act if they feel they've been wronged similarly.

"I will insist on a vote in the United States Senate to expand the ability of people to make claims that may have been harmed," Graham said, adding that would likely include the Republican Attorneys General Association, the Republican National Committee and Turning Point USA.

Graham rejected criticisms of the lawsuit provision from fellow GOP lawmakers, saying it doesn't represent "self-dealing."

"I understand politics, but I'm not worried about that. I'm worried about getting the right outcome," Graham said. "I mean, if you don't want me to sue the government, that's up to you. I'm going to sue, whether you like it or not. I'm not going to put up with this anymore, and people in my spot shouldn't have to deal with this in the future."

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

## Stock trading by members of Congress could be banned in bipartisan push

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — At least 25 bills have been introduced this Congress to further limit lawmakers and their family members from trading individual stocks, and representatives across the aisle renewed pressure Wednesday on U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson to take up the issue.

Their contention is members of Congress hold a serious advantage over everyday Americans when buying and selling stocks because of their access to information on Capitol Hill.

The House Committee on Administration convened Wednesday morning to hear how existing guardrails laid out in the 2012 STOCK Act fall short and consider the options to revamp it.

The Stop Trading on Congressional Knowledge Act, shortened to the STOCK Act, codified that members of Congress, congressional employees and other federal officials are not exempt from federal insider trading laws.

The law also required that lawmakers and certain congressional staffers must disclose stock transactions that amount to over \$1,000 within 45 days.

The law built upon the late 1970s-era Ethics in Government Act that established financial disclosure requirements for officials in all three branches of government.

"While rules already govern how public officials trade stocks, stronger restrictions may be necessary to restore trust and ensure officials are not profiting from their positions," said Chair Bryan Steil, R-Wis.

Ranking member Joe Morelle, D-N.Y., said that he "unequivocally" supports a ban on members of Congress trading individual stocks and "that ban should extend to the co-equal branches of government as well."

### Law seen as ineffective

Policy experts before the committee poked holes in the protective measures already on the books.

"Despite allegations of improper conduct, no member of Congress has ever been prosecuted under the (STOCK) Act, nor do any public records exist indicating that officials have ever paid statutory fines for STOCK Act disclosure errors," said James Copland, senior fellow and director of legal policy at the conservative Manhattan Institute.

Trust in lawmakers and government officials to self-police is eroding, argued the experts and several committee members.

Roughly 86% of the public across party lines wants to ban members of Congress from trading individual stocks, according to a 2023 survey from the University of Maryland School of Public Policy.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, November 20, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 169 ~ 12 of 54

Dan Savickas, vice president of policy and government affairs for the advocacy group Taxpayers Protection Alliance, said data collected by stock activity trackers and journalists reveals Congress' sticky entanglement with the market.

According to a January 2024 report from Unusual Whales, a platform that monitors lawmakers' stock transactions, dozens of members who traded in 2023 outperformed the S&P 500 Index.

A New York Times investigation published in 2022 found 3,700 stock transactions by members of Congress from both parties from 2019 to 2021 "posed potential conflicts between their public responsibilities and private finances."

Savickas said a number of issues exist in the law's current form, not least of which is that the STOCK Act "does not prevent conflicted trading by members of Congress, but merely requires them to report when and if they do so."

Plus, many report them late without consequence, he added. Additionally, a violation is only subject to a \$200 penalty and enforcement is left up to the executive branch, leaving it vulnerable to subjectivity and politics, Savickas said.

Some members of the committee questioned how lawmakers would be taxed should they be forced to divest, and how to navigate specific family investments. That included Rep. Morgan Griffith, R-Va., whose family owns 20% of a community swimming pool he and his family have long used.

"How do we make sure that we're not eliminating me or making me sell something that I feel strongly about? This has been part of my childhood, part of all my kids' childhoods," Griffith said, adding that his son coached the local swim team to the championships last year.

"How do we protect that while curing the ills of people who are trying to do bad things?"

## 'As crooked as a dog's leg'

During a press conference ahead of the hearing, Rep. Tim Burchett, R-Tenn., said "this place is as crooked as a dog's leg, and it needs to stop."

Burchett joined Reps. Brian Fitzpatrick, R-Pa., Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., and Seth Magaziner, D-R.I., in urging Johnson to bring to the floor the Restore Trust in Congress Act, a bill joining together several members' proposals from this year.

The bill would prohibit Congress members, their spouses, and any dependent children and trustees from owning, buying or selling securities, commodities, futures and certain other assets. If enacted, a lawmaker and their family members would have 180 days to divest. Those newly elected would have a 90-day timeline to do so. The ban would not apply to diversified funds.

"Everybody standing here along with a number of others have been working on this issue for some time," Magaziner told reporters.

"We all worked together over the course of the summer to come up with a single, unified bill. So we have one bill, one strategy, and now it is on leadership to get this done and give us a vote," he continued.

Other leaders on the issue who've signed onto the joint effort include Reps. Anna Paulina Luna, R-Fla., Chip Roy, R-Texas, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., and Joe Neguse, D-Colo. Nearly 80 others signed as cosponsors in addition to the 16 original names.

Fitzpatrick said lawmakers "have to get this done, we will get this done this Congress."

"Mark my words, this bill, or a bill, will come to the floor, hopefully through an open amendment process where we can make this better," Fitzpatrick told reporters.

"If we are all willing to accept the premise, and I hope everyone is, that members of Congress unequivocally have access to inside information — we do — if you accept that premise then we have to do something on the stock trading front," he continued.

## Johnson timeline for action

When asked by States Newsroom if Johnson has a timeline for bringing any of the proposals to the floor, a spokesperson responded in an email, "We'll defer to House Admin (committee) for the time being

whether they plan to markup a bill etc.”

Johnson told Punchbowl News in September that a stock trading ban bill is “a tough issue.”

In May, Johnson said he worried whether a ban would affect who could serve in Congress because salaries haven’t risen in several years.

“But on balance, my view is we probably should do that because I think it’s been abused in the past and I think, sadly, a few bad actors discolor it for everyone,” he said.

*Ashley Murray covers the nation’s capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.*

## Spiraling health insurance costs stymie members of US Senate panel

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — U.S. senators began debating how to reduce health care costs for Americans during a hearing Wednesday, where experts’ varied recommendations and comments from lawmakers previewed the rocky and potentially long path ahead.

Republicans on the Finance Committee argued the Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare, has led to a spike in health insurance costs for individuals that shouldn’t be offset by tax credits any longer.

Democrats urged their colleagues to extend the enhanced subsidies for at least another year to give Congress more time to address larger, more complex issues within the country’s health insurance and health care systems.

Committee Chairman Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, said the hearing marked “the first step in building the foundation for” health care reform.

“We need both short-term and long-term solutions,” Crapo said. “In the short term, we cannot simply throw good money after bad policy. If we keep advancing a system that drives up premiums, we will make this problem even harder to solve.”

“Instead, we should set the groundwork for giving Americans more control over their health care choices,” Crapo added. “Rather than accepting the current system of giving billions of taxpayer dollars to insurers, we should consider providing financial assistance directly to consumers through health savings accounts, which are now available on the Obamacare exchanges through a provision in the One Big Beautiful Bill.”

Such tax-advantaged accounts are used to save money to pay for medical expenses and generally are used in conjunction with a high-deductible insurance plan, but an HSA “is a trust/custodial account and is not health insurance,” according to the Congressional Research Service.

The ACA, signed into law by President Barack Obama in 2010, overhauled the U.S. health care system with the intent of reducing high rates of uninsured people and ending insurance industry practices such as exclusions based on pre-existing conditions and the sale of policies with high costs and skimpy coverage. The law also expanded Medicaid and, for individual coverage, introduced the health insurance exchanges, or marketplaces, that now are at issue.

According to the health organization KFF, the number of uninsured Americans fell from about 14% to 16% in the years preceding passage of the law to a record low of 7.7% in 2023.

### Pessimism about health care action

Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden, the top Democrat on the panel, rebuked Republicans for focusing on other policy areas throughout the year instead of making improvements to health care.

“Sitting on your hands has consequences,” he said.

Wyden doesn’t see a way for Congress to extend the enhanced tax credits set to expire at the end of the year for people who get their health insurance from the ACA marketplace, despite Democrats pressing for that during the 43-day government shutdown that ended in mid-November.

Wyden expressed support for working with Republican senators to address health insurance companies’

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, November 20, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 169 ~ 14 of 54

structure, though he said he is "skeptical" his GOP colleagues will actually approve legislation on that particular issue in the months ahead.

"Now if they are serious about taking on the crooks that dominate big insurance, like UnitedHealthcare, I'm all in," Wyden said. "In my view that starts with a laser focus on lower costs for consumers, going after fraud where it truly exists, and cracking down on middlemen."

## **'Very little that this Congress can do'**

Douglas Holtz-Eakin, president at the center-right American Action Forum and former chief economist at the Council for Economic Advisers during the President George W. Bush administration, told the committee the structure of the Affordable Care Act poses problems.

"As a piece of health policy, economic policy and budget policy, the ACA has always been a troubling construct," Holtz-Eakin said, later adding there is "very little that this Congress can do to change the outlook" for 2026.

Holtz-Eakin testified that Congress is long "overdue for a real rethinking of health care policy at the federal level" that he believes should focus on two primary areas.

The first is to "rationalize the insurance subsidies" and the second is to address what he referred to as "high-value care," which he said should include Medicare, the health program that covers 69 million Americans over 65 and some people with disabilities.

"Medicare is a great budgetary threat, and so I encourage the committee and the Congress as a whole to take a hard look at that and make some progress toward better health care outcomes and better budgetary outcomes," Holtz-Eakin said.

Jason Levitis, senior fellow of the Health Policy Division at the left-leaning Urban Institute and a Treasury employee who led the ACA implementation at the department during the Obama administration, urged lawmakers to address the "too complicated and segmented" health insurance marketplace.

Levitis said the best short-term option for Congress would be to extend the enhanced tax credits for ACA enrollees during 2026, despite the time crunch.

"At this point the only feasible option is a clean extension of the existing enhancements," Levitis said. "The marketplaces have already built that option and have been preparing for months for the possibility of an extension."

## **Former Trump adviser says ACA 'failed'**

Brian Blase, president of the Paragon Health Institute and a former special assistant to President Donald Trump at the White House National Economic Council, said bluntly that the Affordable Care Act has "failed."

"The law entrenched an inefficient insurance-dominated health sector with massive subsidies flowing straight from the Treasury to health companies," Blase said.

The subsidies for ACA marketplace plans, he said, were "ill-designed and inflationary," urging lawmakers not to extend them for another year.

"The enrollee share of the premium is capped regardless of the total premium. When enrollees pay only a small slice of the premium or no premium at all, insurers face almost no price discipline," Blase said. "Insurers can raise premiums knowing the taxpayers will absorb almost all of the increase."

Blase said he believes the ACA's regulations on health insurance companies are one of the reasons costs have spiked.

"For example, under the medical loss ratio, insurers must spend a minimum share of premium revenue on medical claims. In other words, to increase profits, insurers must increase premiums," Blase said. "The ACA's essential health benefits require plans to cover the same set of services regardless of what people want or need. These rules increase premiums and wasteful spending."

The medical loss ratio was included in the ACA in response to insurers who spent "a substantial portion" of premiums on administrative costs and profits, including executive salaries, overhead and marketing, according to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, November 20, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 169 ~ 15 of 54

## 'We all believe we need to reform'

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., told reporters separately from the hearing the debate over how to restructure health insurance to bring down costs has highlighted the "differences of opinion" among GOP lawmakers.

"We've got a lot of people who have strong views, but the one thing that unites us is we all believe we need to reform, and we've got to do something to drive health care costs down," Thune said.

GOP leaders, he added, are "looking for solutions that will lower health care premiums, not increase them. And what we see today is just constant inflationary impacts from some of these policies of the past."

Trump, who would need to support any health care overhaul bill for it to move through Congress, wrote in a social media post Tuesday that he wants lawmakers to send money straight to Americans, without detail on how that would work.

"THE ONLY HEALTHCARE I WILL SUPPORT OR APPROVE IS SENDING THE MONEY DIRECTLY BACK TO THE PEOPLE, WITH NOTHING GOING TO THE BIG, FAT, RICH INSURANCE COMPANIES, WHO HAVE MADE \$TRILLIONS, AND RIPPED OFF AMERICA LONG ENOUGH," Trump wrote. "THE PEOPLE WILL BE ALLOWED TO NEGOTIATE AND BUY THEIR OWN, MUCH BETTER, INSURANCE. POWER TO THE PEOPLE! Congress, do not waste your time and energy on anything else. This is the only way to have great Health-care in America!!! GET IT DONE, NOW. President DJT"

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

## Shortage of rural doctors won't end anytime soon, report says

**Rural areas have about two-thirds of the primary care doctors they need**

**BY: NADA HASSANEIN**

For at least the next dozen years, rural areas will continue to have only about two-thirds of the primary care physicians they need, according to a report released Monday.

The nonprofit Commonwealth Fund based its analysis on federal health workforce data. Its report comes just days after states applied for portions of a \$50 billion rural health fund included in the broad tax and spending law President Donald Trump signed in July. Some states want to use the federal money to expand their rural residency programs, as physicians who complete their residencies in rural areas are more likely to practice in one.

About 43 million people live in rural areas without enough primary care physicians, according to the report. Across the country, nearly all — 92% — of rural counties are considered primary care professional shortage areas, compared to 83% of nonrural counties. Forty-five percent of rural counties had five or fewer primary care doctors in 2023. Roughly 200 rural counties lacked one altogether.

Nationally, the report found there was an average of one physician per 2,881 rural residents. States in the South had 3,411 patients per physician, whereas states in the Northeast had 1,979 residents per physician.

Rural residents are less likely to use telehealth for primary care, largely because of limited broadband internet access. About 19% of rural respondents said they received health care from a primary care physician via telehealth over the past year, compared with the national average of 29%.

The report also took the pulse of states' participation in national programs for rural areas, such as a federal loan repayment and scholarship program for physicians working in areas with a shortage of health care providers. In 2023, 40% of rural counties had at least one primary care clinician participating in the program — compared to 60% of nonrural counties.

While the demand for primary care physicians will surpass the supply, the study estimates that the supply of rural nurse practitioners will exceed demand over time, as nurse practitioners are the fastest-growing type of clinician in the U.S., regardless of geography, the authors wrote.

