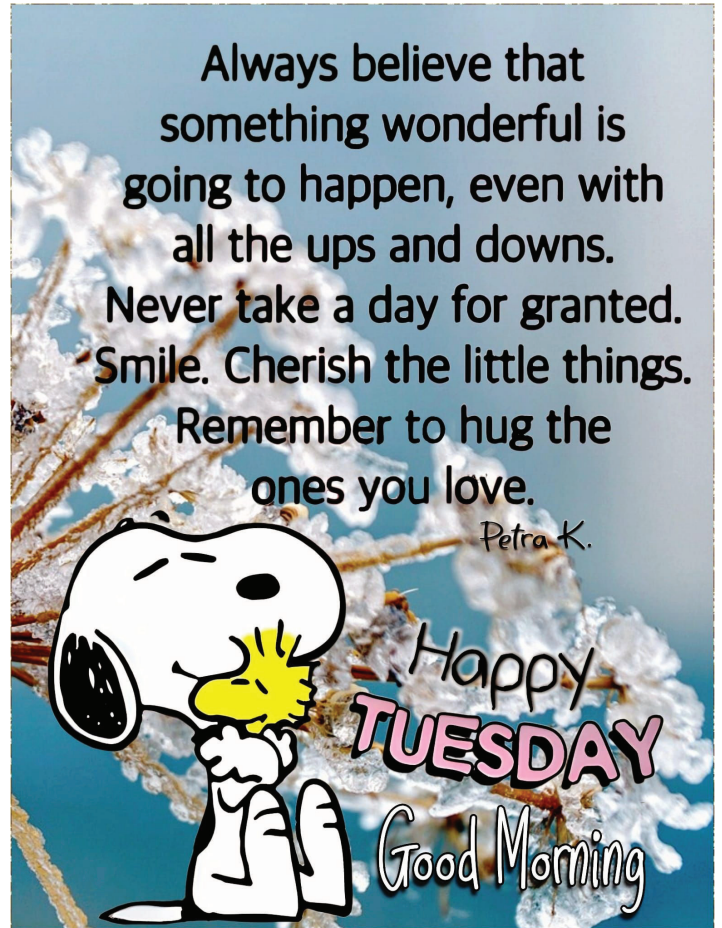


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Tuesday, Nov. 25

Senior Menu: Baked chicken, mashed potatoes, cauliflower, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Muffins.

School Lunch: Pizza burger, tri tater.

United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.

5th grade GBB practice, 4:15 p.m.

Wrestling kick-off fundraiser, 5 p.m.

MS GBB hosts Aberdeen Roncalli (7th at 6 p.m., 8th at 7 p.m.)

Wednesday, Nov. 26

Senior Menu: Chili with beans, tossed salad, peaches, corn bread/muffin.

NO SCHOOL - Thanksgiving break

United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Confirmation, 5:30 p.m.

Groton C&MA: Kid's Club, Youth Group, Adult Bible Study, 7 p.m.

Thursday, Nov. 27

No Senior Meal

NO SCHOOL - Thanksgiving break

Friday, Nov. 28

No senior meal.

NO SCHOOL - Thanksgiving break

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1440

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

Indictments Tossed

A federal judge has dismissed criminal indictments against former FBI Director James Comey and New York Attorney General Letitia James without prejudice, ruling the prosecutor who brought the cases was unlawfully appointed. The Justice Department is expected to appeal.

US Attorney General Pam Bondi appointed Lindsey Halligan as interim US attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia Sept. 22 after the previous interim US attorney—who had declined to charge Comey—resigned. (Comey was indicted Sept. 25; James was indicted Oct. 9.) The judge ruled Halligan's appointment violated federal law and the Constitution, noting Bondi's 120-day interim-appointment authority had lapsed, and only the district court could fill the latest vacancy. The judge said such a move could circumvent Senate confirmation by stacking temporary appointments.

The DOJ could still seek a new indictment through a properly appointed prosecutor, although the five-year statute of limitations for Comey expired in September. Comey and James have argued that their cases were politically motivated. Read the judge's dismissal [here](#) and [here](#).

Gene Therapy Breakthrough

A 3-year-old boy appears to have fully recovered after receiving the first-ever gene therapy to treat Hunter syndrome earlier this year, researchers revealed yesterday.

The rare, inherited disease affects roughly 2,000 people worldwide, with boys having a higher risk of carrying the disease. Children born with Hunter syndrome have a faulty gene that prevents them from producing the enzyme needed to break down complex sugar molecules. Without treatment, the molecules accumulate in their tissues and organs, leading to physical and mental decline in a process resembling dementia. Life expectancy is between 10 and 20 years. Standard treatment is a three-hour-per-week enzyme replacement therapy costing nearly \$500K per year. While it can reduce organ problems, the therapy cannot slow mental decline.

The latest treatment for the 3-year-old boy, however, involved removing his stem cells and replacing the gene before reinjecting the cells. Unlike prior treatments, the latest intervention can reach the brain, preventing mental decline. See more [here](#).

Reggae Icon Gone

Pioneering Jamaican singer and actor Jimmy Cliff has died at age 81. His wife, Latifa, shared yesterday that he suffered a seizure followed by pneumonia.

Cliff, born James Chambers, grew up singing in a rural Jamaican church choir. He moved to Kingston in his early teens with musical ambitions, adopting the surname "Cliff" to express the heights he aspired to reach. His song "Hurricane Hattie" topped Jamaican charts in 1962, and he represented the island at New York City's 1964 World's Fair. His 1969 song "Wonderful World, Beautiful People" became a global hit, reaching No. 6 in the UK and No. 25 in the US. Cliff further introduced reggae to international audiences with his 1972 acting debut in Jamaica's first major film, "The Harder They Come." Read his reflections on the movie [here](#).

Cliff released over 30 albums, won two Grammys, and was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 2010.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Bollywood star Dharmendra, whose career spanned over six decades and more than 250 films, dies at age 89.

Chance the Rapper and Julianne Hough to cohost ABC's "New Year's Rockin' Eve" alongside returning hosts Ryan Seacrest, Rita Ora, and Rob Gronkowski.

Caitlin Clark to make USA Basketball senior national team camp debut next month after missing second half of WNBA season due to groin injury.

Science & Technology

Anthropic unveils Claude Opus 4.5 for software developers and knowledge workers, marking the startup's third major AI model launch in two months.

NASA trims Boeing Starliner contract and indefinitely delays crewed Starliner flights, eight months after technical issues left astronauts stranded on the International Space Station.

Novo Nordisk's semaglutide pill fails to slow Alzheimer's disease in clinical trials.

Neuroscientists identify rare gene mutation that may protect brain immune cells from Alzheimer's, pointing to potential preventative treatments.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +1.6%, Dow +0.4%, Nasdaq +2.7%) as Alphabet (+6.3%), Tesla (+6.8%) lead tech rally.

Amazon to spend up to \$50B on AI infrastructure to support US government agencies; project to break ground in 2026.

Kohl's names Michael Bender as permanent CEO; Bender is fourth executive to lead the department store in four years after former CEO Ashley Buchanan was fired for misconduct.

Politics & World Affairs

Pentagon opens investigation into Sen. Mark Kelly (D-AZ) over participation in a video calling on military members not to follow any illegal orders.

State Department designates Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and Cartel de los Soles as foreign terrorists over alleged drug trafficking to the US.

Ethiopia's Hayli Gubbi volcano erupts for the first time in at least 10,000 years; no casualties were reported as of this writing.

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

21. Once dyed my hair red and will never make that mistake again



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Todd Gay hands a decoration up to Landon Johnson as the Christmas decorations on Main Street were put up on Monday. They took advantage of the nice day to put them up. (Photo by Tina Kosel)



Gov. Rhoden Announces Approval of Disaster Relief Plan for North Sioux City

PIERRE, S.D. – Governor Larry Rhoden announced the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) approved South Dakota’s Community Development Block Grant – Disaster Relief (CDBG-DR) Action Plan for North Sioux City, marking an important step forward in the community’s long-term recovery efforts.

“When South Dakota works together, we build communities that stay strong, safe, and free. This approval is a major victory for North Sioux City, and it brings the city one step closer to the resources it needs to rebuild stronger than before,” said Governor Larry Rhoden. “I am grateful for GOED, my team in the Governor’s Office, and Senator Thune for getting us to this important milestone and making sure it remained a priority in Washington.”

Governor Rhoden discussed this issue with Senator Thune and his team in October, and the Senator’s assistance was an important part of getting the action plan approved in a timely manner.

With the Action Plan approved, GOED will work with federal and local partners to complete the remaining steps so funding can be awarded. This approval provides positive momentum, keeping North Sioux City on track for meaningful recovery and future resilience.

“Securing HUD’s approval is a major step forward, and we are deeply grateful to Governor Rhoden, Senator Thune, and both their teams for championing this effort and keeping this process moving,” said GOED Commissioner Bill Even. “I’m incredibly proud of the GOED team and grateful for their hard work serving our communities. We’ll continue working closely with our federal partners and local leaders as the next phases advance for North Sioux City.”

The Life of O. Clayton Johnson



The funeral service for O. Clayton Johnson, 83, of Groton, SD, will be 11:00am, Wednesday, November 26, 2025, at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Aberdeen with Pastor Ryan Drevlow officiating. Burial will be at Sunset Memorial Gardens. Clayton died Thursday, November 20, 2025, at Avera St. Luke's Hospital in Aberdeen, SD.

Visitation will be 6:00-7:00pm, Tuesday, followed by a prayer service at 7:00pm at Spitzer-Miller Funeral Home, 1111 South Main Street.

O. Clayton Johnson was born on June 13, 1942, to Trygve and Mary Edith (Campbell) Johnson in Miller, SD. He was the third of eight children and the first to be born in a hospital. Clayton grew up and attended school at Sunshine Bible Academy in Miller.

In 1964, Clayton enlisted in the United States Army. He was stationed in Germany and honorably discharged in 1970.

Clayton met Karen Redlinger in Seattle, WA, and the two were married on June 8, 1972. Throughout their life together, they lived in Wyoming, Minnesota, California, and Washington before ultimately settling in South Dakota. Clayton spent most of his career as a truck driver. He traveled countless miles, reaching all 50 states except Hawaii since he couldn't drive there, and Canada. He knew the roads well and could tell you exactly which truck stops were worth visiting. He retired on December 18, 2008, and devoted his time to watching and caring for his grandchildren.

Clayton was a quiet man with a sharp intellect and a warm sense of humor. He loved to read, especially westerns, Louis L'Amour novels, encyclopedias, and war history. Horses held a special place in his heart—he raised them as a child and enjoyed watching television shows featuring horses as he grew older. Above all, Clayton cherished his family and treasured every moment spent with his children and grandchildren.

Grateful for having shared Clayton's life are his children: Kari Johnson, Tara (Clint) Fjelstad, Tami Johnson, Mari (Aaron) Sundberg; grandchildren: Kyle Kohrs, Kaitlin Kohrs, Kelli Kohrs, Kimberly (Jesse) Chandler, Nathan (Jesse) Fjelstad, Jenifer Fjelstad, Trystian (Nikki) Johnson-Sanders, Veronica Johnson, Gabriella Johnson, and Elizabeth Johnson, Rebekah Sundberg, Cayden Sundberg, Scarlett Sundberg; great-grandchildren: Ronnie Fjelstad, Clayton Kohrs, Eliana Fjelstad, siblings, Bill (Gloria) Johnson and Tryva (Al) Woodley; sisters-in-law, Rachel Johnson and Bev Johnson; and many nieces and nephews.

Preceding Clayton in death are his parents, Trygve and Mary Edith Johnson; wife, Karen Johnson; and siblings: Clair (Norma) Johnson, Cecil Johnson, Bud Johnson, Robert & Stan (Dianne) Johnson.



Monument could lose millions due to Sanford Health expansion

Bart Pfankuch

South Dakota News Watch

RAPID CITY, S.D. – Monument Health could lose \$40 million a year in federal revenue, be forced to reduce some medical services and have to cut back on construction efforts as a result of plans by Sanford Health to build a competing medical campus, Monument's CEO said in an interview.

Right now, Monument operates the only hospital in Rapid City and is the major provider of primary, emergency and specialty medical care in western South Dakota. But for the first time, it would have direct competition for many of those services – and their related revenues – due to Sanford Health's \$500 million expansion plans.

Sanford Health announced on Nov. 17 that the Sioux Falls-based medical group plans to build a 168-bed, full-service hospital as well as numerous specialty facilities by 2030 on a 480,000 square-foot campus in southwestern Rapid City. The project will be fueled in large part by a \$300 million donation by South Dakota philanthropist and namesake Denny Sanford.

While the announcement was met with great excitement by local and state officials, it has also raised questions and concerns about the financial future of Monument Health and its ability to provide a broad range of medical care for patients of all incomes across western South Dakota and eastern Wyoming, according to president and CEO Paulette Davidson.

However, it's far too soon to know exactly how the Sanford Black Hills Medical Center campus will affect operations and revenues at Monument once it is built and operational, she said.

"There's so many repercussions I don't know yet ... (but) I think we have to look at every service we provide very carefully," Davidson said. "The community needs the services that we're providing. And if there are some barriers to our ability to do that in the future, that's where I have concerns."

Sanford Health is a much larger provider. It is the largest rural health system in the U.S., with 48 medical centers and 226 clinics across seven Midwest states. The group's annual revenues in 2023 were \$5.7 billion and assets were \$3.8 billion, according to tax documents.

Monument Health has five hospitals and 23 clinics, almost all in western South Dakota. Its annual revenue in 2023 was \$1.2 billion and assets were \$1.5 billion, according to Monument's annual report.

Sanford Health CEO Bill Gassen, speaking at a press conference after the expansion announcement on Nov. 17, said he believes having multiple providers will benefit patients and providers.

"Competition makes for a better community," he said. "The competition that has taken place for the past several decades in Sioux Falls ... we have better care in that community due to the competition and I actually believe that is what is going to happen here, too."

But in a wide-ranging interview with South Dakota News Watch hours after the Nov. 17 announcement, Davidson said there are likely to be negative effects.

Loss of \$40 million in federal funding

One of the most significant impacts could be the loss of Monument's "sole provider status" within the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, Davidson said.

That \$40 million supplemental annual payment from CMS is made because Monument provides most primary medical care in the region, she said.

"We take those extra dollars and we reinvest them into the community," Davidson said. "It is used primarily for staffing, so it flows right to our caregivers and then into the economy."