*Stateline reporter Nada Hassanein can be reached at [nhassanein@stateline.org](mailto:nhassanein@stateline.org).*

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

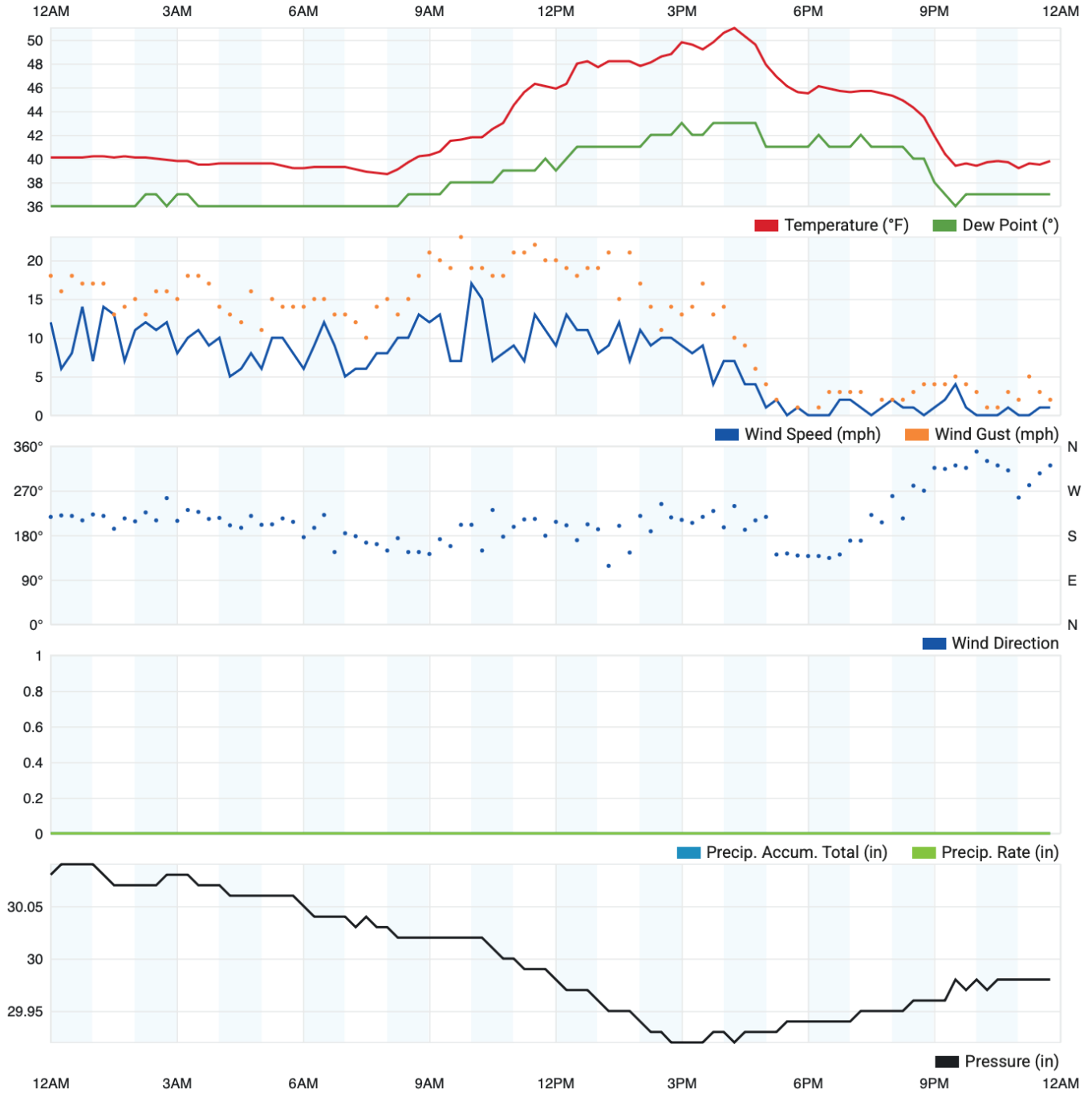
*Nada Hassanein is a health care reporter for Stateline with a focus on inequities.*

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, November 20, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 169 ~ 16 of 54

## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

November 19, 2025



# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, November 20, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 169 ~ 17 of 54

Today



High: 46 °F

Decreasing  
Clouds

Tonight



Low: 24 °F

Mostly Clear

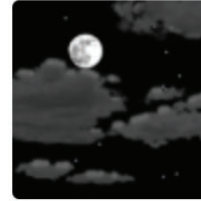
Friday



High: 47 °F

Sunny

Friday Night



Low: 29 °F

Partly Cloudy

Saturday



High: 53 °F

Mostly Sunny



## Mild and Dry through the Weekend

November 20, 2025  
3:37 AM

High Temperatures 10 to 20 degrees above average Friday - Sunday

Today



High:

40-48°

Overnight low:

23-30°

Wind:

NW 5-15 mph

Friday



High:

45-52°

Overnight low:

28-35°

Wind:

S 5-15 mph

Saturday



High:

50-58°

Overnight low:

28-32°

Wind:

W 10-20 mph  
Gusts to 30 mph



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

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

Mild temperatures for the second half of November can be expected through the weekend with highs mostly in the 40s and 50s. These readings are 10 to 20 degrees above average. Today will be the coolest day in highs in the 40s.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, November 20, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 169 ~ 18 of 54

## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 51 °F at 4:06 PM

Low Temp: 39 °F at 7:57 AM

Wind: 23 mph at 9:43 AM

Precip: : 0.00

## Today's Info

Record High: 769 in 1962

Record Low: -12 in 1985

Average High: 40

Average Low: 17

Average Precip in Nov.: 0.53

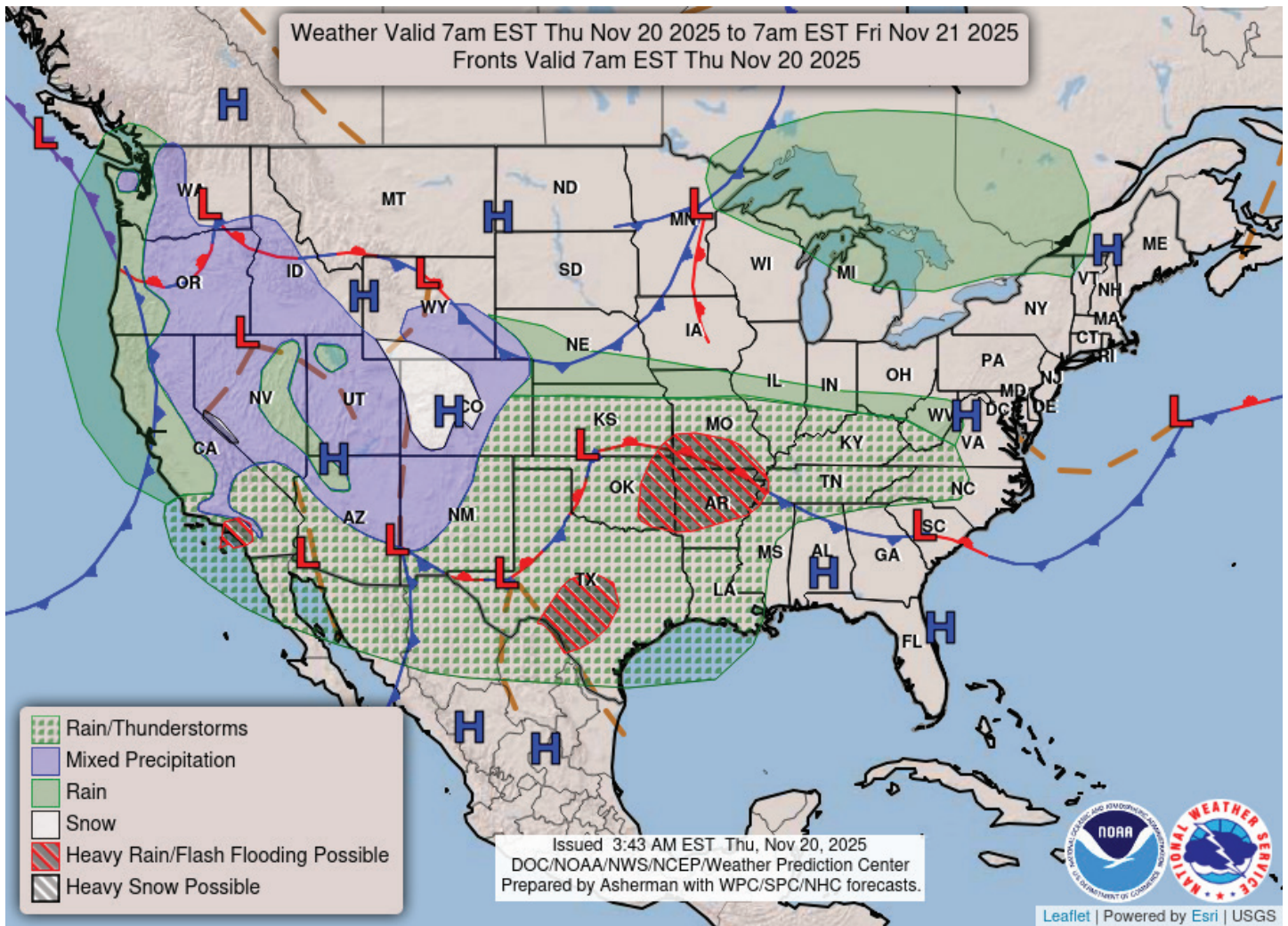
Precip to date in Oct.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 21.00

Precip Year to Date: 23.51

Sunset Tonight: 4:57 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:39 am



# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, November 20, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 169 ~ 19 of 54

## Today in Weather History

November 20, 1975: A storm center located in Oklahoma on Tuesday, November 18th, moved northeastward across Kansas into Iowa and Wisconsin on Wednesday the 19th and Thursday the 20th. Light rain began in the eastern half South Dakota on the morning of the 19th. The rain changed to snow during the afternoon and continued through the evening of the 20th. The winds increased, and blizzard conditions were reached by 6 pm CST on Wednesday the 19th. The snow was driven by sustained winds 40 to 50 miles per hour, gusting to 75 mph on some occasions, which reduced visibility to less than one-half mile. Heavy snow ranging from six to fifteen inches fell over an area southeast of a line from Todd to Aurora to Grant County. Traffic came to a standstill by Wednesday evening the 19th. The snow abruptly ended on the night of the 20th, but winds diminished rather slowly that night. Storm total snowfalls included 9 inches at Clear Lake and 7 inches at Watertown.

November 20, 1977: The second blizzard of the month began very early on Saturday, November 19th and continued through most of Sunday, November 20th. Wind speeds exceeding 50 mph caused much blowing and drifting snow. Visibility was reduced to near zero. Most of the roads in the northern and western parts of the state were blocked. Snowfall amounts north of Milbank and Pierre to Ardmore exceeded five inches. Most of the counties in the northwest and a significant portion of those in the north-central parts of the state reported snowfall amounts exceeding ten inches. Some drifts reached 4 to 5 feet. The highest reported snowfall was 20 inches in Eagle Butte. An eastbound train from Milbank had six freight cars derailed near Albee, in Grant County as a result of the storm. Snowfall totals from this blizzard included; 20 inches at Eagle Butte; 14 inches at Leola; 12 inches at Timber Lake and Britton; 11 inches 4NNE Victor and at Mobridge; 10 inches at 6SE McIntosh, 4W Mellette, Sand Lake, and Ipswich; 9.3 inches in Aberdeen; 9 inches 4NW Onida, at Sisseton, and 2N Onaka; 8 inches at Selby; 7 inches at McLaughlin and Waubay; 6 inches at Conde and Faulkton; 5 inches at Summit and Webster; 4 inches at Pierre, Wilmot and Highmore; and 3 inches at Watertown, Clear Lake, Miller, 3NE Raymond, Redfield, and Wheaton. The 9 inches at Sisseton helped to contribute to the snowiest November on record for Sisseton, which recorded 27.5 inches for November 1977.

1869 - A second great windstorm in three days struck Vermont and New York blowing railroad trains off their tracks. (David Ludlum)

1900: An unusual tornado outbreak in the Lower Mississippi Valley resulted in 73 deaths and extensive damage across Arkansas, Mississippi, and Tennessee.

1914 - The high temperature of 28 degrees at Atlanta, GA, was their earliest daily high below the freezing mark. (The Weather Channel)

1985: Kate intensified to a major Category 3 Hurricane and as she moved west of Key West, Florida with top winds of 115 mph and a minimum central pressure of 954 millibars or 28.17 inches of mercury. The next day Kate made landfall between Panama City and Apalachicola, Florida. Tides ran 8 to 10 feet above normal. Many power poles and lines were downed. Several roads were washed out.

2014: From the NWS Office in Buffalo, New York, "the epic November 17-19th 2014 lake effect event will be remembered as one of the most significant winter events in Buffalo's snowy history. Over 5 feet of snow fell over areas just east of Buffalo, with mere inches a few miles away to the north. There were 13 fatalities with this storm, hundreds of major roof collapses and structural failures, 1000s of stranded motorists, and scattered food and gas shortages due to impassable roads. Numerous trees also gave way due to the weight of the snow, causing isolated power outages. While this storm was impressive on its own, a second lake effect event on Nov-19-20 dropped another 1-4 foot of snow over nearly the same area and compounded rescue and recovery efforts. Storm totals from the two storms peaked at almost 7 feet, with many areas buried under 3-4 feet of dense snowpack by the end of the event."

2015: Season's first snow is Chicago's largest November snowfall in 120 years starting on November 20 and ending on the 21st. The season's first snowfall dropped as much as 17 inches across Chicago's northern suburbs, and the total of 11.2 inches at O'Hare International Airport made it the largest November snowfall in 120 years.

## Feasting on the Word

**In God's Word, we discover guiding principles for a satisfying life.**

### Deuteronomy 8:1-6: Do Not Forget the Lord

8 Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land the Lord promised on oath to your ancestors. 2 Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. 3 He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. 4 Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. 5 Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you.

6 Observe the commands of the Lord your God, walking in obedience to him and revering him.

The Bible should be the main course in our "literary diet." If we spend time in the Word, filling ourselves with its truths—just as we fill ourselves at the dinner table—our spirit and character will be nourished, joyful, and thriving.

It is in God's Word that we learn how He thinks and what He does. In those pages, we also discover the guiding principles for a fulfilling life. After all, how can we trust our heavenly Father unless we know Him? And how can we become like Jesus unless we practice the habits He details in Scripture?

In Proverbs 4:25-27, we read, "Let your eyes look directly ahead and let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you ... Do not turn to the right nor to the left." What this means in practical terms is that every time we must make a decision, we're to sift it through what we know of the Lord from Scripture. We do not live by human reason, the opinion of others, or our own wisdom. Rather, we conform our mind, heart, and will to the biblical standard.

Bread will keep the stomach full, but life will be empty without a daily serving of reading and meditation. Learn to recognize spiritual hunger pains, such as discontent or an ambivalence toward the things of God—and choose to feast on His Word.

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

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, November 20, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 169 ~ 21 of 54

## Upcoming Groton Events

- 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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# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, November 20, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 169 ~ 22 of 54



## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 11.18.25

5 10 23 27 30 10

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$60,000,000**

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 28  
DRAW: Mins 43 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 11.19.25

12 31 39 40 42 8

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$7,510,000**

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 43  
DRAW: Mins 43 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 11.19.25

2 4 12 34 38 16

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT 16 Hrs 58 Mins 43  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 11.19.25

4 20 23 24 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$92,000**

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 58  
DRAW: Mins 43 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 11.19.25

17 19 47 53 61 8

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 27  
DRAW: Mins 43 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 11.19.25

10 31 49 51 68 19

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$629,000,000**

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 27  
DRAW: Mins 43 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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

### **A corruption scandal pressures Ukraine's Zelenskyy to show greater accountability**

By SAMYA KULLAB and ISOBEL KOSHIW Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Pressure is mounting on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to take stronger action to show accountability in the face of a corruption scandal presenting the greatest threat to his government since Russia's full-scale invasion.

Last week, Zelenskyy dismissed two top officials and imposed sanctions on close associates after government investigators revealed that \$100 million had been embezzled from the energy sector through kickbacks paid by contractors.

But that hasn't quieted the political storm. After more than three years of war in which Ukrainians face regular power outages as a result of Russia's fierce bombardment, allegations of corruption in the energy sector aren't sitting well with the public. Calls are growing for Zelenskyy to remove his longtime chief of staff, Andrii Yermak, considered by many to be Ukraine's de facto vice president.

Neither Zelenskyy nor Yermak have been accused of any wrongdoing by those leading the corruption investigation. Yet Zelenskyy's political opponents — as well as allies worried the scandal could weaken their parliamentary governing coalition — say more senior leaders need to be held accountable to restore public trust.

Zelenskyy's term officially ended in May 2024, but he has continued to govern without elections, saying they cannot be held while Russia is occupying a fifth of the country.

His critics say it's also important to bolster credibility with Ukraine's Western allies, whose support is vital to the war effort and in eventually negotiating an end to the conflict.

"It's really hard to imagine that all this is happening at the behest of people from the outside without political support," Anastasia Radina, the head of parliament's anti-corruption committee, said on Facebook on Wednesday. By not cutting ties with Yermak, Zelenskyy is "provoking an even greater internal crisis," she said.

Ukraine has been plagued by corruption since gaining independence, and Zelenskyy was elected on a mandate to eliminate graft.

Two officials in Zelenskyy's office say the president has not made any decision to dismiss Yermak. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief journalists.

#### Zelenskyy dismisses top officials

The investigation conducted by Ukraine's anti-corruption watchdogs implicated high-ranking officials with pressuring contractors to pay up to 15% kickbacks in exchange for construction business with Ukraine's state-owned nuclear energy company, Energoatom.

The investigation involved over 1,000 hours of wiretaps of individuals using code names and cryptic language to discuss the scheme. In some conversations, references were made to a powerful figure operating under the alias "Ali Baba," though this person's identity has not been made public, if it is even known.

After the scheme was made public, Ukraine's parliament approved Zelenskyy's dismissal of the energy and justice ministers. His office imposed sanctions on close associates who were implicated, including Tymur Mindich, a co-owner of Zelenskyy's media production company.

The scandal landed just as Russian airstrikes had left millions of Ukrainians without power, which only intensified the furor. Earlier this year, Zelenskyy faced criticism for trying to weaken the watchdog agencies leading the investigation.

Zelenskyy's political opponents say it is hard to believe that such a huge corruption scheme could have taken place without the knowledge of Yermak — the presidential adviser who has towered over Ukrainian politics for six years — though they have not provided any evidence to support the allegation.

Yermak has not publicly addressed the calls for his resignation.

However, he has apparently sought to bolster his support within the government. He sought to arrange a meeting with Ukraine's popular former army chief, Valerii Zaluzhnyi, who is currently Ukraine's ambassador to the United Kingdom, according to an official close to Zaluzhnyi who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly. The request for a meeting was denied, the official said.

Yermak's spokesperson did not respond to request for comment.

Political pressure grows

Zelenskyy's landslide victory in 2019 resulted in him obtaining around two-thirds of the seats in parliament. Many of his allies favor Yermak's resignation, said lawmaker Oleksandr Merezhko, who is a member of the president's political party.

"The faction and the parliament don't want to bear responsibility for the corruption," he said.

Around 30 members of parliament from Zelenskyy's party are campaigning to create a coalition of national stability based on unity and not political interests and backroom deals, said Mykyta Porturaev, a leading Zelenskyy party lawmaker. But the head of Zelenskyy's party, David Arakhamia, said Porturaev's announcement did not reflect the official party line. Ukraine's parliamentary speaker, Ruslan Stefanchuk, said lawmakers are consulting on next steps.

A powerful figure

Yermak met Zelenskyy over 15 years ago when he was a lawyer venturing into the TV production business and Zelenskyy was a famous Ukrainian comedian and actor.

Yermak plays a central role in Zelenskyy's administration in managing relationships with the U.S. and other Western countries, and developing possible scenarios for a ceasefire with Russia.

He oversaw foreign affairs as part of Zelenskyy's first presidential team and was promoted to chief of staff in February 2020.

Yermak has accompanied Zelenskyy on every trip abroad since Russia's invasion in February 2022, and the president's trust in him has made Yermak's power appear almost insurmountable.

Domestically, officials describe Yermak as Zelenskyy's gatekeeper, and he is widely believed to have chosen all top government appointees, including prime ministers and ministers.

Individuals connected to Yermak and the president's office have come under investigation before.

Two of Yermak's former deputies — Oleg Tatarov and Rostyslav Shurma — left the government in 2024 under pressure after watchdogs investigated them for financial wrongdoing. A third deputy, Andriy Smirnov, was investigated for bribes and other wrongdoing, but still works for Yermak.

## Lainey Wilson wins entertainer of the year at 2025 CMA Awards

By MARIA SHERMAN AP Music Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The top prize of entertainer of the year at the 2025 Country Music Association Awards went to none other than Lainey Wilson, who hosted, performed and barely left the stage Wednesday night.

"It takes a village," she said in her acceptance speech. "We about to party." She beat out Luke Combs, Cody Johnson, Chris Stapleton and Morgan Wallen, last year's winner in the category.

Earlier in the night, she won album of the year for "Whirlwind" — marking her second career win in the category — and earned the trophy for female vocalist of the year. It was her fourth time winning that title.

She celebrated other women in country music — and had a few choice words for those who don't.

"For the folks that are sitting at home, in your mama's basement, eating your Cheetos, trying to pit women against each other," she concluded her speech. "Y'all need to find something better to do."

In some ways, it echoed 2023's award show, where Wilson took home five trophies including entertainer of the year.

But it wasn't just Lainey celebrating at the 59th annual CMA Awards, which aired live from Nashville's Bridgestone Arena. It was also a big night for Ella Langley and Riley Green from the jump. The duo's retro radio hit, "You Look Like You Love Me," took home both single and song of the year at the 2025 Country Music Association Awards Wednesday night.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, November 20, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 169 ~ 25 of 54

"This song is the gift that keeps on giving," Langley said.

"How cool is it that a song with talking verses wins song of the year," added Green.

The legendary Vince Gill was presented with the Willie Nelson Lifetime Achievement Award, serenaded with his classic "When I Call Your Name" by Brandi Carlile and Patty Loveless.

"His guitar playing is amazing. His songwriting is amazing. His singing is amazing," said George Strait. He handed the award to Gill, his friend, and said there was none more deserving. "He's just an immense talent. And oh, yeah, he plays with The Eagles."

Gill joked throughout his acceptance speech. First, about his high vocal tone, and later, that he might be the only person to win the award "that's never smoked any weed," a nod to its namesake and his friend Nelson.

Brooks & Dunn won vocal duo of the year, their 16th victory in the category. "I heard earlier tonight, 'Man, y'all ever get sick of this?'" Kix Brooks said in his acceptance speech. "Hell no!"

Male vocalist of the year went to Cody Johnson, his first win in the category.

Combs opened the show with a fiery rendition of his single "Back in the Saddle," setting the stage for Wilson to launch into a spirited medley. She was joined by a star-studded crew of surprise collaborators, Little Big Town and Keith Urban among them.

Performances arrived fast and fierce from there: Moroney, Stapleton, Kelsea Ballerini, The Red Clay Strays, Stephen Wilson, Jr. and Kenny Chesney shined, one after another. Old Dominion performed on a small stage in the middle of the audience, working their way through a medley of "Break Up with Him," "Memory Lane," "One Man Band," "Hotel Key" and "Snapback."

Shaboozey brought some much needed depth; Wilson's funky "Ring Finger" further proved she can do it all. Langley, Green, Tucker Wetmore and rapper BigXThaPlug held it down for a new generation of country music fans. The latter was especially noteworthy: Combs joined the Texas MC for their duet "Pray Hard," further confirmation of country and rap's crossover.

Zach Top, who performed his ode to six-strings, "Guitar," early in the show, took home the trophy for new artist of the year. "I can't remember if I was supposed to put my beer down first or not," he joked in his speech before taking a swig. It was his first CMA Award.

The CMA Awards are nominated and voted on by members of the Country Music Association, which includes music executives, artists, publicists, songwriters and other industry professionals.

The CMA Awards were broadcast live on ABC and will be available to stream Thursday on Hulu.

## NASA unveils close-up pictures of the comet popping by from another star

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — NASA unveiled close-up pictures on Wednesday of the interstellar comet that's making a quick one-and-done tour of the solar system.

Discovered over the summer, the comet known as 3I/Atlas is only the third confirmed object to visit our corner of the cosmos from another star. It zipped harmlessly past Mars last month.

Three NASA spacecraft on and near the red planet zoomed in on the comet as it passed just 18 million miles (29 million kilometers) away, revealing a fuzzy white blob. The European Space Agency's two satellites around Mars also made observations.

Other NASA spacecraft will remain on the lookout in the weeks ahead, including the Webb Space Telescope. At the same time, astronomers are aiming their ground telescopes at the approaching comet, which is about 190 million miles (307 million kilometers) from Earth. The Virtual Telescope Project's Gianluca Masi zoomed in Wednesday from Italy.

The comet is visible from Earth in the predawn sky by using binoculars or a telescope.

"Everyone that is in control of a telescope wants to look at it because it's a fascinating and rare opportunity," said NASA's acting astrophysics director, Shawn Domagal-Goldman.

The closest the comet will come to Earth is 167 million miles (269 million kilometers) in mid-December.

Then it will hightail it back into interstellar space, never to return.

ESA's Juice spacecraft, bound for Jupiter, has been training its cameras and scientific instruments on the comet all month, particularly after it made its closest pass to the sun. But scientists won't get any of these observations back until February because Juice's main antenna is serving as a heat shield while it's near the sun, limiting the flow of data.

Named for the telescope in Chile that first spotted it, the comet is believed to be anywhere from 1,444 feet (440 meters) across to 3.5 miles (5.6 kilometers) across. Observations indicate that the exceptionally fast-moving comet may have originated in a star system older than our own — "which gives me goose bumps to think about," said NASA scientist Tom Statler.

"That means that 3I/Atlas is not just a window into another solar system, it's a window into the deep past and so deep in the past that it predates even the formation of our Earth and our sun," Statler told reporters.

NASA officials were quick to dispel rumors that this friendly solar system visitor, as they called it, might be an alien ship of some sort. They said that because of the federal government shutdown, they weren't able to respond to all the theories cropping up in recent weeks.

The space agency is always on the hunt for life beyond Earth, "but 3I/Atlas is a comet," said NASA's associate administrator, Amit Kshatriya.

## **Border Patrol is monitoring US drivers and detaining those with 'suspicious' travel patterns**

By BYRON TAU and GARANCE BURKE Associated Press

The U.S. Border Patrol is monitoring millions of American drivers nationwide in a secretive program to identify and detain people whose travel patterns it deems suspicious, The Associated Press has found.

The predictive intelligence program has resulted in people being stopped, searched and in some cases arrested. A network of cameras scans and records vehicle license plate information, and an algorithm flags vehicles deemed suspicious based on where they came from, where they were going and which route they took. Federal agents in turn may then flag local law enforcement.

Suddenly, drivers find themselves pulled over — often for reasons cited such as speeding, failure to signal, the wrong window tint or even a dangling air freshener blocking the view. They are then aggressively questioned and searched, with no inkling that the roads they drove put them on law enforcement's radar.

Once limited to policing the nation's boundaries, the Border Patrol has built a surveillance system stretching into the country's interior that can monitor ordinary Americans' daily actions and connections for anomalies instead of simply targeting wanted suspects. Started about a decade ago to fight illegal border-related activities and the trafficking of both drugs and people, it has expanded over the past five years.

The Border Patrol has recently grown even more powerful through collaborations with other agencies, drawing information from license plate readers nationwide run by the Drug Enforcement Administration, private companies and, increasingly, local law enforcement programs funded through federal grants. Texas law enforcement agencies have asked Border Patrol to use facial recognition to identify drivers, documents show.

This active role beyond the borders is part of the quiet transformation of its parent agency, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, into something more akin to a domestic intelligence operation. Under the Trump administration's heightened immigration enforcement efforts, CBP is now poised to get more than \$2.7 billion to build out border surveillance systems such as the license plate reader program by layering in artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies.

The result is a mass surveillance network with a particularly American focus: cars.

This investigation, the first to reveal details of how the program works on America's roads, is based on interviews with eight former government officials with direct knowledge of the program who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to speak to the media, as well as dozens of federal, state and local officials, attorneys and privacy experts. The AP also reviewed thousands of pages

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, November 20, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 169 ~ 27 of 54

of court and government documents, state grant and law enforcement data, and arrest reports.

The Border Patrol has for years hidden details of its license plate reader program, trying to keep any mention of the program out of court documents and police reports, former officials say, even going so far as to propose dropping charges rather than risk revealing any details about the placement and use of their covert license plate readers. Readers are often disguised along highways in traffic safety equipment like drums and barrels.

The Border Patrol has defined its own criteria for which drivers' behavior should be deemed suspicious or tied to drug or human trafficking, stopping people for anything from driving on backcountry roads, being in a rental car or making short trips to the border region. The agency's network of cameras now extends along the southern border in Texas, Arizona and California, and also monitors drivers traveling near the U.S.-Canada border.

And it reaches far into the interior, impacting residents of big metropolitan areas and people driving to and from large cities such as Chicago and Detroit, as well as from Los Angeles, San Antonio, and Houston to and from the Mexican border region. In one example, AP found the agency has placed at least four cameras in the greater Phoenix area over the years, one of which was more than 120 miles (193 kilometers) from the Mexican frontier, beyond the agency's usual jurisdiction of 100 miles (161 kilometers) from a land or sea border. The AP also identified several camera locations in metropolitan Detroit, as well as one placed near the Michigan-Indiana border to capture traffic headed towards Chicago or Gary, Indiana, or other nearby destinations.

Border Patrol's parent agency, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, said they use license plate readers to help identify threats and disrupt criminal networks and are "governed by a stringent, multi-layered policy framework, as well as federal law and constitutional protections, to ensure the technology is applied responsibly and for clearly defined security purposes."

"For national security reasons, we do not detail the specific operational applications," the agency said. While the U.S. Border Patrol primarily operates within 100 miles of the border, it is legally allowed "to operate anywhere in the United States," the agency added.

While collecting license plates from cars on public roads has generally been upheld by courts, some legal scholars see the growth of large digital surveillance networks such as Border Patrol's as raising constitutional questions. Courts have started to recognize that "large-scale surveillance technology that's capturing everyone and everywhere at every time" might be unconstitutional under the Fourth Amendment, which protects people from unreasonable searches, said Andrew Ferguson, a law professor at George Washington University.

Today, predictive surveillance is embedded into America's roadways. Mass surveillance techniques are also used in a range of other countries, from authoritarian governments such as China to, increasingly, democracies in the U.K. and Europe in the name of national security and public safety.

"They are collecting mass amounts of information about who people are, where they go, what they do, and who they know ... engaging in dragnet surveillance of Americans on the streets, on the highways, in their cities, in their communities," Nicole Ozer, the executive director of the Center for Constitutional Democracy at UC Law San Francisco, said in response to the AP's findings. "These surveillance systems do not make communities safer."

'We did everything right and had nothing to hide'

In February, Lorenzo Gutierrez Lugo, a driver for a small trucking company that specializes in transporting furniture, clothing and other belongings to families in Mexico, was driving south to the border city of Brownsville, Texas, carrying packages from immigrant communities in South Carolina's low country.

Gutierrez Lugo was pulled over by a local police officer in Kingsville, a small Texas city near Corpus Christi that lies about 100 miles (160 kilometers) from the Mexican border. The officer, Richard Beltran, cited the truck's speed of 50 mph (80 kph) in a 45 mph (72 kph) zone as the reason for the stop.

But speeding was a pretext: Border Patrol had requested the stop and said the black Dodge pickup with a white trailer could contain contraband, according to police and court records. U.S. Route 77 passes through

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, November 20, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 169 ~ 28 of 54

Kingsville, a route that state and federal authorities scrutinize for trafficking of drugs, money and people.

Gutierrez Lugo, who through a lawyer declined to comment, was interrogated about the route he drove, based on license plate reader data, per the police report and court records. He consented to a search of his car by Beltran and Border Patrol agents, who eventually arrived to assist.

They unearthed no contraband. But Beltran arrested Gutierrez Lugo on suspicion of money laundering and engaging in organized criminal activity because he was carrying thousands of dollars in cash — money his supervisor said came directly from customers in local Latino communities, who are accustomed to paying in cash. No criminal charges were ultimately brought against Gutierrez Lugo and an effort by prosecutors to seize the cash, vehicle and trailer as contraband was eventually dropped.

Luis Barrios owns the trucking company, Paquetería El Guero, that employed the driver. He told AP he hires people with work authorization in the United States and was taken aback by the treatment of his employee and his trailer.

"We did everything right and had nothing to hide, and that was ultimately what they found," said Barrios, who estimates he spent \$20,000 in legal fees to clear his driver's name and get the trailer out of impound.

Border Patrol agents and local police have many names for these kinds of stops: "whisper," "intel" or "wall" stops. Those stops are meant to conceal — or wall off — that the true reason for the stop is a tip from federal agents sitting miles away, watching data feeds showing who's traveling on America's roads and predicting who is "suspicious," according to documents and people interviewed by the AP.

In 2022, a man from Houston had his car searched from top to bottom by Texas sheriff's deputies outside San Antonio after they got a similar tipoff from Border Patrol agents about the driver, Alek Schott.

Federal agents observed that Schott had made an overnight trip from Houston to Carrizo Springs, Texas, and back, court records show. They knew he stayed overnight in a hotel about 80 miles (129 kilometers) from the U.S.-Mexico border. They knew that in the morning Schott met a female colleague there before they drove together to a business meeting.

At Border Patrol's request, Schott was pulled over by Bexar County sheriff's deputies. The deputies held Schott by the side of the road for more than an hour, searched his car and found nothing.

"The beautiful thing about the Texas Traffic Code is there's thousands of things you can stop a vehicle for," said Joel Babb, the sheriff's deputy who stopped Schott's car, in a deposition in a lawsuit Schott filed alleging violations of his constitutional rights.

According to testimony and documents released as part of Schott's lawsuit, Babb was on a group chat with federal agents called Northwest Highway. Babb deleted the WhatsApp chat off his phone but Schott's lawyers were able to recover some of the text messages.

Through a public records act request, the AP also obtained more than 70 pages of the Northwest Highway group chats from June and July of this year from a Texas county that had at least one sheriff's deputy active in the chat. The AP was able to associate numerous phone numbers in both sets of documents with Border Patrol agents and Texas law enforcement officials.

The chat logs show Border Patrol agents and Texas sheriffs deputies trading tips about vehicles' travel patterns — based on suspicions about little more than someone taking a quick trip to the border region and back. The chats show how thoroughly Texas highways are surveilled by this federal-local partnership and how much detailed information is informally shared.

In one exchange a law enforcement official included a photo of someone's driver's license and told the group the person, who they identified using an abbreviation for someone in the country illegally, was headed westbound. "Need BP?," responded a group member whose number was labeled "bp Intel." "Yes sir," the official answered, and a Border Patrol agent was en route.

Border Patrol agents and local law enforcement shared information about U.S. citizens' social media profiles and home addresses with each other after stopping them on the road. Chats show Border Patrol was also able to determine whether vehicles were rentals and whether drivers worked for rideshare services.