Losing that money could make it harder for Monument to recruit and retain employees at a time when the group has a shortage of 300 nurses, Davidson said. It also could require difficult decisions about

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eliminating or reducing services that do not turn a profit, including behavioral health, she said.

"So we'll have to figure out where to cut back on our services and what services do we cut back on in order to continue to care for as many people as we were caring for before," Davidson said. "That \$40 million, or \$400 million over 10 years, leaves the hospital and it leaves the economy. It goes away and it isn't replaced."

Specialty care on the chopping block?

Another potential impact of Sanford Health's expansion into the Black Hills is that any duplication of medical offerings could reduce Monument's ability to offer and pay for advanced specialty care, Davidson said.

For example, Monument maintains a neurological stroke program with two or three full-time surgeons who are on call 24 hours a day to remove a blood clot to the brain that can quickly kill a patient or leave them without speech or movement.

"Can we both run that program and keep our staff competent, and is there enough volume in those specialty areas?" Davidson said. "Are we going to divide the market so that you're not able to provide that high-quality outcome because you can't keep staff because they're not busy enough?"

Davidson also said that duplication of services could reduce revenues that Monument uses to provide services to lower-income patients in a market where 72% of its patients are on some form of government payment program, which often does not cover the full cost of care.

"I don't think the population is growing fast enough for what they plan to build," Davidson said. "I'm just concerned that they're trying to duplicate the services that are actually paying for all the other services that we do that no one else wants to provide."

Monument provided more than \$134 million in non-reimbursed charity care to patients who cannot pay in 2024, often through its emergency room, Davidson said.

"We're not hearing that they're going to provide behavioral health services or provide for our poor or needy or uninsured families," she said. "The community needs the services that we're providing. And if there are some barriers to our ability to do that in the future, that's where I have concerns."

When asked by News Watch whether the high cost of charity care currently provided by Monument would be an issue for Sanford Health in Rapid City, Gassen said the group considered those costs during its expansion planning processes.

"For us at Sanford Health, that's every day for us in every single community where we provide care," Gassen said. "The mix of charity care and bad debt and different services we provide is different across the whole continuum of our organization. ... (But) coming into this community in a deeper way, we've got eyes wide open about some of the challenges and some of the incredible opportunities that are there. And we're excited to extend that world-class care to every single patient regardless of their ability to pay or who the payer is."

Cutting back on construction

Besides services, Monument might also have to adjust its current capital plan that includes about \$650 million in new construction and modernization efforts over the next decade, Davidson said.

"We have dollars set aside in all our communities," she said. "Anything we have left over at the end of the year is all invested here in western South Dakota."

Some of those plans could be curtailed or scrapped if revenues decline, she said.

As an example, Monument's 28-bed neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) is undersized and does not offer patients as much privacy as it should, Davidson said. A plan to upgrade the facility, scheduled for 2026, could be delayed or eliminated in the future if revenues decline. Davidson noted that the NICU already operates at a \$6 million annual deficit but is maintained due to high community need for those services.

"If a new player comes in and we see a shift in the business that pays for all the services we provide and we can't afford to do some of those projects because the revenue we generate goes away, we're left with less (money) to do things because we can't afford it," she said. "That's the challenge."

Potential partnerships possible

Gassen said final designs for the new medical campus and specific plans for what services will be of-

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ferred are yet to be determined.

At this point, it is impossible to know how Sanford Health's expansion in Rapid City will impact the cost of care, competition for employees or how the two medical groups will co-exist.

Gassen acknowledged on Nov. 17 that neither he nor the other members of Sanford Health's Rapid City leadership team had spoken to Monument leaders about the proposed new medical center. But he said he expects the two health groups will work together well.

"Even in our most fiercely competitive markets, while we compete with each other, driving each other every day to be successful, we also do partner in many different ways to make sure we make the community better," he said.

Davidson said she remains bullish on Monument's ability to fulfill its mission to care for all patients regardless of income or ZIP code, and she's also hopeful that the two organizations can become strong partners in those efforts.

"I think that is what the community expects us to do as two not-for-profit health systems, to work together and find ways to keep our community and everyone in it healthy," she said.

This story was produced by South Dakota News Watch, an independent, nonprofit organization. Read more stories and donate at sdnewswatch.org and sign up for an email to get stories when they're published. Contact investigative reporter Bart Pfankuch at bart.pfankuch@sdnewswatch.org.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Biologist cautions next generation against trusting a career with the federal government

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER

When 9-year-old Liz Renner visited the Gavins Point National Fish Hatchery in southeastern South Dakota with her grandfather, she was hooked.

In adulthood, she devoted more than a decade of education and work to understanding the intricacies of fish biology and conservation. Then, in May 2024, she was hired to work at the hatchery as a fish biologist and member of the Pallid Sturgeon Recovery Program, working to save the endangered species of fish.

"But it felt more like a nightmare at the end than a dream come true," said the 31-year-old, originally from Crooks.

Renner was laid off in February under Department of Government Efficiency action, reinstated in March, and then offered and accepted a deferred resignation weeks later because she feared she'd be let go again later on. She was paid her federal wages through the end of September in exchange for her leaving her position.

"I finally felt like I could breathe after I left the hatchery for a second time," Renner said. "It was a sense of relief that the roller coaster was done for me."

Renner was one of about 154,000 federal employees who took buyouts — officially known as deferred resignations — offered by the Trump administration earlier this year as a way to reduce the size of the federal workforce. Office of Personnel Management Director Scott Kupor said recently that he expects the total decrease in the federal workforce to reach more than 300,000 eventually.

Of the 45 probationary employees laid off in February in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Mountain-Prairie Region, which includes eight states, Renner said she was one of at least 25 who didn't return, either because they were not reinstated after DOGE cut them or because they accepted a buyout. Probationary employees are recent hires, usually in the first year of their position. Their loss burdened remaining employees with larger workloads and a hectic summer, Renner heard from her former colleagues.

'My trust in these institutions is forever shaken'

At this point, Renner is grateful she was able to stay in her field and in the Midwest. Many other former federal biologists are not as fortunate, she said.

Renner moved in with her grandmother in Lyons, South Dakota, and splits her time between there and Lincoln, Nebraska, as a post-doctoral fisheries biologist at the University of Nebraska.

Now she researches, teaches and mentors students, and warns them about what they face. Their most promising options, she tells them, are finding a program out of the country, working in private consulting or with nonprofits, or working in liberal states with legislatures that prioritize conservation funding.

Due to federal workforce reductions, Renner said, those recent graduates may be competing for an entry-level or seasonal job against someone with a master's degree or over 10 years of experience in the field. Other peers have left the fisheries field altogether.

Renner remains passionate about research to conserve, propagate and reintroduce threatened and endangered fish and improve water quality in the state. She plans to stay in the field and look at ways to accomplish her mission outside of the federal government.

"My trust in these institutions is forever shaken," Renner said, adding that if federal cuts continue, "I

don't know what young person in good conscience could look at what's happened and say, 'I want to work for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.'"

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

China soybean pledge lifts prices, but South Dakota farmers still nervous

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

SIoux FALLS — South Dakota soybean industry leaders said Monday that a new trade pledge with China is lifting prices but hasn't erased anxiety about how much farmers depend on a single foreign buyer.

"China's the number one buyer of soybeans out of the United States," said Tom Kersting, CEO of South Dakota Soybean Processors. "At times, they buy 60% of all the exported soybeans out of the U.S."

Kersting was one of the participants in a panel discussion about soybeans hosted by the Downtown Sioux Falls Rotary Club. South Dakota produced \$2.3 billion worth of soybeans last year, the ninth highest value in the nation.

Kersting said China has "quietly" stepped back into the U.S. soybean market since Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent announced the trade pledge in late October, after China had been boycotting purchases of U.S. soybeans in retaliation for tariffs imposed by President Donald Trump. Soybean prices at grain elevators were "right around \$9" per bushel before the news of the trade pledge, Kersting said, and are now "over \$10."

But farmers are not benefiting equally from the price bump. Some sold at lower prices before the trade pledge announcement.

"The prices really didn't appreciate till after harvest was pretty much complete," Kersting said. "The ones that had some beans stored, they'll see those gains."

By his rough estimate, a new \$500 million Mitchell soybean processing plant that opened in September has added 25 cents per bushel in value to local cash bids.

Lake Preston farmer Paul Casper said the price increase has pushed him "closer to break-even on beans," while Trump's tariffs have raised the price of farm inputs such as fertilizers.

Casper said Brazil has emerged as a rival to U.S. soybean farmers after years of infrastructure investment backed by China, which makes the future feel less certain. Yet Casper said he still has faith in Trump.

"I'm still thinking this dealmaker dude has got something up his sleeve," Casper said.

Kersting said the threat of tariffs nudged other buyers to the table, including Vietnam and Thailand, "who we sell a lot of soybean meal to."

Both men warned that long-term overreliance on China leaves U.S. agriculture vulnerable.

"At the end of the day, you should not be making deals with people you don't trust, and nobody trusts them," Kersting said.

Doug Sombke, president of the South Dakota Farmers Union, did not appear on the panel, but said weeks ago after the trade pledge announcement that Trump is attempting to put out a fire he himself started, "and the building is already charred."

"We went backward from where we started, and we didn't need to do that," Sombke said. "This isn't a win. We've been played."

Sombke said the numbers he has heard regarding the trade agreement fall short of what producers were counting on. He said smaller and beginning farmers are being squeezed the hardest.

"Well-established farmers are just going to eat through some of their equity," he said. "But the younger farmer, the smaller guy, doesn't have that."

Sarah Sellars, an assistant professor and Extension specialist at South Dakota State University, told South Dakota Searchlight that the trade deal is “positive in a market that’s been facing a lot of negative news lately,” but said farmers “are still facing really tight crop margins.”

“If we’re not factoring in the money given by government programs or crop insurance, the cost of production is higher than what we’re actually able to sell the crop for,” she said.

On Monday, U.S. Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins said the Trump administration plans to announce a financial aid package for U.S. farmers and provide more details on the China trade deal within two weeks. The aid package is designed to compensate farmers with government payments for tariff-related losses.

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.

Trump allows more foreign ag workers, eases off ICE raids on farms

The shifts come as many Americans are concerned about the rising cost of food

BY: TIM HENDERSON

In a tacit admission that U.S. food production requires foreign labor, the Trump administration is making it easier for farmers to employ guest workers from other countries.

At the same time, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in recent months appears to be refraining from conducting agricultural workplace raids, even as it scours Democratic-led cities for immigrants who are in the country illegally.

“We really haven’t seen agriculture targeted with worksite enforcement efforts, and early this year we did,” said Julia Gelatt, associate director of U.S. immigration policy at the Migration Policy Institute, a nonpartisan think tank.

The shifts come as many Americans are concerned about the rising cost of food, creating political problems for a president who campaigned on lowering them. Last week, the administration also announced it would lift tariffs on some foreign food products, including bananas, beef, coffee and tomatoes.

To ease labor shortages on farms and ranches, the administration last month made changes to the federal H-2A visa program, which allows employers to hire foreign workers for temporary agricultural jobs when there aren’t enough U.S.-born workers available. Under the new rule, the Department of Homeland Security will approve H-2A visas more quickly.

“Our immigration system has been broken for decades, and we finally have a President who is enforcing the law and prioritizing fixing programs farmers and ranchers rely on to produce the safest and most productive food supply in the world,” the U.S. Department of Agriculture said in an email to Stateline.

But the move to increase the supply of foreign agricultural workers conflicts with a July statement by Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins that “the promise to America, to ensure that we have a 100% American workforce, stands.”

Rollins also said the administration was committed to the mass deportation of immigrants who are here illegally, but that it would be “strategic so as not to compromise our food supply.” Ultimately, she said, the solution would be increased automation of agricultural jobs.

The government has issued about 420,000 H-2A visas for agricultural workers every year since 2023, which amounts to about half of the 812,000 agricultural worker jobs. They are concentrated in states that grow fruits and vegetables as opposed to grains, which are increasingly planted and harvested using machines. The government expects an additional 119,000 visas to be issued under the new rule.

Almost half the H-2A visas in the 2025 fiscal year were in Florida (60,000), Georgia (44,000), California (37,000), Washington state (36,000) and North Carolina (28,000).

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Lower wages

The new H-2A rule also includes new hourly wage guidelines that vary by state but are lower than previous wages, and allows employers to charge workers for housing that used to be free. In North Carolina, for instance, the new rate is \$11.09 for unskilled workers compared with \$16.16 last year. In California, the rate is \$13.45 for unskilled workers compared with \$19.97 last year, though minimum wage laws in California and some other states would apply to those jobs, according to a Cornell University analysis.

In North Carolina, farmers are looking forward to lower labor costs, said Lee Wicker, deputy director of the North Carolina Growers Association, a trade association that brought 11,000 guest workers to the state through the H-2A guest worker program last year.

"If you think farmers are making more money in these conditions, you're wrong. They're going broke," Wicker said. Workers will take a pay cut under new guidelines and will have to pay for housing, but that may help farmers stave off bankruptcy, he said.

"I'm not saying the workers are going to be happy about this, but I think they'll come back. Wages have gone down before and they kept coming," he added.

Jeffrey Dorfman, an agricultural and resource economics professor at North Carolina State University, said the changes will be a boon to the state's farmers.

"The move to lower the H-2A wages by the Trump administration will be very well received by growers in North Carolina and will save farmers tens of millions of dollars statewide," Dorfman said. "For many farmers, it will turn money-losing crops into money-making crops, if prices stay about where they are now."

Unionized California farmworkers are opposed to the pay cuts and loss of free housing in the new guest worker visa plan, said Antonio De Loera-Brust, a spokesperson for the United Farm Workers, which represents about 10,000 workers in California.

The union sued the administration over ICE raids in the fields earlier this year, but recently "it's been pretty quiet," he said.

"For us it's been really a one-two punch," De Loera-Brust said. "First came the raids, which hurt workers, and now in order to appease business interests, they make all these concessions on wages and the guest workers program."

Fewer raids

The administration quickly walked back a June directive to avoid raids on the agriculture and hospitality industries. Nevertheless, ICE raids on those employers have been more infrequent in the months since.

In June, ICE raided a dairy farm in New Mexico and a meatpacking plant in Nebraska. Since then, the agency has raided only a handful of food and agriculture employers, such as a July raid on a California marijuana grower and an Arizona restaurant chain, and a September raid to arrest Wisconsin dairy workers.

Earlier this month, ICE agents descended on an onion farm in Northern California, arresting four immigrants on charges of illegally selling farmworker visas.