In Schott's case, Babb testified that federal agents "actually watch travel patterns on the highway" through license plate scans and other surveillance technologies. He added: "I just know that they have a lot of toys over there on the federal side."

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, November 20, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 169 ~ 29 of 54

After finding nothing in Schott's car, Babb said "nine times out of 10, this is what happens," a phrase Schott's lawyers claimed in court filings shows the sheriff's department finds nothing suspicious in most of its searches. Babb did not respond to multiple requests for comment from AP.

The Bexar County sheriff's office declined to comment due to pending litigation and referred all questions about the Schott case to the county's district attorney. The district attorney did not respond to a request for comment.

The case is pending in federal court in Texas. Schott said in an interview with the AP: "I didn't know it was illegal to drive in Texas."

'Patterns of life' and license plates

Today, the deserts, forests and mountains of the nation's land borders are dotted with checkpoints and increasingly, surveillance towers, Predator drones, thermal cameras and license plate readers, both covert and overt.

Border Patrol's parent agency got authorization to run a domestic license plate reader program in 2017, according to a Department of Homeland Security policy document. At the time, the agency said that it might use hidden license plate readers "for a set period of time while CBP is conducting an investigation of an area of interest or smuggling route. Once the investigation is complete, or the illicit activity has stopped in that area, the covert cameras are removed," the document states.

But that's not how the program has operated in practice, according to interviews, police reports and court documents. License plate readers have become a major — and in some places permanent — fixture of the border region.

In a budget request to Congress in fiscal year 2024, CBP said that its Conveyance Monitoring and Predictive Recognition System, or CMPRS, "collects license plate images and matches the processed images against established hot lists to assist ... in identifying travel patterns indicative of illegal border related activities." Several new developer jobs have been posted seeking applicants to help modernize its license plate surveillance system in recent months. Numerous Border Patrol sectors now have special intelligence units that can analyze license plate reader data, and tie commercial license plate readers to its national network, according to documents and interviews.

Border Patrol worked with other law enforcement agencies in Southern California about a decade ago to develop pattern recognition, said a former CBP official who spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal. Over time, the agency learned to develop what it calls "patterns of life" of vehicle movements by sifting through the license plate data and determining "abnormal" routes, evaluating if drivers were purposely avoiding official checkpoints. Some cameras can take photos of a vehicle's plates as well as its driver's face, the official said.

Another former Border Patrol official compared it to a more technologically sophisticated version of what agents used to do in the field — develop hunches based on experience about which vehicles or routes smugglers might use, find a legal basis for the stop like speeding and pull drivers over for questioning.

The cameras take pictures of vehicle license plates. Then, the photos are "read" by the system, which automatically detects and distills the images into numbers and letters, tied to a geographic location, former CBP officials said. The AP could not determine how, precisely the system's algorithm defines a quick turnaround or an odd route. Over time, the agency has amassed databases replete with images of license plates, and the system's algorithm can flag an unusual "pattern of life" for human inspection.

The Border Patrol also has access to a nationwide network of plate readers run by the Drug Enforcement Administration, documents show, and was authorized in 2020 to access license plate reader systems sold by private companies. In documents obtained by the AP, a Border Patrol official boasted about being able to see that a vehicle that had traveled to "Dallas, Little Rock, Arkansas and Atlanta" before ending up south of San Antonio.

Documents show that Border Patrol or CBP has in the past had access to data from at least three private sector vendors: Rekor, Vigilant Solutions and Flock Safety.

Through Flock alone, Border Patrol for a time had access to at least 1,600 license plate readers across

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, November 20, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 169 ~ 30 of 54

22 states, and some counties have reported looking up license plates on behalf of CBP even in states like California and Illinois that ban sharing data with federal immigration authorities, according to an AP analysis of police disclosures. A Flock spokesperson told AP the company "for now" had paused its pilot programs with CBP and a separate DHS agency, Homeland Security Investigations, and declined to discuss the type or volume of data shared with either federal agency, other than to say agencies could search for vehicles wanted in conjunction with a crime. No agencies currently list Border Patrol as receiving Flock data. Vigilant and Rekor did not respond to requests for comment.

Where Border Patrol places its cameras is a closely guarded secret. However, through public records requests, the AP obtained dozens of permits the agency filed with Arizona and Michigan for permission to place cameras on state-owned land. The permits show the agency frequently disguises its cameras by concealing them in traffic equipment like the yellow and orange barrels that dot American roadways, or by labeling them as jobsite equipment. An AP photographer in October visited the locations identified in more than two dozen permit applications in Arizona, finding that most of the Border Patrol's hidden equipment remains in place today. Spokespeople for the Arizona and Michigan departments of transportation said they approve permits based on whether they follow state and federal rules and are not privy to details on how license plate readers are used.

Texas, California, and other border states did not provide documents in response to the AP's public records requests.

CBP's attorneys and personnel instructed local cities and counties in both Arizona and Texas to withhold records from the AP that might have revealed details about the program's operations, even though they were requested under state open records laws, according to emails and legal briefs filed with state governments. For example, CBP claimed records requested by the AP in Texas "would permit private citizens to anticipate weaknesses in a police department, avoid detection, jeopardize officer safety, and generally undermine police efforts." Michigan redacted the exact locations of Border Patrol equipment, but the AP was able to determine general locations from the name of the county.

One page of the group chats obtained by the AP shows that a participant enabled WhatsApp's disappearing messages feature to ensure communications were deleted automatically.

## Transformation of CBP into intelligence agency

The Border Patrol's license plate reader program is just one part of a steady transformation of its parent agency, CBP, in the years since 9/11 into an intelligence operation whose reach extends far beyond borders, according to interviews with former officials.

CBP has quietly amassed access to far more information from ports of entry, airports and intelligence centers than other local, state and federal law enforcement agencies. And like a domestic spy agency, CBP has mostly hidden its role in the dissemination of intelligence on purely domestic travel through its use of whisper stops.

Border Patrol has also extended the reach of its license plate surveillance program by paying for local law enforcement to run plate readers on their behalf.

A federal grant program called Operation Stonegarden, which has existed in some form for nearly two decades, has handed out hundreds of millions of dollars to buy automated license plate readers, camera-equipped drones and other surveillance gear for local police and sheriffs agencies. Stonegarden grant funds also pay for local law enforcement overtime, which deputizes local officers to work on Border Patrol enforcement priorities. Under President Donald Trump, the Republican-led Congress this year allocated \$450 million for Stonegarden to be handed out over the next four fiscal years. In the previous four fiscal years, the program gave out \$342 million.

In Cochise County, Arizona, Sheriff Mark Dannels said Stonegarden grants, which have been used to buy plate readers and pay for overtime, have let his deputies merge their mission with Border Patrol's to prioritize border security.

"If we're sharing our authorities, we can put some consequences behind, or deterrence behind, 'Don't come here,'" he said.

In 2021, the Ward County, Texas, sheriff sought grant funding from DHS to buy a "covert, mobile, License

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, November 20, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 169 ~ 31 of 54

Plate Reader" to pipe data to Border Patrol's Big Bend Sector Intelligence Unit. The sheriff's department did not respond to a request for comment.

Other documents AP obtained show that Border Patrol connects locally owned and operated license plate readers bought through Stonegarden grants to its computer systems, vastly increasing the federal agency's surveillance network.

How many people have been caught up in the Border Patrol's dragnet is unknown. One former Border Patrol agent who worked on the license plate reader pattern detection program in California said the program had an 85% success rate of discovering contraband once he learned to identify patterns that looked suspicious. But another former official in a different Border Patrol sector said he was unaware of successful interdictions based solely on license plate patterns.

In Trump's second term, Border Patrol has extended its reach and power as border crossings have slowed to historic lows and freed up agents for operations in the heartland. Border Patrol Sector Chief Gregory Bovino, for example, was tapped to direct hundreds of agents from multiple DHS agencies in the administration's immigration sweeps across Los Angeles, more than 150 miles (241 kilometers) from his office in El Centro, California. Bovino later was elevated to lead the aggressive immigration crackdown in Chicago. Numerous Border Patrol officials have also been tapped to replace ICE leadership.

The result has been more encounters between the agency and the general public than ever before.

"We took Alek's case because it was a clear-cut example of an unconstitutional traffic stop," said Christie Hebert, who works at the nonprofit public interest law firm Institute for Justice and represents Schott. "What we found was something much larger — a system of mass surveillance that threatens people's freedom of movement."

AP found numerous other examples similar to what Schott and the delivery driver experienced in reviewing court records in border communities and along known smuggling routes in Texas and California. Several police reports and court records the AP examined cite "suspicious" travel patterns or vague tipoffs from the Border Patrol or other unnamed law enforcement agencies. In another federal court document filed in California, a Border Patrol agent acknowledged "conducting targeted analysis on vehicles exhibiting suspicious travel patterns" as the reason he singled out a Nissan Altima traveling near San Diego.

In cases reviewed by the AP, local law enforcement sometimes tried to conceal the role the Border Patrol plays in passing along intelligence. Babb, the deputy who stopped Schott, testified he typically uses the phrase "subsequent to prior knowledge" when describing whisper stops in his police reports to acknowledge that the tip came from another law enforcement agency without revealing too much in written documents he writes memorializing motorist encounters.

Once they pull over a vehicle deemed suspicious, officers often aggressively question drivers about their travels, their belongings, their jobs, how they know the passengers in the car, and much more, police records and bodyworn camera footage obtained by the AP show. One Texas officer demanded details from a man about where he met his current sexual partner. Often drivers, such as the one working for the South Carolina moving company, were arrested on suspicion of money laundering merely for carrying a few thousand dollars worth of cash, with no apparent connection to illegal activity. Prosecutors filed lawsuits to try to seize money or vehicles on the suspicion they were linked to trafficking.

Schott warns that for every success story touted by Border Patrol, there are far more innocent people who don't realize they've become ensnared in a technology-driven enforcement operation.

"I assume for every one person like me, who's actually standing up, there's a thousand people who just don't have the means or the time or, you know, they just leave frustrated and angry. They don't have the ability to move forward and hold anyone accountable," Schott said. "I think there's thousands of people getting treated this way."

## Larry Summers takes leave from teaching at Harvard after release of Epstein emails

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI and HOLLY RAMER Associated Press

Former U.S. Treasury Secretary Larry Summers abruptly went on leave Wednesday from teaching at Harvard University, where he once served as president, over recently released emails showing he maintained a friendly relationship with Jeffrey Epstein, Summers' spokesperson said.

Summers had canceled his public commitments amid the fallout of the emails being made public and earlier Wednesday severed ties with OpenAI, the maker of ChatGPT. Harvard had reopened an investigation into connections between him and Epstein, but Summers had said he would continue teaching economics classes at the school.

That changed Wednesday evening with the news that he will step away from teaching classes as well as his position as director of the Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Business and Government with the Harvard Kennedy School.

"Mr. Summers has decided it's in the best interest of the Center for him to go on leave from his role as Director as Harvard undertakes its review," Summers spokesperson Steven Goldberg said, adding that his co-teachers would finish the classes.

Summers has not been scheduled to teach next semester, according to Goldberg.

A Harvard spokesperson confirmed to The Associated Press that Summers had let the university know about his decision. Summers decision to go on leave was first reported by The Harvard Crimson.

Harvard did not mention Summers by name in its decision to restart an investigation, but the move follows the release of emails showing that he was friendly with Epstein long after the financier pleaded guilty to soliciting prostitution from an underage girl in 2008.

By Wednesday, the once highly regarded economics expert had been facing increased scrutiny over choosing to stay in the teaching role. Some students even filmed his appearance in shock as he appeared before a class of undergraduates on Tuesday while stressing he thought it was important to continue teaching.

Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren, a Democrat, said in a social media post on Wednesday night that Summers "cozied up to the rich and powerful — including a convicted sex offender. He cannot be trusted in positions of influence."

Messages appear to seek advice about romantic relationship

The emails include messages in which Summers appeared to be getting advice from Epstein about pursuing a romantic relationship with someone who viewed him as an "economic mentor."

"im a pretty good wing man , no?" Epstein wrote on Nov. 30, 2018.

The next day, Summers told Epstein he had texted the woman, telling her he "had something brief to say to her."

"Am I thanking her or being sorry re my being married. I think the former," he wrote.

Summers' wife, Elisa New, also emailed Epstein multiple times, including a 2015 message in which she thanked him for arranging financial support for a poetry project she directs. The gift he arranged "changed everything for me," she wrote.

"It really means a lot to me, all financial help aside, Jeffrey, that you are rooting for me and thinking about me," she wrote.

New, an English professor emerita at Harvard, did not respond to an email seeking comment Wednesday.

An earlier review completed in 2020 found that Epstein visited Harvard's campus more than 40 times after his 2008 sex-crimes conviction and was given his own office and unfettered access to a research center he helped establish. The professor who provided the office was later barred from starting new research or advising students for at least two years.

Summers appears before Harvard class

On Tuesday, Summers appeared before his class at Harvard, where he teaches "The Political Economy of Globalization" to undergraduates with Robert Lawrence, a professor with the Harvard Kennedy School.

"Some of you will have seen my statement of regret expressing my shame with respect to what I did in

communication with Mr. Epstein and that I've said that I'm going to step back from public activities for a while. But I think it's very important to fulfill my teaching obligations," he said.

Summers' remarks were captured on video by several students, but no one appeared to publicly respond to his comments.

Epstein, who authorities said died by suicide in 2019, was a convicted sex offender infamous for his connections to wealthy and powerful people, making him a fixture of outrage and conspiracy theories about wrongdoing among American elites.

Summers served as treasury secretary from 1999 to 2001 under President Bill Clinton. He was Harvard's president for five years from 2001 to 2006. When asked about the emails last week, Summers issued a statement saying he has "great regrets in my life" and that his association with Epstein was a "major error in judgement."

Other organizations that confirmed the end of their affiliations with Summers included the Center for American Progress, the Center for Global Development and the Budget Lab at Yale University. Bloomberg TV said Summers' withdrawal from public commitments included his role as a paid contributor, and the New York Times said it will not renew his contract as a contributing opinion writer.

## Arrests now top 250 in immigration crackdown across North Carolina

By GARY D. ROBERTSON Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — Federal agents have now arrested more than 250 people during a North Carolina immigration crackdown centered around Charlotte, the state's largest city, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security said Wednesday.

The operation that began over the weekend is the latest phase of Republican President Donald Trump's aggressive mass deportation efforts that have sent the military and immigration agents into Democratic-run cities — from Chicago to Los Angeles.

Immigration officials have blanketed the country since January, pushing detention counts to all-time highs above 60,000. Big cities and small towns across the country are targeted daily amid higher-profile pushes in places such as Portland, Oregon, where more than 560 immigration arrests were made in October. Smaller bursts of enforcement have popped up elsewhere.

The push to carry out arrests in North Carolina expanded to areas around the state capital of Raleigh on Tuesday, spreading fear in at least one immigrant-heavy suburb.

Late Wednesday, Raleigh Mayor Janet Cowell said via the social platform X that "border patrol enforcement appears to have been suspended" in the city. DHS did not announce a change to its presence and did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The number of arrests around Charlotte and beyond during what the government has dubbed "Operation Charlotte's Web" was about double the total announced by DHS officials earlier this week. The department said in a statement that agencies "continue to target some of the most dangerous criminal illegal aliens."

Their targets include people living in the U.S. without legal permission and those who allegedly have criminal records.

Federal officials have offered few details about those arrested. They've also remained quiet about the scope of the enforcement operations across North Carolina and where agents will show up next, keeping communities on edge.

The crackdown in Charlotte has been met with pockets of resistance and protests.

About 100 people gathered outside a Home Depot store in Charlotte on Wednesday, where federal agents have been spotted multiple times since the surge started. Protest organizers briefly went inside the store with orange and white signs that read, "ICE out of Home Depot, Protect our communities."

Arrests in Charlotte and the Raleigh area have created a chilling effect in immigrant neighborhoods — school attendance dropped, and small shops and restaurants closed to avoid confrontations between

customers and federal agents.

Customers at a laundromat left behind their clothes in washers and dryers and haven't returned after agents showed up at a Charlotte shopping center on Sunday, said David Reboloso, who owns the business.

Agents didn't target his laundromat, but it still impacted his bottom line and shut down the neighboring shops, said Reboloso, a Mexican American born in Brownsville, Texas.

"We're only open because I'm an American citizen, so it doesn't bother me," he said. "But of course, business is down. I have no customers."

Just days after beginning the crackdown in North Carolina, Border Patrol agents were expected to arrive in New Orleans by the end of the week to start preparing for their next big operation in southeast Louisiana, according to documents obtained by The Associated Press and three people familiar with the operation.