Even as ICE ramps up its activity in North Carolina cities such as Charlotte and Raleigh, Wicker, of the growers trade group, said farms in the state have not been targeted.

Gelatt, of the Migration Policy Institute, said that's been true of farms and ranches in many states since June.

"In past administrations we've seen a very quiet de-emphasis of immigration enforcement at farms. You don't need to make an announcement. You don't need to fight in the courts," Gelatt said. "It is possible just to direct enforcement activities away from farms. It'll be hard to know if that's happened now, but I would not be surprised."

While farmworkers in California are seeing some relief from raids, life is still uneasy for them, De Loera-Brust said.

"Overall, they have clearly slowed down [raids] in ag areas, but that's not policy. They could resume at any time. People are living with uncertainty," he said.

Stateline reporter Tim Henderson can be reached at thenderson@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.

Tim Henderson covers demographics for Stateline. He has been a reporter at the Miami Herald, the Cincinnati Enquirer and the Journal News.

Judge drops James Comey and Letitia James charges, saying prosecutor served 'unlawfully'

BY: JACOB FISCHLER

A senior federal judge dismissed charges Monday against two public officials with long-running public disputes with President Donald Trump, saying the controversial appointment of the president's former personal attorney as a prosecutor doomed the cases.

Senior U.S. District Judge Cameron McGowan Currie, whom former President Bill Clinton appointed to the bench in South Carolina, wrote in a Monday order that Attorney General Pam Bondi did not have the authority to make Lindsey Halligan the interim U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia.

The judge said the deadline for an interim appointee to that position had lapsed.

Because that process was invalid, the prosecutions against former FBI Director James Comey and New York Attorney General Letitia James, both of whom had investigated or prosecuted Trump, must be dropped, Currie wrote.

Currie dismissed the indictments without prejudice, meaning they could be revived. But at least in Comey's case, in which charges were brought on the eve of the statute of limitations expiring, that appeared unlikely.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters Monday the administration would appeal the ruling.

"Lindsay Halligan was legally appointed, and that's the administration's position," Leavitt said. "There was a judge who was clearly trying to shield Leticia James and James Comey from receiving accountability."

120-day clock

U.S. attorneys are appointed by the president and confirmed by the Senate, but the attorney general can appoint someone on an interim basis for 120 days. After that, the judges in the district are responsible for appointing an interim prosecutor.

"Ms. Halligan was not appointed in a manner consistent with this framework," Currie wrote.

Bondi appointed Erik Siebert as the interim U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia in January, while his confirmation was pending in the Senate. After 120 days, the judges in the district allowed him to continue.

Siebert resigned in September, reportedly under pressure from Trump and Bondi to bring charges against Comey. Bondi then named Halligan, at the time a White House aide who had also worked for Trump in a private capacity, as the interim U.S. attorney.

But Bondi could not do that because, after 120 days, the responsibility for naming an interim U.S. attorney fell to the district court judges, Currie wrote.

"The 120-day clock began running with Mr. Siebert's appointment on Jan. 21, 2025," she wrote. "When that clock expired on May 21, 2025, so too did the Attorney General's appointment authority. Consequently, I conclude that the Attorney General's attempt to install Ms. Halligan as Interim U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia was invalid and that Ms. Halligan has been unlawfully serving in that role."

Quick indictment

Halligan, after gaining office in September, quickly secured a two-count indictment against the former FBI chief from a grand jury in Alexandria. Comey was accused of lying to Congress about whether he

had authorized a press leak of information related to an FBI investigation of Russian actors' involvement in Trump's first presidential campaign.

However, U.S. District Magistrate Judge William Fitzpatrick wrote last week that issues with evidence, testimony and statements to the grand jury in the case outweighed the usual heavily guarded secrecy of proceedings. He said "profound investigative missteps" could result in the dismissal of Comey's indictment.

Comey has pleaded not guilty.

James won a civil case against Trump related to business fraud, though a state appeals court later overturned the sentence as overly punitive.

Trump has publicly blasted James and Comey as using the mechanisms of legal proceedings to persecute him.

In an extraordinary public message to Bondi just before Halligan replaced Siebert, Trump complained that the prosecutions against both were not developing faster.

The Justice Department did not respond to a message seeking comment Monday.

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

Pentagon investigates Arizona Sen. Mark Kelly after he appears in video blasted by Trump

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — The Department of Defense announced on social media Monday it's looking into "serious allegations of misconduct" against Arizona Democratic Sen. Mark Kelly, one of several lawmakers who posted a video last week telling military members they are not required to follow orders that violate the law.

The video spurred anger from President Donald Trump, who posted, also on social media, that he believed the statement from six Democratic lawmakers represented "SEDITIONOUS BEHAVIOR, punishable by DEATH!"

The claim led to safety concerns on Capitol Hill, especially after a year that included numerous acts of violence against lawmakers and key political figures.

The Defense Department announcement didn't detail exactly how Kelly may have violated the Uniform Code of Military Justice but stated that "a thorough review of these allegations has been initiated to determine further actions, which may include recall to active duty for court-martial proceedings or administrative measures."

It was unclear how the military review and threat of court-martial proceedings would fit with the constitutional protections held by members of Congress for speech and debate.

Kelly wrote in a statement the Defense Department's post was the first time he'd heard about the inquiry.

"If this is meant to intimidate me and other members of Congress from doing our jobs and holding this administration accountable, it won't work," Kelly wrote. "I've given too much to this country to be silenced by bullies who care more about their own power than protecting the Constitution."

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said Kelly and the other senators in the video were encouraging "disorder and chaos within the ranks."

"Not a single one of them ... can point to a single illegal order that this administration has given down because it does not exist," Leavitt said. "They knew what they were doing in this video and Sen. Mark Kelly and all of them should be held accountable for that."

Kelly military background

Kelly served as an aviator in the United States Navy from 1987 until 2012. He was deployed as part of Operation Desert Storm during the first Gulf War. He received several awards throughout his military career, including the Legion of Merit and the Distinguished Flying Cross.

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Kelly reached the rank of captain before his retirement from military service.

Kelly, who was also a NASA astronaut, was first elected to the U.S. Senate in November 2020.

The Defense Department's post announcing an investigation into Kelly said military officials wanted to remind people that "military retirees remain subject to the UCMJ for applicable offenses, and federal laws such as 18 U.S.C. § 2387 prohibit actions intended to interfere with the loyalty, morale, or good order and discipline of the armed forces."

The statement added that all service members "have a legal obligation under the UCMJ to obey lawful orders and that orders are presumed to be lawful. A servicemember's personal philosophy does not justify or excuse the disobedience of an otherwise lawful order."

The statement appeared somewhat similar to the one Kelly, Michigan Sen. Elissa Slotkin, Colorado Rep. Jason Crow, Pennsylvania Reps. Chris Deluzio and Chrissy Houlahan, and New Hampshire Rep. Maggie Goodlander gave in the video they published Nov 18.

The Democrats, all of whom served in the military or worked in intelligence agencies, said they wanted "to speak directly to members of the military and the intelligence community who take risks each day to keep Americans safe."

They said that Americans in those institutions "can" and "must refuse illegal orders."

"No one has to carry out orders that violate the law or our Constitution. We know this is hard and that it's a difficult time to be a public servant," they said. "But whether you're serving in the CIA, in the Army, or Navy, or the Air Force, your vigilance is critical."

Broad constitutional protections for Congress

Members of Congress are broadly protected under the speech and debate clause of the U.S. Constitution, which states that unless a lawmaker is involved in treason, felony and breach of the peace, they are "privileged from Arrest during their Attendance at the Session of their respective Houses, and in going to and returning from the same; and for any Speech or Debate in either House, they shall not be questioned in any other Place."

The annotated explanation of the clause on Congress' official website says the Supreme Court has "broadly" interpreted its applications over the years to ensure an independent legislative branch.

"Despite uncertainty at the margins, it is well established that the Clause serves to secure the independence of the federal legislature by providing Members of Congress and their aides with immunity from criminal prosecutions or civil suits that stem from acts taken within the legislative sphere," it states. "As succinctly described by the Court, the Clause's immunity from liability applies 'even though their conduct, if performed in other than legislative contexts, would in itself be unconstitutional or otherwise contrary to criminal or civil statutes.' This general immunity principle forms the core of the protections afforded by the Clause."

A report from the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service states the judiciary's "immunity principle protects Members from 'intimidation by the executive' or a 'hostile judiciary' by prohibiting both the executive and judicial powers from being used to improperly influence or harass legislators."

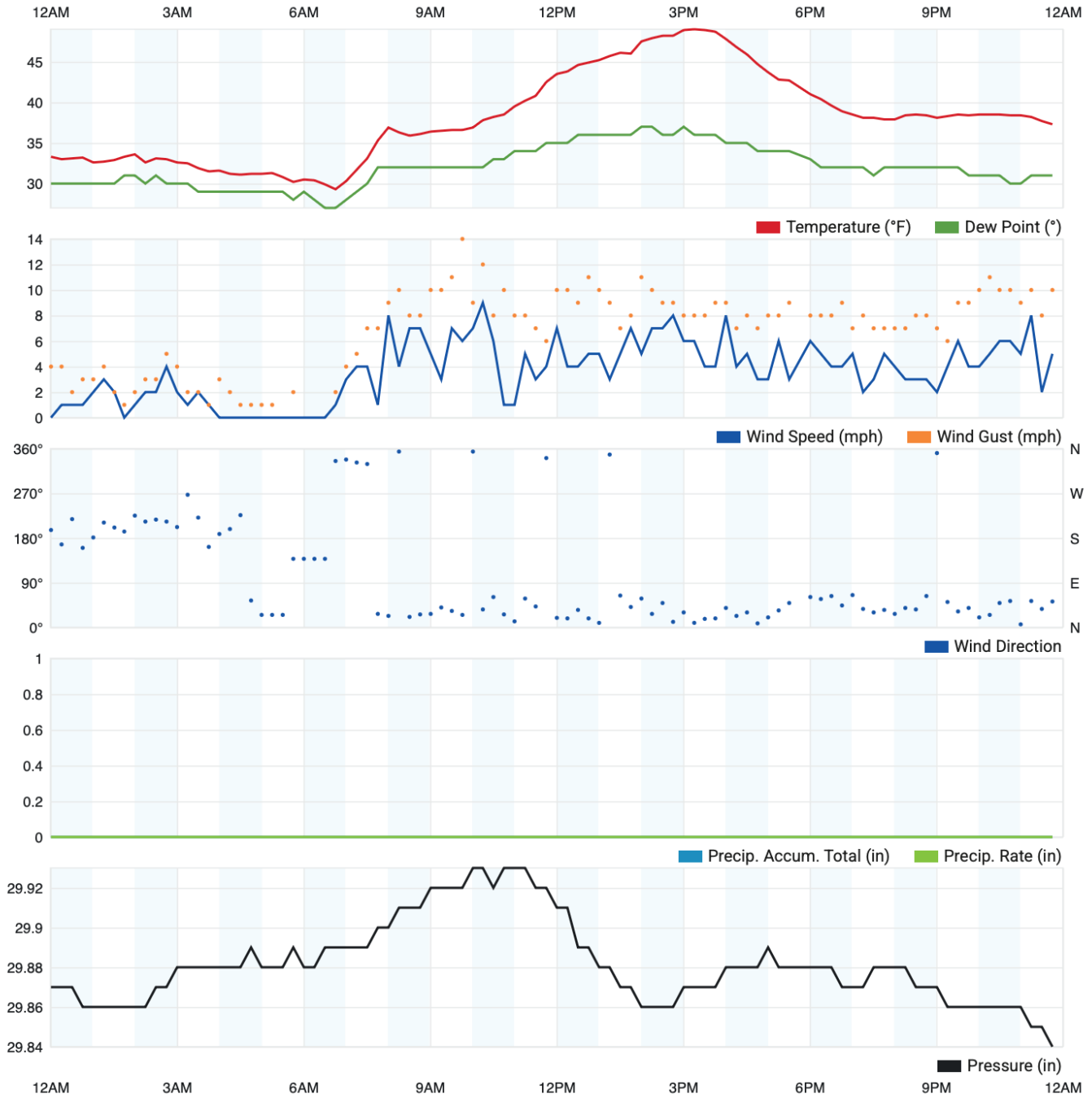
Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

November 24, 2025



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...WINTER WEATHER ADVISORY REMAINS IN EFFECT FROM 6 AM THIS MORNING TO MIDNIGHT CST TONIGHT...

* WHAT...Snow expected. Total snow accumulations between 3 and 5 inches. Winds gusting as high as 45 mph.

* WHERE...Brown County.

* WHEN...From 6 AM this morning to midnight CST tonight.

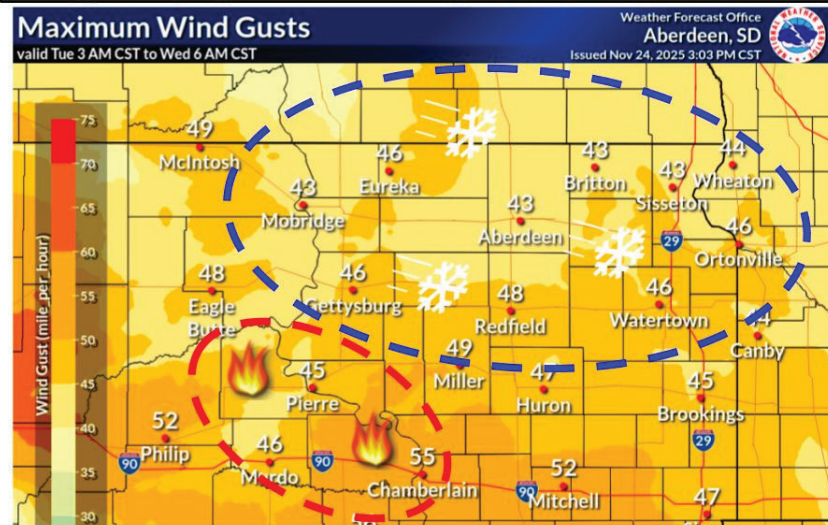
* IMPACTS...Plan on slippery road conditions. Widespread blowing snow could significantly reduce visibility down to a 1/2 mile at times. The hazardous conditions could impact the Tuesday morning and evening commutes. Gusty winds could bring down tree branches.

PRECAUTIONARY/PREPAREDNESS ACTIONS...

Slow down and use caution while traveling. The latest road conditions can be obtained by calling 5 1 1.

Gusty Winds Tuesday November 24, 2025 5:27 PM

- Increasing northwest winds Tuesday, with gusts getting up around and over 35 to 55 mph, highest over south central SD.
- Strong winds will combine with falling snow in northern SD and west-central MN to produce blowing snow and reduced visibilities.
- High to Very High Grassland Fire Danger values possible in south central SD.



	Maximum Wind Gust Forecast (mph)									
	Tue				Wed					
	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am
Aberdeen	17	23	36	40	43	35	30	28	26	21
Britton	14	22	35	43	43	38	36	30	29	24
Clark	14	24	33	45	47	43	37	35	29	28
Eagle Butte	37	44	48	48	45	32	28	23	21	18
Ellendale	21	28	38	44	44	36	33	30	29	23
Eureka	22	30	38	45	46	36	35	30	26	22
Gettysburg	25	35	43	46	45	36	31	26	25	21
Kennebec	31	43	53	54	51	40	31	26	23	20
McIntosh	37	44	47	49	47	36	31	26	23	16
Milbank	9	15	23	36	45	45	43	38	33	28
Miller	21	35	45	49	48	36	33	31	24	23
Mobridge	24	35	41	43	41	33	30	25	23	18
Murdo	35	41	46	46	43	36	29	23	20	16
Pierre	30	39	43	45	44	36	29	23	17	15
Redfield	15	29	41	48	47	36	32	30	24	23
Sisseton	12	17	28	40	43	41	38	35	32	28
Watertown	12	20	29	40	45	43	39	36	32	29
Webster	15	21	32	43	45	40	38	35	32	28
Wheaton	10	16	20	38	43	44	39	37	33	28






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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Gusty winds will move into central and eastern SD overnight into Tuesday. These strong winds could have gust around and over 35-55 mph, highest over south central SD. Strong winds in areas where snow is falling could produce patchy to areas of blowing snow that will cause localized reduced visibilities. In south central SD, where there is less chance of precipitation falling, the winds could cause high to very high grassland fire danger index values.

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Winter Weather Advisory		Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thanksgiving Day
Tuesday	Tuesday Night			
				
100%	20%			
High: 34 °F ↓↓	Low: 16 °F	High: 25 °F	Low: 6 °F	High: 21 °F
Snow and Patchy Blowing Snow	Slight Chance Snow and Patchy Blowing Snow	Mostly Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny

Snow & Strong Winds Tuesday

November 24, 2025 4:12 PM

Light rain tonight to transition to snow Tuesday morning

Key Messages

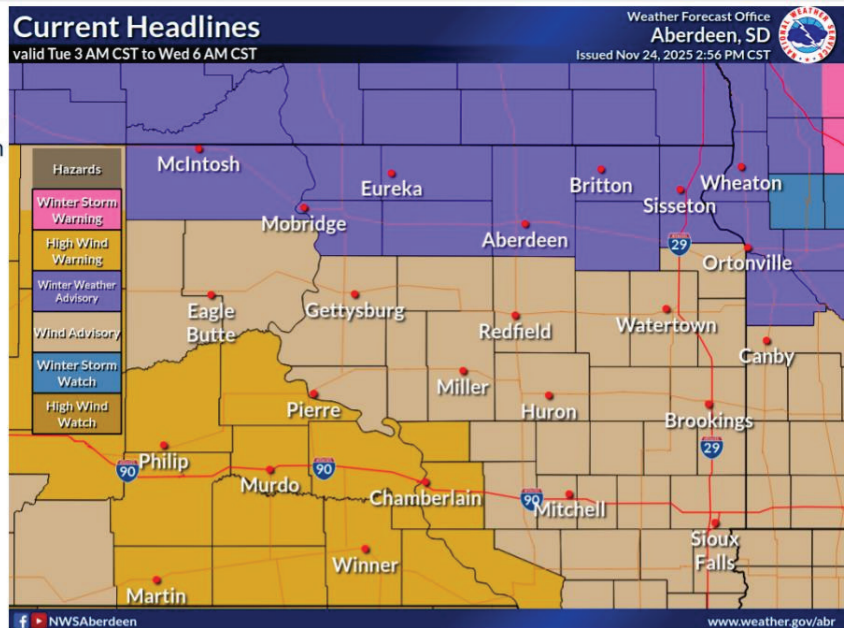
- **Accumulating snow in northern SD and west-central MN**
 - 50-90% chance of 1" of snow or more north and east of a line from McIntosh to Faulkton to Tulare to Brandt
- **Northwest gusts of 35 to 55 mph**
 - Will combine with falling snow in northern SD to produce patchy to areas of blowing snow that will reduce visibilities
- **Much colder through early December**

NEW What Has Changed

- A High Wind Warning for south central SD, a Wind Advisory for parts of central/northeast SD and a Winter Weather Advisory for north central/northeast SD and west central MN have been issued
- An increase in snowfall accumulation probabilities

Next Scheduled Update

- Tuesday Morning



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

A plethora of headlines are in effect for Tuesday covering wintry weather conditions and strong wind conditions. Accumulating snow will be possible for portions of north central and northeast SD and west central MN by the time this system winds down Tuesday evening. Strong northwest winds will lead to blowing snow and reduced visibility. High to very high grassland fire danger will be possible Tuesday for south central SD due to the strong winds, drier conditions and lowest chances for any precipitation.

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Rain Changing to Snow on Tuesday

November 24, 2025
4:47 PM

Light rain tonight to transition to snow Tuesday morning

- Rain will be moving into central SD this evening
- Cooling temperatures will change the rain to a rain/snow mix before transitioning to snow
 - Brief freezing rain possible during transition phase in central SD
- Snow chances continue through the day Tuesday before ending in the evening
 - Snow lingering over far northeastern SD and west central MN late Tuesday evening

	11/24	11/25								11/26	
	Mon 9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am
Aberdeen	25%	20%	85%	95%	85%	85%	30%	10%	10%	0%	0%
Britton	15%	40%	80%	95%	90%	95%	80%	40%	40%	0%	0%
Clark	10%	20%	55%	95%	65%	95%	90%	35%	35%	5%	5%
Eagle Butte	25%	70%	30%	45%	40%	20%	10%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Ellendale	35%	45%	90%	95%	90%	80%	25%	5%	5%	0%	0%
Eureka	50%	50%	95%	90%	85%	60%	15%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Gettysburg	20%	50%	90%	40%	70%	55%	25%	5%	5%	0%	0%
Kennebec	5%	10%	40%	5%	30%	35%	25%	0%	0%	0%	0%
McIntosh	60%	90%	70%	70%	60%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Milbank	10%	25%	35%	75%	95%	75%	85%	45%	45%	5%	5%
Miller	10%	10%	75%	55%	70%	85%	45%	10%	10%	0%	0%
Mobridge	40%	60%	80%	70%	70%	35%	15%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Murdo	5%	35%	35%	5%	30%	35%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Pierre	10%	30%	60%	5%	45%	40%	25%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Redfield	15%	10%	75%	85%	65%	90%	50%	15%	15%	0%	0%
Sisseton	10%	55%	65%	90%	95%	95%	95%	55%	55%	5%	5%
Watertown	10%	40%	45%	95%	85%	70%	95%	45%	45%	5%	5%
Webster	10%	40%	70%	95%	80%	90%	90%	45%	45%	5%	5%
Wheaton	10%	30%	50%	85%	95%	90%	90%	60%	60%	5%	5%

- Rain + - Wintry Mix + - Snow +



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Rain will be moving into central SD this evening and will transition to a rain/snow mix then snow Tuesday morning as cold air starts moving in. Snow chances will continue through Tuesday and decrease by the evening.



Expected Snowfall

November 24, 2025
4:50 PM

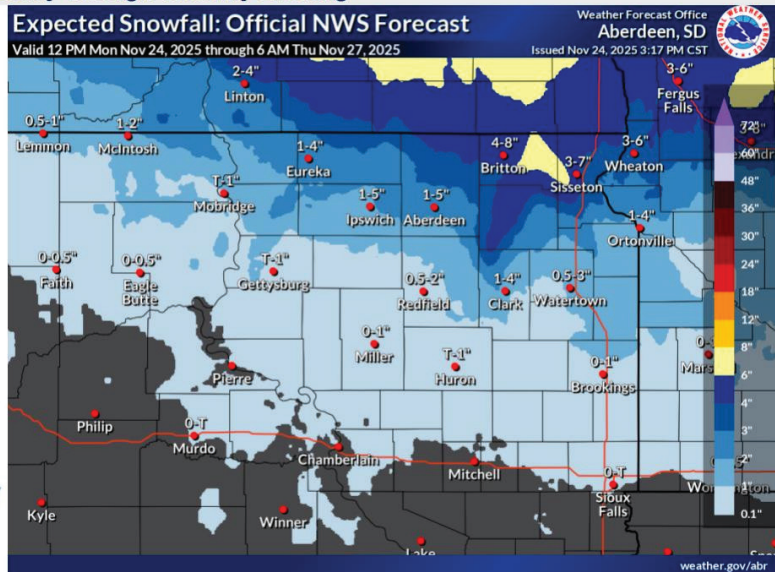
Snowfall forecast from Midnight Tuesday through Tuesday Evening

Snowfall Amounts

- The graphic to the right shows the current snowfall forecast
- **Uncertainty remains on the exact snowfall amounts**, thus the larger snowfall ranges

Impacts

- Warmer road and ground temperatures initially on Tuesday may lead to melting of the snow on Tuesday morning and wet roads
- As temperatures fall through the afternoon and snow increases in intensity in northeast SD, **roads may become snow covered and slippery**



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 49 °F at 3:05 PM

Low Temp: 29 °F at 6:44 AM

Wind: 14 mph at 9:42 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 64 in 1960

Record Low: -22 in 1996

Average High: 38

Average Low: 15

Average Precip in Nov.: 0.64

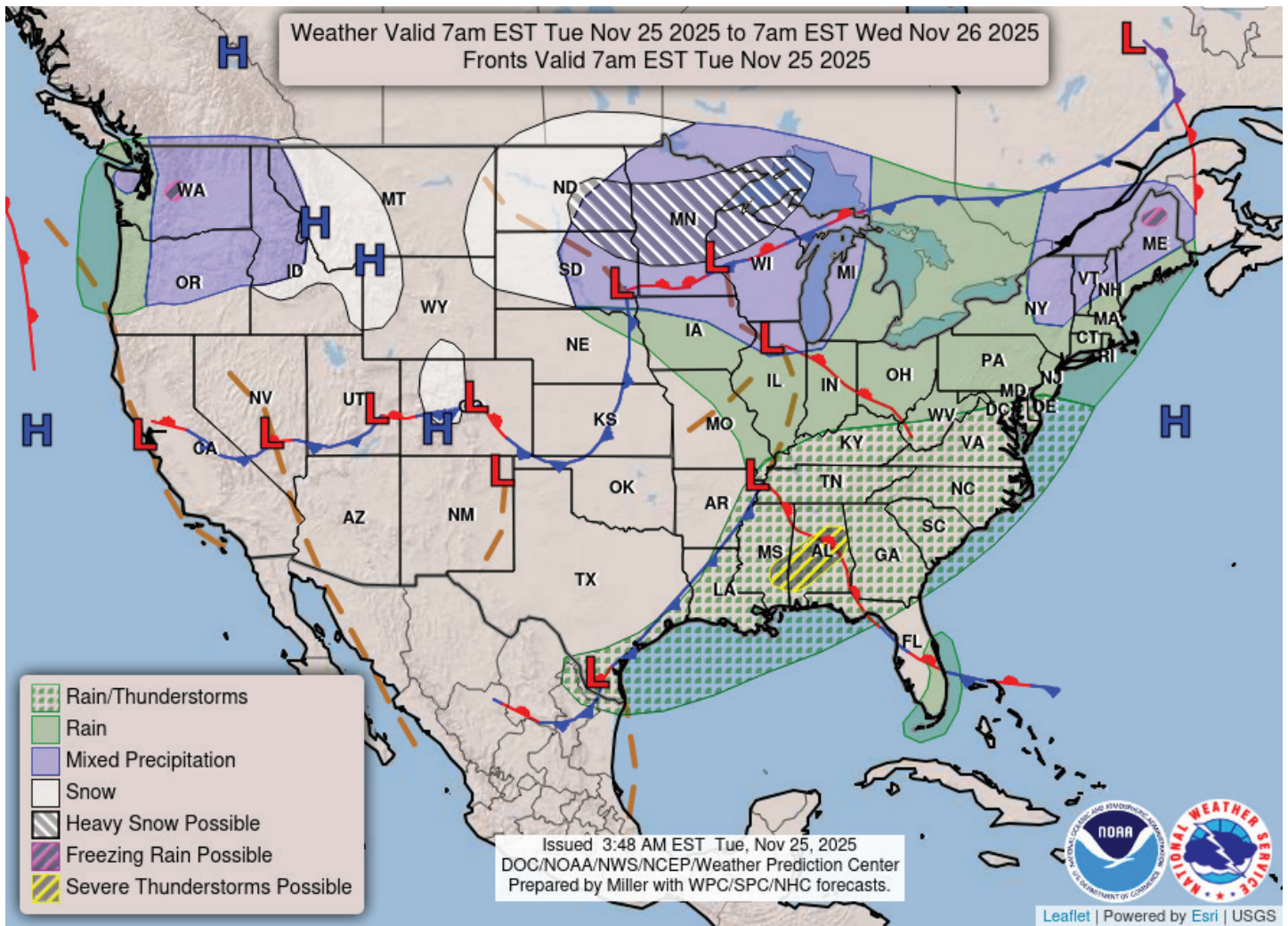
Precip to date in Oct.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 21.11

Precip Year to Date: 23.51

Sunset Tonight: 4:54 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:46 am



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Today in Weather History

November 25, 1896: A major blizzard occurred throughout South Dakota, beginning on the 25th and continuing until the 27th. The storm began in most locations as rain and sleet, which turned to snow, accompanied by strong northerly winds. The 26th was the peak of the storm, and the heaviest snow and strongest wind occurred throughout the north, northeast, west and southwest portions of the state. In eastern and southeastern South Dakota, sleet was extraordinarily heavy on the 26th. There were many reports received of large quantities of trees stripped of smaller branches and limbs due to the weight of the sleet. Across the state, telegraph lines were flattened in all directions, and the poles were broken off in many places. Although there was very little loss of livestock in areas with available shelter, there were heavy individual losses on the ranges of South Dakota. Several people also perished on the ranges west of the Missouri River when they became lost in the storm without livestock. Reports of snowfall totals from the storm are very limited but included 17 inches at Aberdeen and 12 inches at Mellette. This blizzard was the most prominent individual feature in a November that was overall frigid, with a state mean temperature of 16.5 degrees, which was 17.2 degrees below normal at the time. The month still stands as the coldest November on record in Aberdeen, with an average temperature nearly 7 degrees Fahrenheit colder than the next coldest November (1985). The lowest reported temperature during the month was -29 F at Webster. Aberdeen recorded a low of -25 F on the 29th with a high temperature of -8 F that same day. The month currently stands as the snowiest November on record and second snowiest overall month on record for Aberdeen, with 32.8 inches, behind 38.5 inches recorded in February 1915.