Around 250 federal border agents are set to descend on New Orleans in the coming weeks for a two-month immigration crackdown expected to begin in earnest on Dec. 1.

Gregory Bovino, the Border Patrol commander tapped to head the Louisiana sweep, has been on the ground in North Carolina this week, leading the operation there as well.

Louisiana Republicans voiced their support on Wednesday. The chair of the state party, Derek Babcock, said it shows a commitment from Trump and Republican Gov. Jeff Landry to "keeping our citizens safe."

The head of the state's American Civil Liberties Union chapter said they were compiling information to help people know their rights and coordinating with legal services and groups connected with the immigrant community.

"We urge those with privilege and the opportunity to risk it to stand up for their neighbors and friends," said Alanah Odoms with the ACLU of Louisiana.

## **As infant botulism cases climb to 31, recalled ByHeart baby formula is still on some store shelves**

By JONEL ALECCIA AP Health Writer

As cases of potentially deadly botulism in babies who drank ByHeart infant formula continue to grow, state officials say they are still finding the recalled product on some store shelves.

Meanwhile the company reported late Wednesday that laboratory tests confirmed that some samples of formula were contaminated with the type of bacteria that has sickened more than 30 babies in the outbreak.

Tests by an independent food safety laboratory found *Clostridium botulinum*, a bacterium that produces toxins that can lead to potentially life threatening illness in babies younger than 1, the company said on its website. ByHeart officials said they notified the U.S. Food and Drug Administration of the findings but did not specify how many samples were tested or how many were positive.

"We are working to investigate the facts, conduct ongoing testing to identify the source, and ensure this does not happen to families again," ByHeart said on its website.

The FDA did not immediately respond to questions about the findings.

The lab results come as investigators in at least three states found ByHeart formula still for sale even after the New York-based company recalled all products nationwide, officials told The Associated Press.

At least 31 babies in 15 states who drank ByHeart formula have been hospitalized and treated for infantile botulism since August, federal health officials said Wednesday. They range in age from about 2 weeks to about 6 months, with the most recent case reported on Nov. 13.

No deaths have been reported.

In Oregon, nine of more than 150 stores checked still had the formula on shelves this week, a state agriculture official said. In Minnesota, investigators conducted 119 checks between Nov. 13 and Nov. 17 and removed recalled products from sale at four sites, an agriculture department official said. An Arizona health official also said they found the product available.

Businesses and consumers should remain alert, Minnesota officials said in a statement. "No affected product should be sold or consumed," they wrote.

Investigators with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration conducted inspections at ByHeart manufactur-

ing plants in Allerton, Iowa, and Portland, Oregon. No results from the inspections have been reported. California officials previously confirmed the germ that can lead to illness in an open can of ByHeart formula fed to a baby who fell ill.

Infant botulism, which can cause paralysis and death, is caused by a type of bacteria that forms spores that germinate in a baby's gut and produce a toxin.

Symptoms can take up to 30 days to develop and include constipation, poor feeding, a weak cry, drooping eyelids or a flat facial expression. Babies can develop weakness in their limbs and head and may feel "floppy." They can have trouble swallowing or breathing.

ByHeart had been manufacturing about 200,000 cans of formula per month. It was sold online or at retail stores such as Target and Walmart. A Walmart spokesperson said the company swiftly issued a restriction that prevented sale of the formula, removed the product from stores and notified consumers who had bought it. Customers can visit any store for a refund of the formula, which sold for about \$42 per can.

Federal and state health officials are concerned that some parents and caregivers may still have ByHeart products in their homes. They are advising consumers to stop using the product — including formula in cans and any single-serve sticks. They also suggest marking it "DO NOT USE" and keeping it for at least a month in case a baby develops symptoms. In that case, the formula would need to be tested.

The California health department operates the Infant Botulism Treatment and Prevention Program, which tracks cases and distributes treatment for the disease. Officials there have launched a public hotline at 833-398-2022, which is staffed with health officials from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. Pacific Standard Time.

The new hotline was created after calls from hundreds of parents and caregivers flooded a different, longstanding hotline for doctors to discuss suspected infant botulism cases, officials said.

## What's next now that Trump has signed bill releasing the Epstein files

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump has signed a bill to compel the Justice Department to make public its case files on the convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, a potentially far-reaching development in a yearslong push by survivors of Epstein's abuse for a public reckoning.

Both the House and Senate passed the bill this week with overwhelming margins after Trump reversed course on his monthslong opposition to the bill and indicated he would sign it. Now that the bill has been signed by the president, there's a 30-day countdown for the Justice Department to produce what's commonly known as the Epstein files.

"This bill is a command for the president to be fully transparent, to come fully clean, and to provide full honesty to the American people," Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer of New York said Wednesday.

Schumer added that Democrats were ready to push back if they perceive that the president is doing anything but adhering to "full transparency."

In a social media post Wednesday as he announced he had signed the bill, Trump wrote, "Democrats have used the 'Epstein' issue, which affects them far more than the Republican Party, in order to try and distract from our AMAZING Victories."

The swift, bipartisan work in Congress this week was a response to the growing public demand that the Epstein files be released, especially as attention focuses on his connections to global leaders including Trump, former President Bill Clinton, Andrew Mountbatten Windsor, who has already been stripped of his royal title as Prince Andrew over the matter, and many others.

There is plenty of public anticipation about what more the files could reveal. Yet the bill will most likely trigger a rarely seen baring of a sprawling federal investigation, also creating the potential for unintended consequences.

What does the bill do?

The bill compels Attorney General Pam Bondi to release essentially everything the Justice Department has

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, November 20, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 169 ~ 36 of 54

collected over multiple federal investigations into Epstein, as well as his longtime confidante and girlfriend Ghislaine Maxwell, who is serving a 20-year prison sentence for luring teenage girls for the disgraced financier. Those records total around 100,000 pages, according to a federal judge who has reviewed the case.

It will also compel the Justice Department to produce all its internal communications on Epstein and his associates and his 2019 death in a Manhattan jail cell as he awaited charges for sexually abusing and trafficking dozens of teenage girls.

The legislation, however, exempts some parts of the case files. The bill's authors made sure to include that the Justice Department could withhold personally identifiable information of victims, child sexual abuse materials and information deemed by the administration to be classified for national defense or foreign policy.

"We will continue to follow the law with maximum transparency while protecting victims," Bondi told a news conference Wednesday when asked about releasing the files.

The bill also allows the Justice Department to withhold information that would jeopardize active investigations or prosecutions. That's created some worry among the bill's proponents that the department would open active investigations into people named in the Epstein files in order to shield that material from public view.

Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, a longtime Trump loyalist who has had a prominent split with Trump over the bill, said Tuesday that she saw the administration's compliance with the bill as its "real test."

"Will the Department of Justice release the files, or will it all remain tied up in investigations?" she asked.

In July, the FBI said in a memo regarding the Epstein investigation that, "we did not uncover evidence that could predicate an investigation against uncharged third parties." But Bondi last week complied with Trump's demands and ordered a federal prosecutor to investigate Epstein's ties to the president's political foes, including Clinton.

Still, Rep. Thomas Massie, a Kentucky Republican who sponsored the bill, said "there's no way they can have enough investigations to cover" all of the people he believes are implicated in Epstein's abuse.

"And if they do, then good," he added.

The bill also requires the Justice Department to produce reports on what materials it withheld, as well as redactions made, within 15 days of the release of the files. It stipulates that officials can't withhold or redact anything "on the basis of embarrassment, reputational harm, or political sensitivity, including to any government official, public figure, or foreign dignitary."

Who could be named?

There's a widely held expectation that many people could be named in case files for investigations that spanned over a decade — and some concern that just because someone is named, that person would be assumed guilty or complicit.

Epstein was a luminary who kept company with heads of state, influential political figures, academics and billionaires. The release of his emails and messages by a House Oversight Committee investigation last week has already shown his connections with — and private conversations about — Trump and many other high-powered figures.

Yet federal prosecutors follow carefully constructed guidelines about what information they produce publicly and at trial, both to protect victims and to uphold the fairness of the legal system. House Speaker Mike Johnson raised objections to the bill on those grounds this week, arguing that it could reveal unwanted information on victims as well as others who were in contact with investigators.

Still, Johnson did not actually try to make changes to the bill and voted for it on the House floor.

For the bill's proponents, a public reckoning over the investigation is precisely the point. Some of the survivors of trafficking from Epstein and Maxwell have sought ways to name people they accuse of being complicit or involved, but fear they will face lawsuits from the men they accuse.

Massie said that he wants the FBI to release the reports from its interviews with the victims.

Those reports typically contain unvetted information, but Massie said he is determined to name those who are accused. He and Greene have offered to read the names of those accused on the House floor,

which would shield their speech from legal consequences.

"We need names," Massie said.

## Russian attack kills 25 in Ukraine's Ternopil as Zelenskyy meets Erdogan in Turkey

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A large Russian drone and missile barrage on Ukraine's western city of Ternopil killed at least 25 people, including three children, authorities said Wednesday, as President Volodymyr Zelenskyy went to Turkey in search of diplomatic support for his fight against Russia's invasion.

The nighttime attack hit two nine-story apartment blocks in Ternopil, located around 200 kilometers (120 miles) from the Polish border, according to Interior Minister Ihor Klymenko. At least 73 people, including 15 children, were injured, emergency services said.

At least 19 among those killed were burned alive, including three children aged 5, 7 and 16, Klymenko said. Two dozen people are still unaccounted for, he said on national television, and rescuers expect to work at least two more days to complete the search of rubble.

Russia fired 476 strike and decoy drones, as well as 48 missiles of various types, at Ukrainian targets overnight, Ukraine's air force said. The bombardment included 47 cruise missiles, with air defenses intercepting all but six of them, the air force said. Western-supplied F-16 and Mirage-2000 jets intercepted at least 10 cruise missiles, it said.

"Every brazen attack against ordinary life indicates that the pressure on Russia (to stop the war) is insufficient," Zelenskyy wrote on the messaging app Telegram.

Zelenskyy meets with Turkish president

Zelenskyy met with Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Ankara later Wednesday as part of his efforts to diplomatically isolate Russian President Vladimir Putin and bring more international pressure to bear on him. Putin has so far resisted making compromises, despite U.S. pressure.

In brief statements to the press, Zelenskyy and Erdogan expressed their commitment to finding a peaceful settlement. Turkey is a key broker in the Black Sea region, preserving relations with both Ukraine and Russia.

"We count on the strength of Turkish diplomacy, on (how) it's understood in Moscow," Zelensky said.

Zelenskyy said before the talks that he had seen "some positions and signals from the United States" about the war. He didn't elaborate. Tough new American sanctions on Russia's oil industry, devised to push Putin to the negotiating table, are due to take effect on Friday.

A senior Turkish official initially said U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff would join Zelenskyy in Turkey, but backtracked later in the day and said Witkoff wouldn't be coming. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity Tuesday because he wasn't allowed to speak publicly about the arrangements.

U.S. Army Secretary Dan Driscoll and other high-ranking Army officials are in Ukraine to help with peace talks, according to two U.S. officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive plans. Driscoll is scheduled to meet this week with Zelenskyy, one of the officials said. Ukrainian officials confirmed that Driscoll was meeting officials in Kyiv, but made no mention of any discussion of renewing peace talks with Russia.

Romania and Poland scramble fighter jets

Ternopil sits in a part of relatively peaceful western Ukraine, where many people from the east and south moved to as they fled danger along the front line.

Almost 50 people were injured in Russian strikes on three other Ukrainian regions.

Russia's Defense Ministry said it attacked Ukrainian energy facilities and military-industrial targets, including long-range drone depots, in retaliation against strikes by Kyiv on Russian territory.

Two Eurofighter Typhoon jets and two F-16s were scrambled in Romania when a drone entered the NATO member's airspace during the Russian attacks, Romania's Ministry of National Defense said.

The Polish military said that Polish and allied aircraft were deployed in the middle of the night as a

preventive measure. Poland's Rzeszów and Lublin airports were closed temporarily to prioritize military aviation, the Polish Air Navigation Services Agency said.

In northeastern Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, Russian drones injured 46 people, including two girls, the head of the regional military administration, Oleh Syniehubov, wrote on Telegram. Drones hit several city districts, at least 16 residential buildings, an ambulance station, school and other civilian infrastructure, he said.

Russia's Defense Ministry said Wednesday that Ukraine fired four American-supplied ATACMS missiles at the Russian city of Voronezh on Tuesday. All four were shot down, the ministry said, but the debris damaged a private house, an orphanage and a gerontology center. There were no casualties, the ministry said.

Ukraine's General Staff on Tuesday reported firing ATACMS missiles at Russia without offering details.

## **Brazil's Lula joins negotiators at UN climate talks, but no deal yet on major issues**

By SETH BORENSTEIN, MELINA WALLING and ANTON L. DELGADO Associated Press

BELEM, Brazil (AP) — The arrival of Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva at U.N. climate talks on Wednesday was hoped to spur nations to meet a self-imposed early deadline for progress on tough issues. For now, it hasn't worked.

In a news conference late Wednesday, Lula skipped over any update on the status of talks. Instead, he renewed his earlier calls for action, making the case to delegates that the world must reduce its use of fossil fuels like oil, gas and coal.

"We haven't found another place to live," Lula, flanked by Brazilian negotiators and his wife, said.

Lula and several other leaders are pushing to create a road map toward transition to renewable energies. But in his remarks Wednesday, he was careful to say there's no intention to "impose anything on anybody," that countries could transition at their own pace and count on financial help to do so.

Lula's return to the talks, along with the presence of U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres, had stirred some optimism that COP30, as the talks are known, would move forward more quickly ahead of Friday's scheduled wrap up. Host Brazil had pushed for progress on some key issues Wednesday, but it's routine for negotiators at these talks to miss deadlines.

Tougher climate plans, details on climate aid on the table

COP30 President André Corrêa do Lago had given negotiators a Wednesday deadline for a decision on four interconnected issues that were initially excluded from the official agenda: whether countries should be told to toughen their new climate plans; details on handing out \$300 billion in pledged climate aid; dealing with trade barriers over climate and improving reporting on transparency and climate progress.

Scores of countries, rich and poor, are also pushing for a detailed road map on how to phase out fossil fuels. And that's key to toughening new climate plans for a shot at limiting future warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit), the global goal set in 2015's Paris Agreement.

In 2023, after days of contentious debate, climate talks agreed to language calling for a transition away from fossil fuels — coal, oil and natural gas. But little has been done since to clarify or amplify on that one sentence. Protesters inside and outside the conference venue kept pushing for a phaseout.

A group of scientists Wednesday criticized current proposals for a fossil fuel phaseout road map as inadequate, particularly to reach the goal of zero fossil fuel emissions by 2045 at the latest.

"A road map is not a workshop or a ministerial meeting. A road map is a real workplan that needs to show us the way from where we are to where we need to be, and how to get there," said a letter from seven prominent scientists, including some who are advising the COP30 presidency.

Lula and fossil fuels

Lula, in talking to leaders earlier in Belem, boosted the efforts of clarifying how to wean the world from the fuels that emit heat-trapping gases, the chief cause of climate change.

The Brazilian president has also been pushing for more participation in a new multibillion international fund financed by interest-bearing debt instead of donations, called the Tropical Forests Forever Facility. It

seeks to make it more lucrative for governments to keep their trees rather than cut them down.

Iskander Erzini Vernoit, director of the IMAL Initiative for Climate and Development, an independent think-tank based in Morocco, said it won't be easy for Guterres and Lula to find common ground among negotiators.

"Various apparent impasses still remain, and chief among these from an African point of view is the unwillingness of the EU and other rich countries to engage on their obligation to provide climate finance," Erzini Vernoit said.

Implementation is key to cut global warming

Going into this two-week conference, Brazilian leaders emphasized the importance of focusing on implementation, starting action on agreements, targets and pledges already made, over new deals.

If nations met the goals set at past climate talks of tripling renewables, doubling energy efficiency and cutting methane by 2030, the rate of global warming could be cut by a third within a decade and a half by 2040, according to a new report by Climate Analytics.

Neil Grant, a climate policy analysis expert and lead author of the report, said this could rescue the goal set a decade ago in the Paris Agreement.

While climate leaders have conceded that the world is on track to overshoot this climate goal, Grant said: "We have the tools to transition away from fossil fuels. Although the hour is dark, we still have agency."

Lots of action plans

High-level climate liaisons met Wednesday to celebrate the creation or acceleration of more than 110 climate action plans on agreements and goals from past conferences.

These may not get the big headlines, but it's what makes all these efforts work in the real world, said Dan Ioschpe, the COP30 climate champion, who acts as a liaison between governments and civil society at the talks.