November 25, 1703: The greatest windstorm ever recorded in the southern part of Great Britain reaches its peak intensity which it maintains through November 27. Winds gust up to 120 mph, and 9,000 people perish in the mighty gale, most of them sailors of the British fleet. The storm continued through December 2nd. It was reported that 4,000 oaks died in the New Forest and an attempt to count the toll of trees in Kent gave up at 17,000. At sea, the Eddystone Lighthouse was washed away, killing six people. Daniel Defoe wrote a journal called *The Storm* (1704) about this event. The storm has been called the first substantial work of modern journalism.

1950: Called the "storm of the century" this storm impacted the eastern part of the US, killing hundreds and causing millions of dollars in damages. New York City recorded a 94 mph wind gust and Bear Mountain, just north of the city recorded a 140 mph gust. Record low temperatures were reported on the southern end of this storm in Tennessee and North Carolina. This storm was unique as Pittsburgh saw 30 inches of snow, while Buffalo saw 50 degrees with 50 mph wind gusts.

1970 - The temperature at Tallahassee, FL, dipped to 13 degrees, following a high of 40 degrees the previous day. The mercury then reached 67 degrees on the 26th, and highs were in the 70s the rest of the month. (The Weather Channel)

1983 - The Great Thanksgiving Weekend Blizzard hit Denver, CO. The storm produced 21.5 inches of snow in 37 hours, closing Stapleton Airport for 24 hours. The snow and wind closed interstate highways around Denver. Visibility at Limon CO was down to zero for 24 hours. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - An early morning thunderstorm in southeastern Texas produced high winds which rolled a mobile home east of Bay City killing two of the four occupants. Thunderstorms produced locally heavy rains in central and eastern Texas, with nine inches reported at Huntsville, and 8.5 inches at Wimberly. Snow fell across northern and central Lower Michigan, with totals ranging up to nine inches at Cadillac. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather in Arkansas, eastern Oklahoma and northwest Texas during the day and into the night. Thunderstorms in Texas produced softball size hail at Alba, and wind gusts to 80 mph at Krum. Hail and high winds caused nearly five million dollars damage at Kaufman TX, and strong downburst winds derailed twenty-eight freight cars at Fruitvale TX. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)



Daily Devotion

The Value of Discernment

To guard against deception, we need to know Scripture and apply it in daily life.

Proverbs 2:1-11: Good friend, take to heart what I'm telling you; collect my counsels and guard them with your life. Tune your ears to the world of Wisdom; set your heart on a life of Understanding. That's right—if you make Insight your priority, and won't take no for an answer, Searching for it like a prospector panning for gold, like an adventurer on a treasure hunt, Believe me, before you know it Fear-of-GOD will be yours; you'll have come upon the Knowledge of God. And here's why: GOD gives out Wisdom free, is plainspoken in Knowledge and Understanding. He's a rich mine of Common Sense for those who live well, a personal bodyguard to the candid and sincere. He keeps his eye on all who live honestly, and pays special attention to his loyally committed ones. So now you can pick out what's true and fair, find all the good trails! Lady Wisdom will be your close friend, and Brother Knowledge your pleasant companion. Good Sense will scout ahead for danger, Insight will keep an eye out for you. They'll keep you from making wrong turns, or following the bad directions Of those who are lost themselves and can't tell a trail from a tumbleweed, These losers who make a game of evil and throw parties to celebrate perversity, Traveling paths that go nowhere, wandering in a maze of detours and dead ends.

If you made a list of the things you want most in life, would a discerning spirit be one of them? Let's take a moment to define and discuss this wonderful godly attribute that's available to believers.

Discernment is the ability to make sound judgments or to comprehend something obscure. One area where this is essential involves distinguishing something that is good from something that is best. God has a perfect plan for each of us; however, there are a multitude of good options before us. For instance, suppose you're offered two different jobs. They both look promising, but only one of them is God's best for you. Do you know how to determine His will in a situation like that?

Our most basic need for discernment involves being able to understand what God is saying to us (Proverbs 3:5-6). When you're faced with a decision, how do you know if you're hearing from the Lord or simply listening to your own desires or reasoning?

The time to develop discernment is now. Don't wait until a critical decision faces you. Begin today to fill your mind with God's Word so you can think His thoughts and understand His ways. Spend time with Him in intimate fellowship. The more you know Him, the better you can discern His voice.

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

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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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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 11.21.25

3 4 19 31 63 9

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$70,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 48 Mins 18 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

11.24.25

1 5 8 19 50 6

All Star Bonus: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$7,900,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 3 Mins 17 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

11.24.25

3 11 18 24 38 2

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 18 Mins 17 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

11.22.25

3 6 16 22 24

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$97,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 18 Mins 18 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

11.24.25

4 7 48 65 68 24

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 47 Mins 18 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

11.24.25

8 16 26 30 58 14

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$681,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 47 Mins 18 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Russian attacks kill at least 6 in Ukraine as talks on peace plan continue

By ISOBEL KOSHIW and KONSTANTIN TOROPIN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia launched a wave of attacks on Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, overnight, with at least six people killed in strikes that hit city buildings and energy infrastructure. A Ukrainian attack on southern Russia killed three people and damaged homes, authorities said.

The attacks came during a renewed U.S. push to end the war that has raged for nearly four years and talks about a U.S. peace plan. Army Secretary Dan Driscoll met with Russian officials for several hours in Abu Dhabi on Tuesday, a U.S. official told The Associated Press.

Driscoll, who became part of the U.S. negotiating team less than two weeks ago, is heading up the latest phase of talks involving the terms of a possible peace settlement with Russia.

The U.S. official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive negotiations, declined to give details on how long the negotiations would last or what topics were being discussed, but noted that the Ukrainians were aware of the meeting and all sides have indicated they wanted to reach a deal to halt the fighting as quickly as possible.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said late Monday that "the list of necessary steps to end the war can become doable" after progress was made in Sunday's talks between U.S. and Ukrainian delegates in Geneva. He said he planned to discuss "sensitive" outstanding issues with President Donald Trump.

Rustem Umerov, a senior adviser to Zelenskyy, wrote on social platform X on Tuesday that the Ukrainian leader hoped to finalize a deal with Trump "at the earliest suitable date in November."

Russian officials have been reserved in their comments on the peace plan.

European leaders have cautioned that the road to peace will be long.

'Glass rained down'

Russia fired 22 missiles of various types and over 460 drones at Ukraine overnight, Zelenskyy wrote on Telegram. The strikes knocked out water, electricity and heat in parts of Kyiv. Video footage posted to Telegram showed a large fire spreading in a nine-story residential building in Kyiv's eastern Dniproviskyi district.

Mayor Vitalii Klitschko said two people were killed and five injured in Dniproviskyi and another residential building in the central Pecherskyi district was badly damaged.

Liubov Petrivna, a 90-year-old resident of a damaged building in the Dniproviskyi district, told the AP that "absolutely everything" in her apartment was shattered by the strike and "glass rained down" on her.

Petrivna said she didn't believe in the peace plan now under discussion: "No one will ever do anything about it. Putin won't stop until he finishes us off."

In a subsequent attack wave, four people were killed and three were injured in a strike on a nonresidential building in Kyiv's western Sviatoshynyi district, according to the head of Kyiv city administration, Tymur Tkachenko.

Neighboring Romania and Moldova reported that a handful of drones violated their airspace.

Strikes hit energy infrastructure

Ukraine's energy ministry said energy infrastructure had been hit, without giving details. Ukraine's emergency services said six people, including two children, were injured in a Russian attack on energy and port infrastructure in the Odesa region.

A Ukrainian drone attack on Russia's southern Rostov region overnight killed three people and injured eight others in the city of Taganrog not far from the border in Ukraine, Gov. Yuri Slyusar said in an online statement.

The attack damaged private houses and multistory residential blocks, unspecified social facilities, a warehouse and a paint shop, Slyusar said.

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Russian air defenses destroyed 249 Ukrainian drones overnight above various Russian regions and the occupied Crimea, the Russian Defense Ministry said Tuesday, noting that 116 of the drones were shot down over the Black Sea.

It was the fourth-largest Ukrainian drone attack on Russia, according to an AP tally.

Peace efforts going in 'right direction'

The latest attacks followed peace-plan talks in Switzerland between U.S. and Ukraine representatives. Oleksandr Bevez, a delegate from the Ukrainian side, told the AP that the talks had been "very constructive" and the two sides were able to discuss most points.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said Tuesday that Moscow has not received the updated U.S. peace plan that emerged from that meeting.

French President Emmanuel Macron said Tuesday that the U.S. plan for Ukraine "goes in the right direction" but also cautioned it must not be "a capitulation" that enables Russia to later renew hostilities.

Any peace deal must include robust security guarantees for Ukraine and, more widely, for Europe, Macron said in an interview with broadcaster RTL, adding that the size of Ukraine's armed forces shouldn't be restricted so it can defend the country in peacetime.

Macron was speaking ahead of a video conference meeting on Tuesday of countries, led by France and the U.K., that could help police any ceasefire with Russia.

"We want peace, but we don't want a peace is that is, in fact, a capitulation. That is to say, it puts Ukraine in an impossible position that in the end gives Russia the freedom to keep going, to go further," Macron said.

"No one can replace the Ukrainians in saying which territorial concessions they are prepared to make," he added. "There's only one person who doesn't want peace: it's Russia."

Afghanistan says Pakistani airstrikes in east of the country have killed 10 people, mostly children

By ABDUL QA HAR AFGHAN and MUNIR AHMED Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Afghanistan's Taliban government on Tuesday accused Pakistan of launching overnight strikes in three eastern provinces, killing 10 civilians, including nine children, in a sign of worsening tensions between the two neighbors.

Zabihullah Mujahid, the chief spokesperson for the Afghan government, said on X that Pakistan "bombed" the home of a civilian in Khost province, killing nine children and a woman. He said additional strikes were carried out in the provinces of Kunar and Paktika, injuring four other people.

Mujahid described the attacks as "atrocities," and said the strikes were "a violation of Afghan territory." Afghanistan, he added in his post on X, "considers the use of its airspace and territory and defense of its people to be its legitimate right, and at the appropriate time, it will give the necessary response."

Rising tension

Pakistan's military and government did not immediately comment on the allegation, which comes more than a month after cross-border clashes erupted when the Afghan government claimed Pakistani drone strikes hit Kabul.

However, the ceasefire brokered by Qatar and Turkey between the two sides in October was still holding Tuesday despite the alleged overnight strikes by Pakistan deep inside Afghanistan. There was no immediate comment from Qatar and Turkey.

Iran in recent weeks has also offered to play a role in defusing tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Ali Larijani, the secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, said Tuesday on X that he met with Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar in Islamabad, a day after arriving on a previously scheduled visit. Dar's office was also expected to release a statement about the meeting.

In Khost, residents combed through the rubble of the destroyed home, retrieving belongings.

"You see the cruelty with your own eyes, that young children, a woman and nine children, were martyred," said Muhammad Iqbal, who said the dead were his cousin's family.

Local tribal leader Mer Adam Khan said the attack was carried out by a drone that was flying over the area at around midnight. "It is not known where it came from and by whom," he said, adding that the home that was destroyed was that of a local man, whom he identified as Shariat Khan.

"He has not interfered in any government. He lives a poor life here," the tribal leader said.

Recent attacks in Pakistan

The latest escalation follows a deadly attack a day earlier in Pakistan's northwestern city of Peshawar, where two suicide bombers and a gunman stormed the headquarters of the Federal Constabulary. Three officers were killed and 11 others were wounded in the Monday morning attack.

No group has claimed responsibility for the Peshawar attack, but suspicion quickly fell on the Pakistani Taliban, or Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan.

It is a separate group but closely allied with the Afghan Taliban, and many of its leaders are believed to be hiding in Afghanistan. Kabul in 2022 brokered a brief ceasefire between the TTP and Pakistan. However, the militant group ended the truce after accusing Pakistan of violating it.

Pakistan has intensified intelligence-based operations against militants in recent weeks.

On Tuesday, the military said security forces killed 22 militants during a raid on what it described as a hideout of "Indian-backed" fighters in Bannu, a district in Pakistan's northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province near the Afghan border.

In a statement, the army referred to the killed insurgents as Khawarij, a term the government and the military use for militants they allege are supported by Afghanistan and India. Kabul and New Delhi deny providing any support to such groups.

The statement said Pakistan "will continue at full pace to wipe out the menace of foreign-sponsored and supported terrorism from the country."

Pakistan has repeatedly urged Afghanistan's Taliban rulers to prevent TTP militants from using Afghan territory to launch attacks. Kabul denies the accusation, but relations further deteriorated after Afghanistan blamed Pakistan for the Oct. 9 drone strikes on its capital and threatened retaliation.

The clashes that followed killed dozens of soldiers, civilians and militants before the sides agreed to the Oct. 19 ceasefire.

Peace talks

Two subsequent rounds of talks in Istanbul failed to resolve the dispute, when Pakistan said Afghanistan had refused to provide a written guarantee that TTP fighters would not operate from Afghan soil.

The Afghan government insists it does not allow anyone to use its soil for attacks against any country, including Pakistan.

The lingering tensions have stalled bilateral trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan, with all border crossings between the two neighbors remaining shut since last month. It has also affected movement of people, as residents from both sides have been unable to travel to meet with relatives and friends since early October.

China launches Shenzhou 22 spacecraft to assist in return of 3 astronauts stranded on space station

BEIJING (AP) — China launched the Shenzhou 22 spacecraft on Tuesday to help bring back a team of astronauts after a damaged spacecraft left them temporarily stranded on China's space station.

The Shenzhou 22, which successfully docked at the Tiangong space station Tuesday, will be used sometime in 2026 by the three astronauts who arrived on Nov. 1.

Earlier this month, another group of Chinese astronauts from the Shenzhou 20 mission faced a nine-day delay in their return to Earth after their craft's window was damaged. They eventually returned using the Shenzhou 21 spacecraft, which had just carried the replacement crew to Tiangong.

While the three-person crew landed safely on Earth, three of their fellow astronauts on the replacement crew were temporarily left without a guaranteed way to return in case of an emergency.

The Shenzhou 20 spacecraft — the damaged one, which for now remains in space — will be brought

down to Earth later and assessed, according to state broadcaster CCTV. The space program determined it didn't meet safety standards for transporting the astronauts.

Chinese astronauts have been carrying out missions to the Tiangong space station in recent years as part of Beijing's rapidly progressing space program, initially building out the station module-by-module.

China developed Tiangong after the country was excluded from the International Space Station over U.S. national security concerns, since China's space program is controlled by its military.

Tiangong, which means "Heavenly Palace," hosted its first crew in 2021. It is smaller than the International Space Station, which has been operating for 25 years.

Thai woman found alive in coffin after being brought in for cremation

BANGKOK (AP) — A woman in Thailand shocked temple staff when she started moving in her coffin after being brought in for cremation.

Wat Rat Prakhong Tham, a Buddhist temple in the province of Nonthaburi on the outskirts of Bangkok, posted a video on its Facebook page, showing a woman lying in a white coffin in the back of a pickup truck, slightly moving her arms and head, leaving temple staff bewildered.

Pairat Soodthoop, the temple's general and financial affairs manager, told The Associated Press on Monday that the 65-year-old woman's brother drove her from the province of Phitsanulok to be cremated.

He said they heard a faint knock coming from the coffin.

"I was a bit surprised, so I asked them to open the coffin, and everyone was startled," he said. "I saw her opening her eyes slightly and knocking on the side of the coffin. She must have been knocking for quite some time."

According to Pairat, the brother said his sister had been bedridden for about two years, when her health deteriorated and she became unresponsive, appearing to stop breathing two days ago. The brother then placed her in a coffin and made the 500-kilometer (300-mile) journey to a hospital in Bangkok, to which the woman had previously expressed a wish to donate her organs.

The hospital refused to accept the brother's offer as he didn't have an official death certificate, Pairat said. His temple offers a free cremation service, which is why the brother approached them on Sunday, but was also refused due to the missing document.

The temple manager said that while he was explaining how to get a death certificate when they heard the knocking. They then assessed her and sent her to a nearby hospital.

The abbot said the temple would cover her medical expenses, according to Pairat.

US labels Maduro-tied Cartel de los Soles as a terror organization. It's not a cartel per se

By REGINA GARCIA CANO Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — President Donald Trump's administration has ramped up pressure on Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro by designating the Cartel de los Soles as a foreign terrorist organization. But the entity that the U.S. government alleges is led by Maduro is not a cartel per se.

The designation, published Monday in the Federal Register, is the latest measure in the Trump administration's escalating campaign to combat drug trafficking into the U.S. In previewing the step about a week ago, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio accused Cartel de los Soles, or Cartel of the Suns, of being "responsible for terrorist violence" in the Western Hemisphere.

The move comes as Trump evaluates whether to take military action against Venezuela, which he has not ruled out despite bringing up the possibility of talks with Maduro. Land strikes or other actions would be a major expansion of the monthslong operation that has included a massive military buildup in the Caribbean Sea and striking boats accused of trafficking drugs, killing more than 80 people.

Venezuelans began using the term Cartel de los Soles in the 1990s to refer to high-ranking military officers

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who had grown rich from drug-running. As corruption expanded nationwide, first under the late President Hugo Chávez and then under Maduro, its use loosely expanded to police and government officials as well as activities like illegal mining and fuel trafficking. The "suns" in the name refer to the epaulettes affixed to the uniforms of high-ranking military officers.

The umbrella term was elevated to a Maduro-led drug-trafficking organization in 2020, when the U.S. Justice Department in Trump's first term announced the indictment of Venezuela's leader and his inner circle on narcoterrorism and other charges.

"It is not a group," said Adam Isaacson, director for defense oversight at the Washington Office on Latin America organization. "It's not like a group that people would ever identify themselves as members. They don't have regular meetings. They don't have a hierarchy."

Trump's expansion of terror label to cartels

Maduro's government in a statement Monday categorically denied the existence of the cartel, describing the Trump administration's accusation as a "ridiculous fabrication" meant to "justify an illegitimate and illegal intervention against Venezuela."

Up until this year, the label of foreign terrorist organization had been reserved for groups like the Islamic State or al-Qaida that use violence for political ends. The Trump administration applied it in February to eight Latin American criminal organizations involved in drug trafficking, migrant smuggling and other activities.

The administration blames such designated groups for operating the boats it is striking but rarely identifies the organizations and has not provided any evidence. It says the attacks, which began off the coast of Venezuela and later expanded to the eastern Pacific Ocean, are meant to stop narcotics from flowing to American cities.

But many — including Maduro himself — see the military moves as an effort to end the ruling party's 26-year hold on power.

Since the arrival of U.S. military vessels and troops to the Caribbean months ago, Venezuela's U.S.-backed political opposition also has reignited its perennial promise of removing Maduro from office, fueling speculation over the purpose of what the Trump administration has called a counterdrug operation.

Trump, like his predecessor, does not recognize Maduro as Venezuela's leader.

Maduro is on his third term after ruling-party loyalists declared him the winner of last year's presidential election despite credible evidence that the opposition's candidate defeated him by a more than 2-to-1 margin. He and senior officials have been repeatedly accused of human rights violations against real and perceived government opponents, including in the aftermath of the July 2024 election.

Hegseth says designation offers 'new options'

U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said last week that the designation of Cartel de los Soles will provide a "whole bunch of new options to the United States" for dealing with Maduro. But Hegseth, speaking in an interview with conservative news outlet OAN, did not provide details on what those options are and declined to say whether the U.S. military planned to strike land targets inside Venezuela.

"So nothing is off the table, but nothing's automatically on the table," he said.

Trump administration officials have signaled that they find it difficult to see a situation in which Maduro remaining in power could be an acceptable endgame. But as Trump considers an array of military and non-military options, including covert action by the CIA, for next steps, there is strong belief inside the administration that Maduro's rule "is not sustainable," according to a senior administration official who was not authorized to comment publicly on the sensitive matter.

The official added that Trump has been keenly listening to his intelligence team, which has reported to him that chatter picked up inside Venezuela indicates growing anxiety from Maduro and other high-level Venezuelan officials as the U.S. strikes continue. Trump, the official said, is "very content and satisfied" for the moment with the strikes' impact.

All the while, pleas from Maduro and others close to the Venezuelan leader to speak directly to the administration, relayed through various intermediaries and channels, seem to be more frantic, the official said. But Trump has not sanctioned any intermediaries to speak to Maduro on behalf of the U.S. administration.

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Meanwhile, Gen. Dan Caine, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was visiting American troops Monday in Puerto Rico and on a Navy warship in the region.

Indictment alleges conspiracy to 'flood' US with drugs

The 2020 U.S. indictment accused Maduro, Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello and Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino López, among others, of conspiring with Colombian rebels and members of the Venezuelan military for several years "to flood the United States with cocaine" and use the drug trade as a "weapon against America." Colombia is the world's top cocaine producer.

Before laying down weapons as part of a 2016 peace deal, members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, regularly used the porous border region with Venezuela as a haven and hub for U.S.-bound cocaine shipments — often with the support or at least consent of Venezuelan security forces. Dissidents continued the work. Colombia's National Liberation Army guerrilla is also involved in the illegal trade.

Maduro has denied the charges. The U.S. Justice Department this year doubled to \$50 million the reward for information that leads to his arrest.

Maduro has insisted that the U.S. is building a false drug-trafficking narrative to try to force him out. He and other government officials have repeatedly cited a United Nations report that they say shows traffickers attempt to move only 5% of the cocaine produced in Colombia through Venezuela.

The U.S. Treasury Department imposed sanctions on the Cartel de los Soles in July, saying Maduro and his top allies had bent the power of the Venezuelan government, military and intelligence services to assist the cartel in trafficking narcotics to the U.S.

U.S. authorities also alleged Maduro's cartel gave material support to the Venezuelan gang Tren de Aragua and the Sinaloa cartel, both of which were among the organizations that the U.S. designated as foreign terror organizations in February.

Tyson's beef plant closure in Nebraska will impact a reliant town and ranchers nationwide

By JOSH FUNK AP Business Writer

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Tyson Foods' decision to close a beef plant that employs nearly one third of residents of Lexington, Nebraska, could devastate the small city and undermine the profits of ranchers nationwide.

Closing a single slaughterhouse might not seem significant, but the Lexington plant employs roughly 3,200 people in the city of 11,000 and has the capacity to slaughter some 5,000 head of cattle a day. Tyson also plans to cut one of the two shifts at a plant in Amarillo, Texas, and eliminate 1,700 jobs there. Together those two moves will reduce beef processing capacity nationwide by 7-9%.

Consumers may not see prices change much at the grocery store over the next six months because all the cattle that are now being prepared for slaughter will still be processed, potentially just at a different plant. But in the long run, beef prices may continue to climb even higher than the current record highs — caused by a variety of factors from drought to tariffs — unless American ranchers decide to raise more cattle, which they have little incentive to do.

An increase in beef imports from Brazil, like President Donald Trump encouraged last week by slashing tariffs on the South American country, may help insulate consumers while ranchers and feedlots struggle with high costs and falling prices.

Here's what we know about the impact of the plant closure and the changing tariffs:

A 'gut punch' to the community

Clay Patton, vice president of the Lexington-area Chamber of Commerce said Monday that Tyson's announcement Friday felt like a "gut punch" to the community in the Platte River Valley that serves as a key link in the agricultural production chain.

When it opened in 1990, the Lexington plant that Tyson later acquired revitalized and remade the formerly dwindling town by attracting thousands of immigrants to work there and nearly doubling the population.

When the plant closes in January, the ripple effects will be felt throughout the community, undermining

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many first-generation business owners and the investment in new housing, Patton said. Tyson said it will offer Lexington workers the chance to move to take open jobs at one of its other plants if they are willing to uproot their families for jobs hundreds of miles away.

"I'm hopeful that we can come through this and we'll actually become better on the other side of it," Patton said.

Elmer Armijo was struck by how established the community was when he moved to Lexington last summer to lead First United Methodist Church. He described solid job security, good schools and health care systems and urban development — all in doubt now.

"People are completely worried," Armijo said. "The economy in Lexington is based in Tyson."

Many local churches, Armijo's included, are already offering counseling, food pantries and gas vouchers for community members.

Cattle prices falling in response

The prospect of losing a major buyer for cattle and increasing imports from Brazil, which already accounted for 24% of the beef brought into the country this year, only adds to doubts about how profitable the U.S. cattle business might be over the next several years, making it less likely that American ranchers will commit to raising more animals.

"There's a just a lack of confidence in the industry right now. And producers are unwilling to make the investment to rebuild," said Bill Bullard, president of Ranchers-Cattlemen Action Legal Fund United Stockgrowers of America.

Boosting imports from Brazil has the potential to affect the market — much more than Trump's suggestion to increase imports from Argentina — since the country sends more beef to America than any other. But for steak lovers, the sky-high price of the cut isn't likely to be affected regardless, as most imports are lean trimmings that get mixed into ground beef.

Kansas State University agricultural economist Glynn Tonsor said it's hard to predict whether imports will continue to account for roughly 20% of the U.S. beef supply next year. He pointed out that Trump's tariffs have changed several times since they were announced in the spring and could quickly change again.

The only constant in the equation has been that consumers have continued to buy beef even as prices soar. Tonsor said on average Americans will consume 59 pounds (27 kilograms) of beef per person this year.

Tyson faces continued losses in the beef business

There has long been excess capacity in the meat business nationwide, meaning the nation's slaughterhouses could handle many more cattle than they are processing. That has only been made worse in recent years as the government has encouraged more smaller companies to open slaughterhouses to compete with Tyson and the other giants that dominate the beef business.

Tyson expects to lose more than \$600 million on beef production this year after already reporting \$720 million of red ink in beef over the past two years.

Tonsor said it was inevitable that at least one beef plant would close. Afterward, Tyson's remaining plants will be able to operate more efficiently at closer to full capacity.

Ernie Goss, an economist at Creighton University in Omaha, said the Lexington plant likely wasn't measuring up in the industry increasingly reliant on technological advancements that enhance productivity.

"It's very difficult to renovate or make the old plant fit the new world," said Goss, who completed an impact study for a new Sustainable Beef plant. The Lexington facility "just wasn't competitive right now in today's environment in terms of output per worker."

AP and Trump administration argue access case before federal appeals court; no ruling yet

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Associated Press and the Trump administration renewed their argument Monday over a president's ability to limit media access to journalists he disagrees with, resuming a courtroom dispute with potential First Amendment implications that began last winter when the president announced

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that he had renamed the Gulf of Mexico.

President Donald Trump restricted the AP's access to events in smaller spaces like the Oval Office and Air Force One, leading the news outlet to sue. A lower federal court ruled that Trump improperly retaliated against the outlet because it did not follow and refer to the body of water as the Gulf of America.

The U.S. District Court of Appeals in Washington prevented the ruling from taking effect — effectively leaving it up to the White House to determine the AP's access. A three-judge panel from that court, two of them Trump appointees who voted against AP as part of a separate appellate panel last spring, heard arguments Monday on an appeal of the lower court's ruling.

No immediate ruling was issued.

A fundamental disagreement about the rules of access

The administration says it is up to the White House to determine the makeup of "pools" that cover the president in places where space is limited. And he can reward or punish reporters with access in these cases in the same way he does in granting interviews, Trump's team argued.

The AP says that if journalists are invited to cover an event on a pool basis — such as last week when the president had meetings in the Oval Office with Saudi Arabia's crown prince and New York City Mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani — it cannot discriminate on the basis of a news organization's freedom of speech.

"The First Amendment does not stop at the Oval Office door," said Charles Tobin, the attorney representing the AP.

Since the dispute began, the White House has given AP writers sporadic access to limited-space events at the White House. AP photographers have received much more frequent access. Tobin argued the White House has hurt the AP's business with its new policy; for years, AP journalists had been virtually always included in these pool events.

But in its brief supporting its own position, the administration said that "to the extent that the AP built a business model that depended on the assumption that it would maintain this favored-nation status in perpetuity, that is hardly the government's fault."