"We need to make sure that we reach the targets of the agreement, of the Paris Agreement. And for that we need to implement technologies, solutions, processes," Ioschpe told The Associated Press, mentioning aviation, maritime and agriculture as key industries to target.

Among the new efforts launched at COP30 is to get an agreement by businesses and governments to spend \$1 trillion to improve the world's electricity grid and renewable energy storage and quadruple biofuels, Ioschpe said.

## **Curaçao and Cape Verde qualify for a super-sized World Cup, but a 4-time champion is on the brink**

By JAMES ROBSON AP Soccer Writer

MANCHESTER, England (AP) — A super-sized World Cup has paved the way for tiny Curaçao and Cape Verde to book their places at sport's biggest global event next year.

Just as FIFA president Gianni Infantino predicted.

It was back in 2017 when world soccer's governing body announced controversial plans to expand the sport's flagship tournament from 32 teams to 48 in 2026. It would create opportunities, Infantino explained, for countries that "would never have dreamed to participate" in a World Cup.

"Congratulations to Curaçao on an incredible achievement. In only your fourth cycle as an independent nation, you've inspired us all with your deserved qualification," Infantino said.

Some claimed the expansion was politically motivated. There were concerns about a dilution of quality and drama due to the expanded format.

That remains to be seen. But the bumper version of the tournament — staged in the United States, Canada and Mexico — has already created fascinating storylines long before it kicks off next June.

Newcomers and comebacks

The Caribbean island of Curaçao, an autonomous territory within the Netherlands kingdom, is the smallest nation by population ever to qualify for the World Cup — overtaking Iceland. Cape Verde is the third smallest.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, November 20, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 169 ~ 40 of 54

Uzbekistan and Jordan are also first-time qualifiers and the playoffs could yet see more new faces with New Caledonia, Suriname, Kosovo and Albania all in the mix.

There are places, as well, for nations making long-awaited World Cup comebacks.

Scotland returns for the first time since 1998. The same goes for Norway — meaning Erling Haaland will grace the biggest stage in soccer for the first time — and Austria. Haiti has qualified for only the second time in its history, having last been to World Cup in 1974.

"This is the best feeling," Scotland coach Steve Clarke said. "We're there ... fantastic moment."

More opportunities but giants have struggled

The expansion has undoubtedly created more opportunities for regions like CONCACAF, which gets six direct spots, including the three co-hosts. It also has two teams in the playoffs, whereas in 2022 it had three direct spots and another via the playoffs.

Africa had five teams previously, but now it has nine direct spots and one potential entry via the playoffs.

Yet even an expanded edition has still seen established nations struggle. Four-time world champion Italy is in danger of missing out for the third straight time after finishing second in its qualifying group.

The Italians — European champions in 2021 — must go through the playoffs if they are to end their World Cup exile.

That led to complaints from Italy coach Gennaro Gattuso.

"In my day, the best (group) runners-up went straight to the World Cup, now the rules have changed," he said.

Despite Gattuso's complaints, Europe has more places than any other continent, with 16 teams — up from 13 — qualifying directly or via the playoffs.

There is an argument to say European qualifying can be too easy for the top nations. England qualified as group winner with a 100% record and without conceding a single goal. England has not lost a game in World Cup qualifying since 2009 — covering 39 matches.

Norway, which topped Italy's group, also had a 100% record in qualifying, while Croatia, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland all qualified unbeaten.

Changing of the guard

Italy's difficulties point to its own decline, having failed to qualify for the World Cup since 2014. That slump dates back further, with Italy being eliminated at the group stage of the last two World Cups it competed at — in 2010 and 2014, having won the tournament in 2006.

Germany won the last of its four world titles 2014 and has gone out at the group stage of the following two World Cups — suggesting the dominance of the established elite may no longer be guaranteed.

That is being felt beyond Europe as well.

Nigeria was, for so long, one of the powerhouses of African soccer and qualified for six out of seven editions from 1994-2018. Now it has missed out on the World Cup for the second time in succession, having also failed to qualify for Qatar in 2022.

Can newcomers and underdogs spring more surprises?

Curaçao and Cape Verde have already made history by qualifying for the World Cup and their success should inspire future generations — leading to further development of the game domestically.

That was what FIFA hoped an expanded tournament would achieve.

But the World Cup has been the stage for many famous upsets through the years. The United States stunned mighty England in 1950. In 2022, Saudi Arabia beat Lionel Messi and eventual world champion Argentina. Cameroon beat then-defending champion Argentina in 1990 and Senegal did the same to another defending champion, France, in 2002.

In 2022, Morocco became the first African nation to reach the World Cup semifinals — beating European giants Belgium, Spain and Portugal on the way.

The gap is closing and teams once considered outsiders now have genuine ambition of going deep into tournaments.

As host nation and with Mauricio Pochettino as coach, the United States will aim to better its best World Cup performance when it advanced to the quarterfinals in 2002. A recent revival that includes a 5-1 rout

of Uruguay will have further lifted confidence.

But the likes of Argentina, Brazil, Spain and France remain the favorites to lift the trophy that has only been shared among eight nations in its 95-year history.

## **New hurdle in Comey case as Trump's Justice Department faces questions about the grand jury process**

By ERIC TUCKER and MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

ALEXANDRIA, Va. (AP) — The prosecution of former FBI Director James Comey hit another hurdle Wednesday as the Justice Department encountered mounting questions about how the case was presented to a grand jury for indictment.

The development risked further imperiling a politically charged prosecution already subject to multiple challenges and demands for its dismissal. It came during a hearing in which Comey's lawyers asked U.S. District Judge Michael Nachmanoff to throw out the case on grounds that the government was being vindictive and as a separate challenge to Lindsey Halligan, the hastily appointed and inexperienced prosecutor who secured the indictment, is pending.

The Justice Department's acknowledgment under questioning from a judge that the full grand jury did not review a copy of the final indictment is the latest indication of its seemingly disjointed pursuit of a criminal case against one of President Donald Trump's political enemies. Comey was fired by Trump in May 2017 while overseeing an FBI investigation into potential ties between Russia and Trump's 2016 campaign. The two have been publicly at odds ever since, with Trump deriding Comey as "a weak and untruthful slime ball" and calling for his prosecution.

Concerns about the legal process came into focus earlier in the week when a different judge in the case raised questions about what he said were "profound investigative missteps," including misstatements of law to the grand jury. The Justice Department denies that the process was tainted by irregularities.

A story of two indictments

Halligan initially asked the grand jury to return a three-count indictment against Comey. But after the grand jurors rejected one of the proposed counts, the Justice Department subsequently secured a second two-count indictment that accused Comey of making a false statement and obstructing Congress. Comey has pleaded not guilty and denied wrongdoing.

In a blistering ruling Monday, U.S. Magistrate Judge William Fitzpatrick, also handling parts of the case, said that after reviewing a transcript of the grand jury proceedings, he had questions about whether the full grand jury had reviewed the final two-count indictment that was returned.

Nachmanoff, the trial judge, pressed the Justice Department about Fitzpatrick's concerns during a court session Wednesday that chiefly focused on Comey's vindictiveness arguments. After conferring privately with Halligan, Tyler Lemons, one of the prosecutors, acknowledged that the revised indictment was not shown to all of the grand jurors.

"I was not there, but that is my understanding, your honor," Lemons said.

Nachmanoff called Halligan to the lectern and asked her who was present when the final indictment was presented to a magistrate. She said only two grand jurors, including the foreperson, were there.

Comey lawyer Michael Dreeben called the government's failure to present the final indictment to the entire grand jury grounds for dismissing the case. He also argued that the statute of limitations for the charged crimes has elapsed without a valid indictment.

"That would be tantamount to a bar of further prosecution in this case," Dreeben said.

Nachmanoff did not issue an immediate decision, saying "the issues are too weighty and too complex" for a bench ruling.

The Justice Department dismissed the import of the revelation in a pair of Wednesday evening filings, saying that the two charges in the final indictment were identical to the two counts the grand jury approved when presented with the proposed indictment.

"Given that the grand jury was presented with the two counts on which it voted to return an indictment

and in fact voted upon those counts," prosecutors said, the case need not be dismissed.

Claims of vindictiveness

Dreeben separately argued that the prosecution was improperly vindictive and rooted in Trump's quest for retribution, circumstances requiring a dismissal.

"The president's use of the Department of Justice to bring a criminal prosecution against a vocal and prominent critic in order to punish and deter those who would speak out against him violates the Constitution," Dreeben said.

Though vindictive prosecution motions are not often successful, Comey's lawyers have laid out a laundry list of verbal attacks from Trump in hopes of establishing the case as an outgrowth of the president's personal animus.

Trump amplified his long-running demands for a Comey prosecution with a September social media post in which he complained to Attorney General Pam Bondi about the lack of action against his political opponents. "We can't delay any longer, it's killing our reputation," Trump wrote, adding that "JUSTICE MUST BE SERVED, NOW!!!"

"If this is not a direction to prosecute," Dreeben said in court, "I'd really be at a loss to say what is."

The night of that post, Trump said he would appoint Halligan, a White House aide without prior prosecutorial experience, as U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, on an interim basis. She replaced a veteran prosecutor who was effectively forced from the job after not charging Comey or another Trump foe, New York Attorney General Letitia James.

Halligan secured an indictment of Comey days later as the statute of limitations on the case was about to expire. The charges are related to sworn testimony about whether Comey had authorized an FBI colleague to serve as an anonymous source to the news media.

Asked by Nachmanoff whether he considered Halligan to be a "stalking horse" or "puppet" for the administration, Dreeben demurred and opted against that characterization. But, he said, "She did what she was told to do."

Presidents, Dreeben said, have other tools at their disposal to punish critics, but bringing the full weight of the Justice Department to bear is impermissible.

"The government cannot use power of criminal prosecutions to attempt to silence a critic in violation of the First Amendment," he said.

Lemons, the Justice Department prosecutor, insisted that Comey was indicted by a "properly constituted" grand jury because he broke the law — not because Trump ordered it.

"The defendant is not being put on trial for anything he said about the president," Lemons said.

Lemons said nobody directed Halligan to prosecute Comey or seek his indictment.

"It was her decision and her decision only," he added.

But Nachmanoff noted that Trump appointed Halligan just days before she presented the Comey case to the grand jury.

"What independent evaluation could she have done in that time period?" he asked Lemons.

Nachmanoff asked Lemons whether he has seen a "declination memo" in which prosecutors had outlined reasons for not seeking an indictment against Comey. Lemons said the department had instructed him not to disclose that "privileged" information.

## Israel's military carries out strikes in Lebanon and Gaza, killing dozens of people

By HUSSEIN MALLA, BASSEM MROUE and WAFAA SHURAFU Associated Press

SIDON, Lebanon (AP) — The Israeli military carried out barrages of airstrikes in southern Lebanon Wednesday on what it said were Hezbollah sites, including weapons storage facilities, after a drone strike earlier in the day killed one person and wounded several others, including students on a bus.

The new wave of strikes came a day after an airstrike killed 13 people in the Palestinian refugee camp

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, November 20, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 169 ~ 43 of 54

of Ein el-Hilweh, the deadliest of Israeli attacks on Lebanon since a ceasefire in the Israel-Hezbollah war a year ago.

Meanwhile, after Israel reported its soldiers were fired on in southern Gaza, health officials in the territory said Israeli strikes killed at least 25 Palestinians in one of the deadliest days in Gaza since the Oct. 10 ceasefire agreement took effect. Separately, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu traveled to a buffer zone in Syrian territory that Israel seized last year.

Israel claims Hezbollah is regrouping

Israel's military warned Wednesday it would strike targets in several villages in southern Lebanon, describing them as Hezbollah infrastructure, and called on people to move away from the locations. More than an hour later, strikes began in the villages of Shehour and Deir Kifa.

Israel's military said Hezbollah was working to reestablish itself and rebuild its capacity in southern Lebanon, without providing evidence. It said the weapons' facilities targeted were embedded among civilians and violated understandings between Israel and Lebanon. Israel agreed to a ceasefire and withdraw from southern Lebanon last year and Lebanon agreed to quell Hezbollah activity in the area.

Earlier Wednesday, an Israeli airstrike on a car in the southern Lebanese village of Tiri killed one person and wounded 11, including students aboard a nearby bus, the Lebanese Health Ministry and state media said. State-run National News Agency said the school bus happened to be passing near the car that was hit.

Israel's military later said it killed a Hezbollah operative in the drone strike.

In Ein el-Hilweh refugee camp, just outside the port city of Sidon, life appeared normal Wednesday. Lebanese authorities prevented journalists from entering. At the scene of the strike, paramedics searched for human remains around a wall that was stained with blood. Several cars were burned and broken glass and debris littered the ground.

The Israeli military said it struck a Hamas training compound that was being used to prepare an attack against Israel and its army. It added that the Israeli army would continue to act against Hamas wherever it operates.

Hamas denied in a statement that the sports playground that was hit was its training compound.

Palestinian factions in refugee camps hand over weapons

Palestinian factions in Lebanon's 12 refugee camps earlier this year began handing over their weapons to the Lebanese state. The government has said that it will also work on disarming Hezbollah, but Hezbollah has rejected it as long as Israel continues to occupy several hills along the border and carries out almost daily strikes.

The U.S. has recently increased pressure on Lebanon to work harder on disarming Hezbollah and canceled a planned trip to Washington this week by Lebanese army commander Gen. Rudolph Haikal.

A senior Lebanese army officer told The Associated Press that U.S. officials were angered by an army statement on Sunday that blamed Israel for destabilizing Lebanon and blocking the Lebanese military deployment in south Lebanon. The officer spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to speak publicly.

The latest Israel-Hezbollah war began Oct. 8, 2023, a day after Hamas attacked southern Israel, after Hezbollah fired rockets into Israel in solidarity with Hamas. Israel launched a widespread bombardment of Lebanon two months ago that severely weakened Hezbollah, followed by a ground invasion.

That war, the most recent of several conflicts involving Hezbollah over the past four decades, killed more than 4,000 people in Lebanon, including hundreds of civilians, and caused an estimated \$11 billion worth of destruction, according to the World Bank. In Israel, 127 people died, including 80 soldiers.

Israeli strikes kill 25 in Gaza

Gaza's Ministry of Health said that Israeli strikes killed 25 Palestinians and injured 77 since the afternoon in one of the deadliest days since the Oct. 10 ceasefire took effect. Hospital officials who received the bodies said they came from on both sides of the yellow line established in last month's ceasefire. The boundary splits the enclave in two, leaving the border zone under Israeli military control while the area beyond it is meant to serve as a safe zone.

Officials at al-Ahli, Shifa, Nasser and Kuwaiti hospitals reported they received the bodies of those killed from Gaza City, Khan Younis and the Muwasi area, the southern Gaza displacement camp. An Israeli strike also killed one person in Shijaiyah, a Gaza City neighborhood outside the safe zone where Israeli forces remain deployed.

The Israeli military said its strikes responded to militants who had opened fire on Israeli forces in Khan Younis earlier in the day. It said no soldiers were killed.

On Wednesday Hamas condemned the Israeli strikes across Gaza City and Khan Younis, calling them a "shocking massacre." In a statement, the group denied firing toward Israeli troops.

Israeli strikes have decreased since the ceasefire agreement took effect, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, though they have not stopped entirely. After Wednesday evening's strikes, the ministry, which does not distinguish between civilians and combatants, has reported more than 300 deaths since the truce began, an average of more than seven per day. Each side has accused the other of violating its terms, which include increasing the flow of aid into Gaza and returning hostages — dead or alive — to Israel.

The deaths are among the more than 69,000 Palestinians killed since Israel launched its sweeping offensive more than two years ago in response to Hamas-led militants abducting 251 people and killing around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, in the Oct. 7, 2023, attack that triggered the war. Gaza's Health Ministry, part of the Hamas-run government and staffed by medical professionals, maintains detailed records seen as a reliable estimate by the U.N. and many independent experts.

Netanyahu visits buffer zone within Syria

Top Israeli officials including Netanyahu traveled Wednesday into a demilitarized buffer zone in Syria that Israel seized after the fall of President Bashar Assad last year. "We attach immense importance to our defensive and offensive capability here," Netanyahu said. "This is a mission that can develop at any moment."

Its December 2024 operations drew swift condemnation, with critics accusing Israel of using Syria's turmoil to expand its control of the Golan Heights, which it captured and annexed in 1967 in a move that is not recognized by most of the international community.

Israeli incursions in southern Syria have intensified in recent months, with residents reporting forest destruction, advances onto farmland and Israeli military checkpoints. The zone, which wraps the Golan Heights, has also attracted interest from Israeli settlers.