The AP reports and produces for thousands of news outlets and other organizations around the world.

Tobin made his argument before three judges who illustrated that the AP faces an uphill battle in this fight, despite the lower court ruling. Two of them, Gregory Katsas and Neomi Rao, are Trump appointees who voted against the AP as part of a separate appellate panel this past spring. And they expressed skepticism Monday about how a rule could be put in place that satisfies the outlet's concerns.

"You would eventually need an injunction against the president for this to work, don't you," Rao asked him. It's extremely rare for a judge to issue an injunction against a president; they generally act against people who work for the chief executive.

"How would we decide what's a 'pool' event and an individual journalist's event?" Rao asked.

Yaakov Roth, the principal deputy assistant attorney general arguing for the Trump administration, also wondered about rules put in place limiting a president's ability to invite people to see him at the White House. "Nobody is going to come up here and say that the president has to invite equal numbers of Republicans and Democrats to the White House Christmas party," he said.

Roth was questioned by the third judge on the panel, Robert Wilkins, who asked if the administration could bar a group of citizens from Kansas who had obtained tickets to tour the White House if a Trump appointee discovered one of them had posted something on social media critical of the president.

"Woe to the public," said Wilkins, who was appointed by former President Barack Obama.

Making a case that press freedom transcends the press

Julie Pace, AP's executive editor, wrote in an op-ed piece Monday morning that the question of access is not just about AP; it's about people's access to the government that works for them.

"When we talk about press freedom, we are really talking about your freedom. Reporters ask questions, photographers take pictures, and video journalists record history on your behalf to ensure that you are informed about the things you don't have the time to unearth, watch or learn about for yourself," Pace wrote.

"Letting the government control which journalists can cover the highest office in the land and setting

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rules about what those journalists can say or write is a direct attempt to undercut the First Amendment," Pace wrote. "It should worry all of us."

Nearly four dozen press organizations, and news outlets from ProPublica to Fox News Channel, along with The New York Times and The Washington Post, filed a brief in support of the AP.

The AP's decision on the Gulf of Mexico is significant because it is included in its influential Stylebook, which sets guidance for consistency on usage of phrases that is consulted by journalists around the world.

AP style recommends also acknowledging Trump's renaming of the Gulf. The president said that AP's access would remain restricted until it changed its style.

Somewhat ironically, the issue of naming the Gulf of Mexico has faded. A study by the Nieman Lab last month found that in journalism, use of the Gulf of America has largely been confined to conservative outlets and trade publications that deal frequently with government regulation.

It's a bird! It's a plane! It's a rare Superman comic book! And it fetched \$9.12M!

By JACK BROOK Associated Press/Report for America

A copy of the first Superman issue, unearthed by three brothers cleaning out their late mother's attic, netted \$9.12 million this month at a Texas auction house which says it is the most expensive comic book ever sold.

The brothers discovered the comic book in a cardboard box beneath layers of brittle newspapers, dust and cobwebs in their deceased mother's San Francisco home last year, alongside a handful of other rare comics that she and her sibling had collected on the cusp of World War II.

She had told her children she had a valuable comic book collection hidden away, but they had never seen it until they put her house up for sale and decided to comb through her belongings for heirlooms, said Lon Allen, vice president of comics at Heritage Auctions. The brothers uncovered the box of comics and sent a message to the auction company, leading Allen to fly out to San Francisco earlier this year to inspect their copy of "Superman No. 1" and show it to other experts for appraisal.

"It was just in an attic, sitting in a box, could have easily been thrown away, could've easily been destroyed in a thousand different ways," Allen said. "A lot of people got excited because it's just every factor in collecting that you could possibly want all rolled into one."

The "Superman No. 1" comic, released in 1939 by Detective Comics Inc., is one of a small number of copies known to be in existence and is in excellent condition. The Man of Steel was the first superhero to enter pop culture, helping boost the copy's value among collectors, alongside its improbable backstory, Allen said.

The previous record for the world's most expensive comic book had been set last year, when an "Action Comics No. 1" — which first introduced Superman to the world as part of an anthology — sold for \$6 million. In 2022, another Superman No. 1 sold for \$5.3 million.

A small, in-house advertisement in the comic book helped experts identify it as originating from the first edition of 500,000 Superman No. 1 copies ever printed. Allen estimates there are fewer than 500 in existence today.

The copy was not given any special protection, but the cool Northern California climate helped preserve it, leaving it with a firm spine, vibrant colors and crisp corners, according to a statement from Dallas-based Heritage Auctions. The copy was rated a 9.0 out of 10 by comics grading company CGC, meaning it had only the slightest signs of wear and aging.

The three brothers, in their 50s and 60s, did not wish to be identified due to the windfall involved nor did the buyer of the comic book, according to the auction house.

"This isn't simply a story about old paper and ink," one brother said in a statement released by the auction house. "This was never just about a collectible. This is a testament to memory, family and the unexpected ways the past finds its way back to us."

Judge dismisses Comey, James indictments after finding that prosecutor was illegally appointed

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal judge on Monday dismissed the criminal cases against former FBI Director James Comey and New York Attorney General Letitia James, concluding that the prosecutor who brought the charges at President Donald Trump's urging was illegally appointed by the Justice Department.

The rulings from U.S. District Judge Cameron McGowan Currie halt at least for now a pair of prosecutions that had targeted two of the president's most high-profile political opponents and amount to a sharp rebuke of the Trump administration's legal maneuvering to install an inexperienced and loyalist prosecutor willing to file the cases.

The orders do not concern the substance of the allegations against Comey or James but instead deal with the unconventional manner in which the prosecutor, Lindsey Halligan, was named to her position as interim U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia. Defense lawyers said the Trump administration had no legal authority to make the appointment. In a pair of similar rulings, Currie agreed and said the invalid appointment required the dismissal of the cases.

"All actions flowing from Ms. Halligan's defective appointment," including securing and signing the indictments, "were unlawful exercises of executive power and are hereby set aside," she wrote.

A White House spokeswoman said the rulings will "not be the final word on the matter," and Attorney General Pam Bondi vowed at an unrelated news conference that the Justice Department would pursue an "immediate appeal." Prosecutors may also try to refile the charges, a possibility left open by the judge's orders.

Indictments had been subject to multiple challenges

The challenges to Halligan's appointment are just one facet of a multiprong assault on the indictments by Comey and James, whose multiple other efforts to dismiss the cases remain unresolved.

Both have separately asserted that the prosecutions were vindictive and emblematic of a weaponized Justice Department. Comey's lawyers last week seized on a judge's findings of a constellation of grand jury irregularities and missteps by Halligan and James likewise has cited "outrageous government conduct" preceding her indictment.

"I am grateful that the court ended the case against me, which was a prosecution based on malevolence and incompetence and a reflection of what the Justice Department has become under Donald Trump, which is heartbreaking," Comey, who has pleaded not guilty to charges of making a false statement and obstructing Congress, said in a video statement.

In a separate statement, James, a Democrat who has pleaded not guilty to mortgage fraud allegations, said, "I am heartened by today's victory and grateful for the prayers and support I have received from around the country." She said she remained "fearless in the face of these baseless charges as I continue fighting for New Yorkers every single day."

Halligan's appointment

At issue in Currie's rulings is the mechanism the Trump administration employed to appoint Halligan, a former White House aide with no prior prosecutorial experience, to lead one of the Justice Department's most elite and important offices.

Halligan was named as a replacement for Erik Siebert, a veteran prosecutor in the office and interim U.S. attorney who resigned in September amid Trump administration pressure to file charges against both Comey and James. He stepped aside after Trump told reporters he wanted Siebert "out."

The following night, Trump said he would be nominating Halligan to the role of interim U.S. attorney and publicly implored Bondi to take action against his political opponents, saying in a Truth Social post that, "We can't delay any longer, it's killing our reputation and credibility" and "JUSTICE MUST BE SERVED, NOW!!!"

Comey was indicted three days after Halligan was sworn in by Bondi, and James was charged two weeks after that.

Attorneys general do have the authority to name an interim U.S. attorney who can serve for 120 days.

But lawyers for Comey and James argued that once that period expires, as it did in Siebert's case, the law gives federal judges in the district the exclusive authority to appoint a prosecutor to serve until the vacancy is filled. By making successive interim U.S. appointments on its own, defense lawyers said, the Justice Department did an end-run around well-established law.

"The 120-day clock began running with Mr. Siebert's appointment on January 21, 2025. When that clock expired on May 21, 2025, so too did the Attorney General's appointment authority," Currie wrote. "Consequently, I conclude that the Attorney General's attempt to install Ms. Halligan as Interim U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia was invalid and that Ms. Halligan has been unlawfully serving in that role since September 22, 2025."

The Justice Department had defended Halligan's appointment but revealed last month that it also given Halligan a separate position of "Special Attorney," presumably as a way to protect the indictments from the possibility of collapse. But Currie said such a retroactive designation could not save the cases.

"The implications of a contrary conclusion are extraordinary," the judge wrote. "It would mean the Government could send any private citizen off the street — attorney or not — into the grand jury room to secure an indictment so long as the Attorney General gives her approval after the fact. That cannot be the law."

Though the defendants had asked for the cases to be dismissed with prejudice, meaning the Justice Department would be barred from bringing them again, Currie instead dismissed them without prejudice — leaving open the possibility that prosecutors could try to file the charges again.

Comey was indicted just days before the five-year statute of limitations in his case expired, which could complicate any effort to refile the case. One of his lawyers, Patrick Fitzgerald, said in a statement that Currie's decision "further indicates that because the indictment is void, the statute of limitations has run and there can be no further indictment."

Judges have separately held that several other interim U.S. attorneys — in New Jersey, Los Angeles and Nevada — have served in their positions unlawfully but have also permitted cases brought by their offices to proceed. Lawyers for Comey and James had argued that Currie's rulings needed to go even further because Halligan was apparently the only prosecutor who presented evidence to the grand juries.

Longtime foes of the president

Comey has for years been one of Trump's chief antagonists. Appointed FBI director in 2013 by President Barack Obama, Comey at the time of Trump's 2016 election was overseeing an investigation into whether the Republican's presidential campaign had conspired with Russia to sway the outcome of the race. Furious over that investigation, Trump fired Comey in May 2017.

James has also been a frequent target of Trump's ire, especially since winning a staggering judgment against him and the Trump Organization in a lawsuit alleging he defrauded banks by overstating the value of his real estate holdings on financial statements. An appeals court overturned the fine, which had ballooned to more than \$500 million with interest, but upheld a lower court's finding that Trump had committed fraud.

Trump administration plans to review refugees admitted under Biden, memo obtained by The AP says

By REBECCA SANTANA and ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration plans a review of all refugees admitted to the U.S. during the Biden administration, according to a memo obtained Monday by The Associated Press, in the latest blow against a program that has for decades welcomed people fleeing war and persecution into the country.

The review is likely to sow confusion and fear among the nearly 200,000 refugees who came to the United States during that period. It is likely to face legal challenges from advocates, some of whom said the move was part of the administration's "cold-hearted treatment" of people trying to build new lives in the U.S.

The memo, signed by the director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Joseph Edlow, and dated Friday, said that during the Biden years "expediency" and "quantity" were prioritized over "detailed

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screening and vetting." The memo said that warranted a comprehensive review and "re-interview of all refugees admitted from January 20, 2021, to February 20, 2025."

The memo indicated that there will be a list of people to re-interview within three months.

Advocates of the refugee program say that refugees are generally some of the most vetted of all people coming to the United States and that they often wait years to be able to come.

The memo also immediately suspended green card approvals for refugees who came to the U.S. during the stated time period.

If the agency determines that a person shouldn't have qualified for entry as a refugee, the person "has no right to appeal," according to the memo, although if they are put in removal proceedings and sent to immigration court, they can then plead their case there. The memo also stated that even those who have already received their green card would be reviewed.

"USCIS is ready to uphold the law and ensure the refugee program is not abused," Edlow wrote.

People admitted to the U.S. as refugees are required to apply for a green card one year after they arrive in the country and usually five years after that can apply for citizenship.

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, the Department of Homeland Security and the White House did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The moves described in the memo are the latest to take aim at the refugee program, which the administration suspended earlier this year and later set a limit for entries to 7,500 mostly white South Africans — a historic low of refugees to be admitted to the U.S. since the program's inception in 1980. The Trump administration more broadly has ramped up immigration enforcement as part of its promise to increase deportations of illegal immigrants.

The Biden administration admitted 185,640 refugees from October 2021 through September 2024. Refugee admissions topped 100,000 last year, with the largest numbers coming from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Afghanistan, Venezuela and Syria.

Refugee advocates slammed news of the review, saying that it will traumatize people who have already gone through extensive vetting to make it to the U.S. in the first place.

"This plan is shockingly ill-conceived," said Naomi Steinberg, vice president of U.S. policy and advocacy at HIAS, a refugee resettlement agency. "This is a new low in the administration's consistently cold-hearted treatment of people who are already building new lives and enriching the communities where they have made their homes."

USCIS expects to have a priority list for re-interviews within 90 days, Edlow wrote. His language points to a rigorous revisiting of why refugee status was granted in the first place.

"Testimony will include, but is not limited to, the circumstances establishing past persecution or a well-founded fear for principal refugees, the persecutor bar, and any other potential inadmissibilities," he wrote.

Sharif Aly, President of the International Refugee Assistance Project, an advocacy group, criticized the administration's actions in a statement late Monday, saying that refugees are "already the most highly vetted immigrants in the United States."

"Besides the enormous cruelty of this undertaking, it would also be a tremendous waste of government resources to review and re-interview 200,000 people who have been living peacefully in our communities for years," Aly said.

IRAP is currently part of a lawsuit seeking to overturn the administration's suspension of refugee admissions.

A guide to Thanksgiving travel after the government shutdown

By RIO YAMAT AP Airlines and Travel Writer

The turbulence caused by the longest U.S. government shutdown may still be fresh on the minds of travelers this Thanksgiving, but experts say preparing for the usual holiday crush of winter weather, heavy traffic and crowded airports can help ease the jitters.

"I think the shutdown at this point is history for air travel. The airlines understand this time of year so

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well. They know exactly what they need to do," said Sheldon H. Jacobson, an airport and airlines operations expert. "The real challenge is making sure travelers can help themselves."

Here's a guide to navigating the busiest travel week of the year:

How busy could it be?

Travel forecasts point to packed airports, roads and trains.