Syria's new authorities have condemned Israel's incursions but said they do not want to enter into a military confrontation. Syrian and Israeli officials have been negotiating on a potential security agreement to defuse tensions but the talks appear to have stalled.

The provocative visit by the prime minister drew fresh criticism from Syria and neighboring countries.

In a statement, Syria's Foreign Ministry said the visit was an attempt to entrench Israeli control and called it "a grave violation of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity."

## Trump says he'll push for peace in Sudan after Saudi crown prince urged greater US involvement

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said on Wednesday he plans to put greater attention on helping find an end to the brutal civil war in Sudan after being urged to take action by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

Trump, who claims to have ended several wars since returning to office and has openly lobbied for the Nobel Peace Prize, admitted the conflict "wasn't on my charts" before his conversation with the crown prince.

But the president said he spoke in detail about the civil war with the de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia during their White House talks on Tuesday. The crown prince, Trump said, urged him to use the power and influence of the presidency to bring an end to the war.

"His majesty would like me to do something very powerful having to do with Sudan," Trump said in

remarks during a joint appearance with Prince Mohammed before U.S. and Saudi business leaders.

The fighting for control of Sudan has killed over 40,000 people and created the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with over 14 million people displaced. The civil war, which started in April 2023, has pitted the Sudanese Armed Forces against the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces.

"I thought it was just something that was crazy and out of control," Trump said as he shared the stage with the crown prince. "But I just see how important that is to you, and to a lot of your friends in the room."

Trump said Prince Mohammed told him that bringing an end to the war "would be the greatest thing you can do, that would be greater than what you've already done."

Trump's comments come after Secretary of State Marco Rubio last week called for a halt to the flow of military support coming to the paramilitary RSF from abroad.

The RSF's recent capture of North Darfur's capital, el-Fasher, left hundreds dead and forced tens of thousands of people to flee reported atrocities by the paramilitary force, according to aid groups and U.N. officials.

The International Organization for Migration said that nearly 90,000 people have left el-Fasher and surrounding villages, undertaking a perilous journey through unsafe routes where they have no access to food, water or medical assistance.

Saudi officials, in part, have argued to the administration that a further unraveling of Sudan could result in instability in the Red Sea and Africa and create conditions for extremist groups to exploit the moment to spread terrorism in the Middle East and beyond.

The war between the RSF and the military has split regional powers. Egypt, Turkey and Saudi Arabia have backed the Sudanese Armed Forces, while the United Arab Emirates, a close U.S. ally, has been sending weapons to the RSF, according to American intelligence findings.

Trump, following his remarks, said in a social media post that his administration will work with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, and other Middle Eastern partners "to get these atrocities to end, while at the same time stabilizing Sudan."

Trump appeared with Prince Mohammed as the crown prince wrapped up his first visit to Washington in seven years.

## **Judge to proceed with contempt probe after US flew migrants to El Salvador prison in March**

By SUDHIN THANAWALA Associated Press

A federal judge said Wednesday he plans to move ahead quickly on a contempt investigation of the Trump administration for failing to turn around planes carrying Venezuelan migrants to El Salvador in March.

U.S. District Judge James Boasberg in Washington said a ruling Friday by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit gave him the authority to proceed with the inquiry, which will determine whether there is sufficient evidence to refer the matter for prosecution. He asked attorneys by Monday to identify witnesses and offer plans for how to conduct the probe and said he'd like to start any hearings on December 1.

The judge has previously warned he could seek to have officials in the administration prosecuted.

On March 15, Boasberg ordered the aircraft carrying accused gang members to return to the U.S., but they landed instead in El Salvador, where the migrants were held at a notorious prison.

"I am authorized to proceed just as I intended to do in April seven months ago," the judge said during a hearing Wednesday. He added later, "I certainly intend to find out what happened on that day."

Boasberg said having witnesses testify under oath appeared to be the best way to conduct the contempt probe, but he also suggested the government could provide written declarations to explain who gave orders to "defy" his ruling. He suggested one witness: a former U.S. Justice Department attorney who filed a whistleblower complaint that claims a top official in the department suggested the Trump administration might have to ignore court orders as it prepared to deport Venezuelan migrants it accused of being gang members.

The Trump administration has denied any violation, saying the judge's directive to return the planes was made verbally in court but not included in his written order. Justice Department attorney Tiberius Davis told Boasberg the government objected to further contempt proceedings.

Boasberg previously found probable cause to hold the Trump administration in criminal contempt of court. The ruling marked a dramatic battle between the judicial and executive branches of government, but a divided three-judge appeals court panel later sided with the administration and threw out the finding. The two judges in the majority were appointed by President Donald Trump.

On Friday, a larger panel of judges on the D.C. Circuit said the earlier ruling by their colleagues did not bar Boasberg from moving ahead with his contempt probe. Boasberg's contempt finding was a "measured and essential response," Judges Cornelia Pillard, Robert Wilkins and Bradley Garcia wrote.

"Obedience to court orders is vital to the ability of the judiciary to fulfill its constitutionally appointed role," they wrote. "Judicial orders are not suggestions; they are binding commands that the Executive Branch, no less than any other party, must obey."

The Trump administration invoked an 18th century wartime law to send the migrants, whom it accused of membership in a Venezuelan gang, to a mega-prison in El Salvador known as the Terrorism Confinement Center, or CECOT. It argued that American courts could not order them freed.

In June, Boasberg ruled the Trump administration must give some of the migrants a chance to challenge their deportations, saying they hadn't been able to formally contest the removals or allegations that they were members of Tren de Aragua.

The judge wrote that "significant evidence" had surfaced indicating that many of the migrants were not connected to the gang "and thus were languishing in a foreign prison on flimsy, even frivolous, accusations."

More than 200 migrants were later released back to Venezuela in a prisoner swap with the U.S.

Their attorneys want Boasberg to issue another order requiring the administration to explain how it will give at least 137 of the men a chance to challenge their gang designation under the Alien Enemies Act.

The men are in danger in Venezuela and fear talking to attorneys, who have been able to contact about 30 of them, but they "overwhelmingly" want to pursue their cases, Lee Gelernt, an attorney with the American Civil Liberties Union, said Wednesday.

Davis said it may be hard to take the men into custody again given tensions between the U.S. and the government of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

Boasberg did not immediately rule on the matter.

## What to know about expanded work requirements about to kick in for SNAP

By DAVID A. LIEB and GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

After a disruptive U.S. government shutdown, federal SNAP food assistance is again flowing to low-income households. But in the months ahead, many participants will have to abide by new work requirements.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program provides monthly benefits — averaging around \$190 per person — to about 42 million people nationwide. During the first couple weeks of November, many of those recipients missed their regular allotments as President Donald Trump's administration battled in court over whether to tap into reserves to fund the program while the government was shut down.

Here's what to know about SNAP:

The benefits are available across the country after lapses

For the first part of the month, the situation was chaotic after the federal government said SNAP would not be funded because of the government shutdown.

Some states replenished the electronic benefit cards used in the program either fully or partially, using their own funds or federal dollars that were part of court orders. Others didn't.

Most states boosted food charities, but lines were long and some shelves were empty.

As soon as the government reopened on Nov. 12, many states rushed to get out benefits.

By Tuesday, all states either had loaded full November benefits onto people's electronic spending cards

or were working on it, according to an Associated Press review. Participants should receive December SNAP benefits according to their normal schedule.

More SNAP recipients will face work requirements

A massive tax and spending bill signed into law in July by Trump expanded requirements for many adult SNAP recipients to work, volunteer or participate in job training for at least 80 hours a month. Those who don't are limited to three months of benefits in a three-year period.

The work requirements previously applied to adults ages 18 through 54 who are physically and mentally able and don't have dependents. The new law also applies those requirements to those ages 55 through 64 and to parents without children younger than 14. It repeals work exemptions for homeless individuals, veterans and young adults aging out of foster care. And it limits the ability of states to waive work requirements in areas lacking jobs.

The Trump administration waived the work requirements in November, but the three-month clock on work-free SNAP benefits will be in full force in December.

The new requirements are expected to reduce the average monthly number of SNAP recipients by about 2.4 million people over the next 10 years, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

Agriculture secretary casts doubt about SNAP

In the aftermath of the shutdown, Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins, whose department administers SNAP, has cast doubt on the program. Rollins has said it is rife with fraud, including deceased people receiving benefits and some people receiving multiple benefits.

Rollins suggested that everyone who receives SNAP be required to reapply. But it's not clear whether Rollins was suggesting an additional requirement or referring to the current one that mandates people to periodically recertify their income and other information.

An Agriculture Department spokesperson didn't clarify but instead said in a statement that the standard recertification processes for households is part of a plan to eliminate fraud, abuse and waste.

Under federal law, most households must report their income and basic information every four to six months and be fully recertified for SNAP at least every 12 months. Full recertification can occur every 24 months for households where all adults are age 60 and above or have disabilities.

But states can require more frequent eligibility verifications. Last year, 27 states required at least some households to be fully recertified every four to six months, depending on their household circumstances, according to a USDA report.

## Labor Department won't release full October jobs report, a casualty of the 43-day federal shutdown

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Labor Department said Wednesday that it will not be releasing a full jobs report for October because the 43-day federal government shutdown meant it couldn't calculate the unemployment rate and some other key numbers.

Instead, it will release some of the October jobs data — most importantly the number of jobs that employers created last month — along with the full November jobs report, now due a couple of weeks late on Dec. 16.

The department's "employment situation" report usually comes out the first Friday of the month. But the government shutdown disrupted data collection and delayed the release of the reports. For example, the September jobs report, now coming out Thursday, was originally due Oct. 3.

The monthly jobs report consists of two parts: a survey of households that is used to determine the unemployment rate, among other things; and the "establishment" survey of companies, nonprofits and government agencies that is used to track job creation, wages and other measurements of labor market health.

The Labor Department said Wednesday that the household survey for October could not be conducted because of the shutdown and could not be done retroactively. But it was able to collect the hiring numbers

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, November 20, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 169 ~ 48 of 54

from employers, and those will come out with the full November report.

Wednesday's announcement means the September jobs numbers will likely get extra scrutiny Thursday. They are the last full measurement of hiring and unemployment that Federal Reserve policymakers will see before they meet Dec. 9-10.

The Fed is sharply split over whether to reduce its key interest rate for a third time this year next month. Those divisions could be largely resolved by fresh economic data if it showed a sharp deterioration in the job market, economists say, because that would likely encourage more officials to support a rate cut. But the absence of data could embolden those policymakers who want to wait for more evidence about where the economy is headed before reducing rates again.

At its last meeting in late October many Fed officials said the central bank should proceed with caution, given the "reduced availability of key economic data."

The jobs numbers have lately been contentious. After the July jobs report proved disappointing, President Donald Trump abruptly fired the official responsible for collecting the data, Bureau of Labor Statistics commissioner Erika McEntarfer.

McEntarfer herself was quick to say there was nothing suspicious about Wednesday's announcement. "No conspiracy here, folks," she posted on the social media site Bluesky. "BLS was entirely shutdown for six weeks. Payroll data from firms can be retroactively collected for October. The household survey cannot be conducted retrospectively. This is just a straightforward consequence of having all field staff furloughed for over a month."

## **U.S. trade deficit drops 24% in August as Trump's tariffs reduce imports**

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. trade deficit fell by nearly 24% in August as President Donald Trump's sweeping global tariffs pushed imports lower.

In a report delayed for more than seven weeks by the federal government shutdown, the Commerce Department said Wednesday that the gap between what the United States buys from other countries and what it sells them fell to \$59.6 billion in August, from \$78.2 billion in July.

Imports of goods and services dropped 5% to \$340.4 billion in August from July when U.S. companies were stocking up on foreign products before Trump finalized taxes on products from almost every country on earth. Those levies went into effect Aug. 7.

U.S. exports blipped up 0.1% in August to \$280.8 billion.

Trump, charging that America's persistent trade deficits mean that other countries have taken advantage of the U.S., has overturned decades of U.S. policy in favor of free trade, slapping double-digit tariffs on imports from most countries and targeting specific products, including steel, copper and autos, with their own levies.

Still, the U.S. trade deficit is up so far in 2025, coming in at \$713.6 billion through August, up 25% from \$571.1 billion in January-August 2024.

A drop in imports and the trade deficit is good for economic growth because foreign products are subtracted from the nation's gross domestic product. GDP is the output of a nation's goods and services.

"August's smaller trade deficit will be a tailwind for third quarter real GDP, since it means that more U.S. expenditures were directed toward domestically-produced goods and services rather than foreign ones," Bill Adams, chief economist at Comerica Bank, wrote in a commentary. "While this release is quite dated because of the government shutdown, it contributes to evidence that the economy was growing briskly in the third quarter."

Tariffs, which Trump says will protect U.S. industries and lure factories to America, are paid by importers who typically attempt to pass along the higher cost to their customers. Economists say Trump's tariffs are one reason U.S. inflation remains stubbornly above the Federal Reserve's 2% target.

After voters' dissatisfaction with the high cost of living led to big Democratic gains in the Nov. 4 elec-

tions, the president relented and dropped tariffs last week on beef, coffee, tea, fruit juice, cocoa, spices, bananas, oranges, tomatoes and certain fertilizers, saying they “may, in some cases” have contributed to higher prices.

His tariffs are also facing a legal challenge that has gone to the Supreme Court. In a Nov. 5, hearing, the justices sounded skeptical that the president had the authority to bypass Congress and slap unlimited tariffs on most imports simply by declaring a national emergency.

## Ukraine asks Vatican to formalize mediation role for return of citizens taken by Russia

By NICOLE WINFIELD and ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Ukraine has asked the Vatican to formalize its role facilitating negotiations over the return of Ukrainian children and civilians taken by Russia during the nearly four-year war, a Kyiv government official said Wednesday.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy made the request in a letter to Pope Leo XIV ahead of an audience Friday between the pope and a delegation of returned Ukrainian children and civilians. At a briefing Wednesday, the young people described being subject to Russian propaganda and their trauma at being separated from loved ones.

Zelenskyy’s letter asked that Leo formalize the informal arrangement launched by Pope Francis in which an Italian cardinal, Matteo Zuppi, had served as a personal papal envoy for humanitarian issues.

The deputy head of Zelenskyy’s office, Iryna Vereshchuk, told reporters in Rome that Ukraine wanted the Holy See to act as the middleman, or “platform,” through which Ukraine and Russia could discuss the return of civilians.

“It’s one thing when we have their prisoners of war and Russians are interested in returning them. They have our POW, we have theirs. There is an interest in exchange.” But Ukraine isn’t holding any Russian civilians to exchange, she said.

It is not clear whether any children or civilians have been returned via the Vatican’s informal channel.

Vereshchuk said under the Zuppi mission, Russia used a “gray zone” to not respond to Ukraine’s lists of civilians it wanted released, because the process was not formalized.

“Once the process is formalized we can have proper communications with the Russians and when we submit a letter through the platform they will have to respond,” she said.

Neither the Vatican nor the Russian embassy to the Holy See immediately responded to requests for comment.

### ICC warrant for Putin over children abductions

Vereshchuk was accompanying a delegation of Ukrainian children, parents and grandparents who had lived in Russian-controlled or occupied parts of Donetsk or were held by Russian forces elsewhere and now live in Ukrainian-controlled territory.

Ukrainian officials say the country continues to document thousands of cases of children who were unlawfully taken to Russian territory during the war — a practice Kyiv calls one of its most sensitive humanitarian crises.

The International Criminal Court in 2023 issued an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin for war crimes, accusing him of personal responsibility for the abductions of children from Ukraine.

According to current data published by Ukraine’s Bring Kids Back presidential platform, 19,546 Ukrainian children were officially recorded as deported or forcibly transferred by Russia.

Media reports quoting Ukraine’s Human Rights Ombudsman Dmytro Lubinets, said that as of March 27, 1,247 children had been successfully returned to Ukraine through diplomatic and humanitarian channels.

Vereshchuk said Ukraine had identified the names of about 2,000 civilians in Russian captivity via the Red Cross. It was not clear whether that number includes children.

### Ukrainian youths and Russian propaganda

The young people in the delegation meeting with Leo on Friday described being subject to Russian

propaganda while living in Donesk, in eastern Ukraine, where Ukraine has been battling Russian-backed forces since 2014. Russia already controls most of Donbas — its name for Donetsk and neighboring Luhansk — that Moscow illegally annexed along with two southern regions three years ago.

The young people said they were bullied at school by Russian students and teachers and were forced to learn the Russian national anthem, speak Russian and write support letters for Russian soldiers.

“When I said I don’t want to write any of these kind of letters, someone argued with me, and I was told that Ukraine doesn’t exist” anymore, said Veronika Vlasova, who as a 13-year-old was taken to Russian territory and separated from her mother for 14 months. Vlasova, now 16, said she was held in a children’s rehabilitation center in Russian territory without access to her telephone but eventually got out. She now lives in Kyiv.

Liudmyla Siryk described a months-long search for her grandson, who was injured in Mariupol as a 12-year-old in March 2022, during the opening weeks of the war. The grandson, Oleksandr Radchuk, was separated from his mother, Siryk’s daughter, and taken to a hospital in Donetsk.

Siryk said she worked for months to secure the necessary papers to bring Radchuk back to Ukrainian territory, and took a four-day bus ride through Baltic countries and Russia to reach Donetsk, where they were reunited at a hospital.

“I’ve never been traveling in my life,” she said.

Radchuk, now 15, believes his mother is held in Russian captivity.

## **Indiana lawmaker under pressure to back Trump’s redistricting push is victim of a swatting**

By CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

An Indiana lawmaker who has yet to make a decision on whether to back President Donald Trump’s push to have Republicans redraw the state’s congressional boundaries was the victim of a swatting call Sunday that brought sheriff’s deputies to his home.

The call, in which someone reported a fake emergency at the Terre Haute home of state Sen. Greg Goode, came hours after Trump criticized Indiana lawmakers for not moving forward with the plan and singled out Goode and Senate President Pro Tem Rodric Bray. Trump has been trying to persuade Republican-led states across the country to aggressively redraw their congressional maps to help the GOP hold the U.S. House in next year’s midterm elections.

Deputies were sent to Goode’s home after receiving an email “advising harm had been done to persons inside a home,” according to a statement from the Vigo County Sheriff’s Office.

“All persons were secure, safe, and unharmed. Investigation showed that this was a prank or false email (also known as ‘swatting’),” the statement said. The incident is under investigation.

Goode, a Republican, wrote on social media that the responding deputies were “under the impression of a domestic violence emergency.” He thanked the deputies for acting professionally.

“While this entire incident is unfortunate and reflective of the volatile nature of our current political environment, I give thanks to God that my family and I are ok,” Goode wrote.

Earlier Sunday, Trump singled out Goode and Indiana Senate President Pro Tem Rodric Bray while demanding that Republicans move forward with a redistricting plan for Indiana. Republicans already hold a 7-2 advantage in the state’s congressional delegation.

“Because of these two politically correct type ‘gentlemen,’ and a few others, they could be depriving Republicans of a Majority in the House, a VERY BIG DEAL!” Trump wrote on his social media platform.

Bray, the Republican leader of Indiana’s Senate, announced Friday that his chamber will no longer meet to vote on redistricting, citing a lack of support from his members even after pressure from the White House. Vice President JD Vance has visited multiple times to make the case.

Goode, a Republican member of the Senate, has not publicly stated his position on redistricting and says he will not make a decision without seeing a map and legislation introduced for lawmakers’ review.

The White House didn’t immediately respond to a request for comment.

The goal of swatting is to get authorities, particularly a SWAT team, to respond to an address by making bogus claims of violence happening inside.

Democrats need to gain just three seats to win control of the House next year, leading to Trump's strong-arming of GOP-controlled states. Legislatures or commissions in Texas, Missouri, North Carolina and Ohio have adopted new maps to boost Republicans' odds, while California and Virginia are poised to counter Trump's push and redraw their own maps to benefit Democrats.

## Takeaways from Trump's White House meeting with Saudi crown prince: Deals and bromance

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — A jovial President Donald Trump held a warm and friendly meeting with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman at the White House, packed with plenty of handshakes and back pats. He brushed aside questions about Saudi Arabia's human rights record, praised the prince for his statesmanship and announced hundreds of billions of dollars in new Saudi investment in the United States.

The White House rolled out plenty of pomp for the Saudi royal on Tuesday, dispatching fighter jets that the two leaders watched from a red carpet, parading out an honor guard on horseback and giving a lavish dinner in the East Room.

In a sitdown in the Oval Office that took place just seven years after Prince Mohammad was implicated by U.S. intelligence agencies in the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, Trump and the prince took numerous questions from reporters — one of whom was repeatedly insulted by Trump — on everything from commerce to the sale of advanced F-35 fighter jets to Riyadh.

Here is a look at some of the takeaways from the visit:

**Movement on military cooperation**

Trump had previewed his decision to sell F-35s on Sunday but formalized it before the prince on Tuesday when he said the approval was complete and that Israel's fears about maintaining its qualitative military edge in the Middle East would be addressed.

Details of the deal were not immediately clear, but some in the Pentagon and other agencies have opposed the sale because of the potential for advanced technology being shared with China, which also has close ties with Saudi Arabia.

"As far as I'm concerned, I think they are both at a level where they should get top of the line," Trump said of Saudi Arabia and Israel, which already has F-35s. "Israel's aware and they're going to be very happy."

Israeli officials have suggested that they would not be opposed to Saudi Arabia getting F-35s as long as Saudi Arabia normalizes relations with Israel under the Abraham Accords framework.

The Saudis have said they would join the Abraham Accords but only after there is a credible and guaranteed path to Palestinian statehood, a position Prince Mohammad repeated in the meeting.

"We want to be part of the Abraham Accords, but we want also to be sure that we secure a clear path of two-state solution," he said. "We're going to work on that to be sure that we come prepared for the situation as soon as possible to have that."

Trump also said the U.S. and Saudi Arabia would complete a broader agreement on military and security issues during the visit and that the U.S. would proceed with a civilian nuclear agreement with Saudi Arabia, about which Israel also has raised concerns.

The two nations also signed a deal that calls for the Saudis to purchase nearly 300 tanks from the U.S.

At the dinner Tuesday night, Trump announced he was designating Saudi Arabia as a major non-NATO ally, a largely symbolic move that gives foreign partners some defense, trade and security cooperation benefits.

**Khashoggi's killing gets swept aside**

Tuesday's meeting was the first White House visit for the crown prince since Khashoggi, a U.S. resident and Washington Post columnist, was killed and dismembered at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, Turkey, in 2018.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, November 20, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 169 ~ 52 of 54

U.S. intelligence said Prince Mohammad likely approved the slaying.

In a remarkable scene in the Oval Office, the prince, nicknamed MBS, faced questions from reporters, something not typical for the de facto head of the absolute monarchy where dissent is criminalized.

He was asked about Khashoggi's slaying along with the role that Saudi citizens played in the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks in the United States. Trump, however, lashed out at the reporter for the line of questioning.

Trump called Khashoggi, a Saudi pro-democracy activist, "extremely controversial" and said "a lot of people didn't like that gentleman that you're talking about. Whether you like him or didn't like him, things happen, but he (the crown prince) knew nothing about it and we can leave it at that."

Prince Mohammad, who has denied involvement in Khashoggi's killing, replied that his government had taken action.

"It's been painful for us in Saudi Arabia," he said. "We did all the right steps of investigation, etc., in Saudi Arabia, and we've improved our system to be sure that nothing happens like that again. And it's painful, and it was a huge mistake."

Trump also commended the Saudi leader for strides made by the kingdom on human rights without providing any specific detail but presumably referring to reforms relating to women's rights. "What's he done is incredible in terms of human rights and everything else," Trump said.

Lots of pomp and circumstance

Trump greeted Prince Mohammed at the White House's South Lawn entrance with a handshake and arm slung over the prince's shoulder. Trump literally rolled out the red carpet for the Saudi leader, with a military band on hand and a flyover by U.S. military planes, before showing the crown prince his decorations along the White House Colonnade.

"We have a extremely respected man in the Oval Office today," Trump said at the top of meeting, calling the prince "a friend of mine for a very long time."

Trump also castigated his predecessor, former President Joe Biden, for greeting Prince Mohammed with a fist bump during his 2022 visit to Saudi Arabia.

"When you get out of the plane and you get the future king — and a man who is one of the most respected people in the world — you shake his hand, you don't give him a fist bump, right?" Trump said. "Trump doesn't give a fist bump. I grab that hand" — and he did just that.

At the dinner Tuesday night, the tuxedo-clad president and first lady Melania Trump welcomed the crown prince back on the red carpet again, before feting him at a dinner attended by tech titans. Among them were Tesla CEO Elon Musk, Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang and Apple CEO Tim Cook, along with golfer Bryson DeChambeau and soccer star Cristiano Ronaldo.

They dined on a pistachio-crust rack of lamb, followed by a couverture mousse pear for dessert.

Vast but vague commercial and economic deals

Prince Mohammad told Trump that his country would be increasing its financial commitments to the U.S. from \$600 billion, which was announced during the president's trip to Riyadh in May, to \$1 trillion.

Details of those deals were not immediately clear but are expected to include investments in a variety of American businesses, including artificial intelligence, as well as the purchase of jet engines and other equipment.

## New museum in California offers immersive experience of the Shroud of Turin

By DEEPA BHARATH Associated Press

GARDEN GROVE, Calif. (AP) — An interactive museum dedicated to the Shroud of Turin, which some say was Jesus' burial cloth, opens its doors to the public Wednesday at the Christ Cathedral campus in Southern California.

"The Shroud of Turin: An Immersive Experience," a \$5-million exhibit in Garden Grove featuring 360-degree projection room theaters, Shroud of Turin replicas, interactive kiosks, and a life-size sculpture of Christ, was conceived over a span of three years and funded through private donations.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, November 20, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 169 ~ 53 of 54

The content was created primarily by Othonia, Inc., a Rome-based group dedicated to the examination of the shroud, one of the most studied artifacts in history. The original — a 14-foot-long, 3.5-foot-wide (4.3-meter-long, 1 meter-wide) cloth — is kept in a bulletproof, climate-controlled case housed in the Cathedral of Saint John the Baptist in Turin, Italy.

The California museum — covering 10,000 square feet (930 square meters) — contains a life-size laminated visual of the shroud stretched over a wall. It shows the faint image of a man with wounds similar to those of Christ.

The cloth is a powerful symbol for Christians

The Vatican has called the cloth a powerful symbol of Christ's suffering while making no claim to its authenticity. Many experts stand by carbon-dating of scraps of the cloth that put it in the 13th or 14th century, but many faithful — some accomplished scientists among them — say the results might have been skewed by contamination, calling for larger samples to be analyzed. Many insist that the cloth contains pollen from Jerusalem and is woven in a pattern that was unique to the first century.

The cloth, considered a relic by many Christians, was most recently on display in the spring of 2015. While the shroud may never leave Turin, the new exhibit will remain at least through 2030 on the Christ Cathedral campus, next to the famous glass tower and sanctuary erected by televangelist Robert H. Schuller that is now home to the Catholic Diocese of Orange.

The Most Rev. Timothy Freyer, an auxiliary bishop at the diocese, said he hopes the exhibit will reinforce for visitors the power of God's love for all.

"My hope is that people of faith will have stronger faith, people who are doubting will come to belief and people with no faith will begin the questioning process and then come to faith," he said.

One of the highlights of the immersive experience is a re-creation of Christ's resurrection on Easter morning, with museum visitors sitting in the tomb and watching the shrouded body disappear in a flash of light. The exhibit also features replicas of the spear believed to have pierced Christ's chest and the helmet of thorns placed on his head.

Philip Rizzo, a parishioner at St. Bonaventure Catholic Church in Huntington Beach who was part of a group that got a preview, said seeing these items up close created a powerful visual representation of Christ's suffering and sacrifice. Also, he said, witnessing the extensive scientific research conducted on the cloth makes the artifact more relatable.

"We're tangible beings, not just spirit and light," Rizzo said. "Science really helps make that connection."

The subject of extensive research

While some scientists have criticized the eagerness of Christians to authenticate the cloth, the new exhibit had its origins in such curiosity. Its main proponent was August Accetta, a gynecologist who opened up the Shroud Center of Southern California in 1998 and has studied the cloth's mystery for over three decades.

Accetta said it was the Shroud of Turin that converted him from agnostic to Catholic. His Shroud fascination continued after meeting John Jackson, a nuclear physicist, who in 1978 led a 40-person team of scientists as part of the Shroud of Turin Research Project. Their study determined that the cloth was not a manufactured work of art, but contained human bloodstains and that no known physical, chemical or biological process could adequately explain how the image on the Shroud was formed.

Accetta believes, as some other scientists do, that the image was created by a burst of radiation and that a massive amount of energy is required to create the image without burning the cloth.

"On the shroud, you see four centimeters of anatomically correct information encoded in two microns, which is about half the thickness of a strand of hair," he said. "We can't even begin to understand that, let alone reproduce it."

To him, the only explanation — as the interactive exhibit illustrates — is that the body of Christ became light and the shroud simply collapsed, leaving the fine imprint of his face on the white linen.

The Rev. Robert Spitzer, founder of the Magis Center, a nonprofit that uses science to defend the Catholic faith, said the cloth bears "perfect blood stains down to the edges," which does not happen when a shroud is simply pulled off a dead body. The stains should be smeared and fragmented if that were the case, he said. Like Accetta, Spitzer says the etching on the cloth was likely caused by particle radiation.

# Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, November 20, 2025 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 169 ~ 54 of 54

"And then one 10,000th of a second after the discharge begins, whap! These blood stains are transferred perfectly onto the cloth," Spitzer said. "The only explanation is that body has to disappear. I mean — like Frodo's ring — it's gone."

Where science meets faith

Spitzer added that he does not need a relic to explain his faith because that comes from his belief in Scripture and Christ's resurrection.

"But it's given me a little deeper insight into God and how he works," he said.

Nora Creech, director of Othonia in the U.S., said the Rome-based organization was founded by the Rev. Hector Guerra, who dreamed of creating 100 exhibits globally. He built the first flagship exhibit in Jerusalem and others in Rome, Poland, Mexico and the U.S. This latest one is the first to feature an immersive experience, which was created by a California-based studio.

Creech said they decided to begin the movielike immersive experience with Christ's life story from birth to crucifixion and end with the resurrection and the message that "Jesus is still with us today."

"One of the quotes in the movie is that the cross received Jesus alive and turned him over to the shroud, dead. The shroud received Jesus dead and turned him over to us alive in the Eucharist," she said.

Rudy Dichtl, one of the scientists who formed the 1978 research team, still remembers every moment spent touching and holding the cloth in his hands. He said he and the other scientists walked into the project with the understanding that they would leave the moment they saw the cloth was a forgery or a manufactured piece of art. Their research found that it was not.

"We saw the cloth as something that had the potential to be the burial cloth of Christ," he said.

Dichtl, a Catholic, said as a scientist he acknowledges there is limited evidence in science to conclusively say the cloth was the one that covered the body of Christ.

"But as a Christian," he said, "I do believe it is the burial cloth of Christ."

## Today in History: November 20, the Mexican Revolution begins

Today is Thursday, Nov. 20, the 324th day of 2025. There are 41 days left in the year.

On Nov. 20, 1910, Francisco Madero led a revolt against Mexican President Porfirio Díaz, marking the beginning of the decade-long Mexican Revolution.

Also on this date:

In 1945, 22 former Nazi officials went on trial before an international war crimes tribunal in Nuremberg, Germany. (Almost a year later, the International Military Tribunal sentenced 12 of the defendants to death; seven received prison sentences ranging from 10 years to life; three were acquitted.)

1947, Britain's future queen, Princess Elizabeth, married Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, at Westminster Abbey.

In 1969, Native American activists began an occupation of Alcatraz Island that would last 19 months before they were forcibly removed by federal authorities.

In 1982, the University of California, Berkeley, football team defeated Stanford University by scoring a touchdown on a lateral-filled kickoff return on the last play of the game, despite the Stanford marching band entering the field of play, thinking Stanford had already won. In college football lore, the bizarre finish is often referred to simply as "The Play."

In 1992, fire seriously damaged Windsor Castle, the favorite weekend home of Britain's Queen Elizabeth II.

In 2003, music producer Phil Spector was charged with murder in the shooting of actor Lana Clarkson at his California home. (After a first trial ended with a hung jury in 2007, Spector was convicted of second-degree murder in 2009 and sentenced to 19 years to life; he died in prison at age 81 on Jan. 16, 2021.)

Today's Birthdays: Actor Estelle Parsons is 98. Author Don DeLillo is 89. Comedian Dick Smothers is 87. Former President Joe Biden is 83. Broadcast journalist Judy Woodruff is 79. Musician Joe Walsh is 78. Actor Bo Derek is 69. Actor Ming-Na Wen is 62. Rapper Michael "Mike D" Diamond (Beastie Boys) is 60. Actor-comedian Joel McHale is 54. Country singer Dierks Bentley is 50. Olympic gold medal-winning gymnast Dominique Dawes is 49. Rapper Future is 42.