A week after lifting the unprecedented flight restrictions it placed on commercial airlines during the shut-down, the Federal Aviation Administration is preparing for its busiest Thanksgiving in 15 years, with more than 360,000 flights scheduled between Monday and next Tuesday. That's more than 17.8 million people who will be screened at airports, according to the Transportation Security Administration.

Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy said Monday at a news conference that air traffic controller staffing levels have stabilized in time for what he says will be the busiest Thanksgiving on record for travel, while the head of the FAA reassured passengers that they can "fly with confidence" this week.

AAA projects 1.3 million more travelers will be on the roads than last year, pushing the total number of people traveling by car to at least 73 million.

Winter weather

You can't control the weather, but you can control how prepared you are if a storm hits. If your flight is canceled or delayed, will you drive instead or postpone or cancel your trip? Knowing your options ahead of time can reduce stress if a storm leaves you stranded.

The Weather Channel offers a Thanksgiving weekly forecast highlighting major airports and highways that could be affected by bad weather — including snow, ice and rain — along with a free online tool in the Weather Channel app that shows how or if your travel route might be impacted.

Forecasters warned of flooding rain and the possibility of severe thunderstorms Monday from Texas to Arkansas and Louisiana into Mississippi. By Monday evening, more than 1,000 flights into and out of Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport were delayed and over 100 canceled, according to the flight-tracking site FlightAware.

On Tuesday, the FAA's busiest day with more than 52,000 flights scheduled, forecasters say rain is expected in the Pacific Northwest and in much of the eastern U.S. Airports in Atlanta, Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, Seattle and Washington, D.C. could be impacted, according to the Weather Channel. Another winter storm in the central U.S. could also take shape late Friday into Saturday.

"The details will come into better focus over the next few days, but anyone traveling home after Thanksgiving should check in on the evolving forecast and be ready for changing conditions," said Matt Sitkowski, science editor-in-chief at the Weather Channel.

What to pack (and what to skip)

Jacobson, whose research contributed to the design of TSA PreCheck, recommends starting your packing by unpacking.

Check every pocket in case TSA-restricted items, like full-sized bottles, were left behind from a previous trip. This simple scan can help you get through security faster, especially when airports are crowded.

If you're traveling with gifts, Jacobson suggests wrapping them at your destination because TSA agents may need to open them.

When deciding which clothes and shoes to pack, James Belanger, vice president of meteorology at the Weather Company, said to check the "feels like" temperature for a better sense of the weather, especially for those not used to the cold.

And don't forget a REAL ID is required to fly within the U.S., or bring another accepted form of ID, like a passport or military ID.

People with iPhones can now also add their U.S. passport details to Apple Wallet, which can be scanned at participating airports if travelers don't have a REAL ID. More than a dozen states already accept some form of a mobile ID at airport checkpoints, and travelers can go to the TSA website for more details.

Road trip ready

Whether driving is your top choice or backup plan, AAA spokesperson Aixa Diaz suggests checking your

tires, car battery and fluids, then hitting the road with a full tank of gas as early as possible to avoid traffic. Last year, AAA said, it responded to nearly 600,000 emergency roadside assistance calls during the Thanksgiving travel period to help drivers stranded by dead batteries, flat tires and empty tanks.

According to an analysis by Google Maps:

— Traffic on Wednesday is expected to be 14% heavier than usual between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., with peak traffic from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m.

— On Thanksgiving Day, the roads will be busiest between noon and 3 p.m.

— When it's time to head home, avoid driving from 12 to 3 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday, when traffic is heaviest.

The best passenger

"...is an informed passenger," Jacobson likes to say.

Download your airline's app to track your flight status, and check it regularly as your travel date approaches. That way, if your flight is canceled the day before, you can quickly look for alternatives.

Driving or flying, leave earlier than you think you need to. Knowing you won't have to rush to your destination can help calm any nerves, whether it's lingering anxiety from the shutdown or because you're traveling with young kids or someone who needs extra help getting around.

"These are some very simple things to think about, but they're important things to think about," Jacobson said.

Thousands of arrests by Trump's crime-fighting task force in Memphis strain crowded jail and courts

By ADRIAN SAINZ Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP) — A task force ordered by President Donald Trump to combat crime in Memphis, Tennessee, has made thousands of arrests, compounding strains on the busy local court system and an already overcrowded jail in ways that concerned officials say will last months or even years as cases play out.

Since late September, hundreds of federal, state and local law enforcement personnel tied to the Memphis Safe Task Force have made traffic stops, served warrants and searched for fugitives in the city of about 610,000 people. More than 2,800 people have been arrested and more than 28,000 traffic citations have been issued, data provided by the task force and Memphis police shows.

The task force, which includes National Guard troops, is supported by Republican Gov. Bill Lee and others who hope the surge reduces crime in a city that has grappled with violent crime, including nearly 300 homicides last year and nearly 400 in 2023.

On Monday, Attorney General Pam Bondi traveled to Memphis to meet with officers and tout the task force's success in taking suspects and illegal guns off the street. Bondi and other law enforcement leaders later served food to officers to thank them for their work.

Asked about the strain on the local criminal justice system, U.S. Marshals Service Director Gadyaces Serralta said authorities are bringing as many cases as they can in federal court. He said federal officials are open to working with state prosecutors to find ways to speed up prosecutions.

"If we don't speed up the process, it's going to continue to back up," Serralta said. But, he said, "because we can't put them through the criminal justice system does not mean that it's a free pass to commit crimes. We're going to keep arresting folks. They keep committing crimes, we're going to keep arresting them."

From 2018 to 2024, homicides in Memphis increased 33% and aggravated assaults rose 41%, according to AH Datalytics, which tracks crimes across the country using local law enforcement data for its Real-Time Crime Index. But AH Datalytics reported those numbers were down 20% during the first nine months of this year, even before the task force got to work.

Opponents of the task force in majority-Black Memphis say it targets minorities and intimidates law-abiding Latinos, some of whom have skipped work and changed social habits, such as avoiding going to

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church or restaurants, fearing they will be harassed and unfairly detained. Statistics released at the end of October showed 319 arrests so far on administrative warrants, which deal with immigration-related issues.

The effects have rippled beyond the streets, into the aging criminal courthouse and the troubled jail. Officials are concerned about long waits in traffic court causing people to miss work and packed criminal court dockets forcing inmates to spend extra days waiting for bail hearings.

"The human cost of it is astounding," said Josh Spickler, executive director for Just City, a Memphis-based organization that advocates for fairness in the criminal justice system.

The mayor of Shelby County, which includes Memphis, has requested more judges to hear cases that could span months or years. County officials are discussing opening court at night and on weekends, a move that would help manage the caseload but cost more.

Meanwhile, Shelby County Jail inmates are being moved to other facilities because of overcrowding, officials say. Inmates at jail intake are sleeping in chairs, and jail officials are asking county commissioners for funding to help address problems, such as a corrections employees shortage.

These issues raise concerns from activists and officials about safety in a jail that has seen 65 deaths since 2019, according to Just City. Court case backlogs mean defendants and crime victims could spend an unfair amount of time dealing with the criminal justice system, said Steve Mulroy, the county's district attorney.

"The task force deployment probably could have used more planning," said Mulroy, a Democrat whose office is cooperating with the task force. "More thought could have been put into the downstream effects of the increased arrest numbers."

Jail official asks for help

There were hundreds more jail bookings and bail settings during the first several weeks of the task force's operation than during the comparable period last year, an increase of about 40% in each category, according to county statistics.

The jail, which has a regular capacity of 2,400, had an average daily population of 3,195 inmates in September, the most recent month when statistics were available. County officials said that number was expected to rise for October.

As of mid-November, 250 overflow jail detainees were being housed at other facilities, compared with 80 in November 2024. Some of those are outside Shelby County, which makes it harder for lawyers and relatives to visit and increases the cost of bringing defendants to Memphis for hearings.

In a letter to commissioners, Chief Jailer Kirk Fields has requested at least \$1.5 million in emergency funds, noting that more inmates means more expenses for food, clothing, bedding and linens.

Help with the courts

One issue is whether there are enough judges to hear cases, especially after lawmakers eliminated two judgeships during last year's session.

On Oct. 31, Shelby County Mayor Lee Harris wrote to state court officials asking for additional judges, saying the county is preparing for at least 3,500 to 5,000 people being arrested. More arrests increase jail expenses and the possible hiring of more public defenders, prosecutors and jail employees, he wrote.

"This places Shelby County in extreme financial peril," Harris wrote.

The Tennessee Supreme Court's response said that while lower court judges reported more judges are not necessary at this time, it has designated two senior judges to help should they be needed.

"Part of it is, understanding just what the cadence is going to look like over the next few months and then developing a strategy," the governor said earlier this month, noting that the state is monitoring the situation.

Some officials have proposed Saturday court sessions and night court sessions two or three nights a week, Mulroy said. They've considered having a clinic where people facing misdemeanor warrants could surrender, to help clear those up.

Mulroy's office also is reevaluating whether detention is necessary for people jailed in hundreds of low-level cases.

"If there's no basis to think they're a danger to the community or a flight risk, and they're in there just

because they can't afford their bail, we can take a second look," he wrote.

Task force says it's being effective

Ryan Guay, a U.S. Marshals Service and task force spokesperson, told The Associated Press that the high volume of arrests reflects the force's effectiveness.

"We recognize that this success places additional demands on the broader criminal justice system, including courts and detention facilities," Guay said.

The Federal Bureau of Prisons has said that it is making a satellite prison camp available to the task force. The bureau said the Shelby County Sheriff's Office would assume oversight of the facility. A sheriff's office spokesperson declined to comment on the camp's location, citing operational security.

One of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre's last survivors, Viola Ford Fletcher, dies at age 111

By JAMIE STENGLE Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — Viola Ford Fletcher, who as one of the last survivors of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre in Oklahoma spent her later years seeking justice for the deadly attack by a white mob on the thriving Black community where she lived as a child, has died. She was 111.

Her grandson Ike Howard said Monday that she died surrounded by family at a Tulsa hospital. Sustained by a strong faith, she raised three children, worked as a welder in a shipyard during World War II and spent decades caring for families as a housekeeper.

Tulsa was mourning her loss, said Mayor Monroe Nichols, the first Black leader of Oklahoma's second-largest city. "Mother Fletcher endured more than anyone should, yet she spent her life lighting a path forward with purpose."

She was 7 years old when the two-day attack began on Tulsa's Greenwood district on May 31, 1921, after a local newspaper published a sensationalized report about a Black man accused of assaulting a white woman. As a white mob grew outside the courthouse, Black Tulsans with guns who hoped to prevent the man's lynching began showing up. White residents responded with overwhelming force. Hundreds of people were killed and homes were burned and looted, leaving over 30 city blocks decimated in the prosperous community known as Black Wall Street.

"I could never forget the charred remains of our once-thriving community, the smoke billowing in the air, and the terror-stricken faces of my neighbors," she wrote in her 2023 memoir, "Don't Let Them Bury My Story."

As her family left in a horse-drawn buggy, her eyes burned from the smoke and ash, she wrote. She described seeing piles of bodies in the streets and watching as a white man shot a Black man in the head, then fired toward her family.

She told The Associated Press in an interview the year her memoir was published that fear of reprisals influenced her years of near-silence about the massacre. She wrote the book with Howard, her grandson, who said he had to persuade her to tell her story.

"We don't want history to repeat itself so we do need to educate people about what happened and try to get people to understand why you need to be made whole, why you need to be repaired," Howard told the AP in 2024. "The generational wealth that was lost, the home, all the belongings, everything was lost in one night."

The attack went largely unremembered for decades. In Oklahoma, wider discussions began when the state formed a commission in 1997 to investigate the violence.

Fletcher, who in 2021 testified before Congress about what she went through, joined her younger brother, Hughes Van Ellis, and another massacre survivor, Lessie Benningfield Randle, in a lawsuit seeking reparations. The Oklahoma Supreme Court dismissed it in June 2024, saying their grievances did not fall within the scope of the state's public nuisance statute.

"For as long as we remain in this lifetime, we will continue to shine a light on one of the darkest days in American history," Fletcher and Randle said in a statement at the time. Van Ellis had died a year earlier,

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at the age of 102.

A Justice Department review, launched under the Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Act and released in January 2024, outlined the massacre's scope and impact. It concluded that federal prosecution may have been possible a century ago, but there was no longer an avenue to bring a criminal case.

The city has been looking for ways to help descendants of the massacre's victims without giving direct cash payments. Some of the last living survivors, including Fletcher, received donations from groups but have not received any payments from the city or state.

"The fact that she died without any meaningful redress — not for herself, her family, or her community — isn't just a legal failure. It's a moral one," Damario Solomon-Simmons, an attorney for the survivors and the founder of the Justice for Greenwood Foundation, said in a statement.

"She would not want her passing to be the end of the fight," he said. "She would want it to light a fire under all of us."

Fletcher, born in Oklahoma on May 10, 1914, spent most of her early years in Greenwood. It was an oasis for Black people during segregation, she wrote in her memoir. Her family had a nice home, she said, and the community had everything from doctors to grocery stores to restaurants and banks.

Forced to flee during the massacre, her family became nomadic, living out of a tent as they worked in the fields as sharecroppers. She didn't finish school beyond the fourth grade.

At the age of 16, she returned to Tulsa, where she got a job cleaning and creating window displays in a department store, she wrote in her memoir. She then met Robert Fletcher, and they married and moved to California. During World War II, she worked in a Los Angeles shipyard as a welder, she wrote.

She eventually left her husband, who was physically abusive, and gave birth to their son, Robert Ford Fletcher, she wrote. Longing to be closer to her family, she returned to Oklahoma and settled north of Tulsa in Bartlesville.

Fletcher wrote that her faith and the close-knit Black community gave her the support she needed to raise her children. She had another son, James Edward Ford, and a daughter, Debra Stein Ford, from other relationships.

She worked for decades as a housekeeper, doing everything in those homes from cooking to cleaning to caring for children, Howard said. She worked until she was 85.

She eventually returned to Tulsa to live. Howard said his grandmother hoped the move would help in her fight for justice.

Howard said the reaction his grandmother got when she started speaking out was therapeutic for her. "This whole process has been helpful," Howard said.

Pentagon says it's investigating Sen. Mark Kelly over video urging troops to defy 'illegal orders'

By KONSTANTIN TOROPIN and BEN FINLEY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Pentagon announced Monday it is investigating Democratic Sen. Mark Kelly of Arizona over possible breaches of military law after the former Navy pilot joined a handful of other lawmakers in a video that called for troops to defy "illegal orders."

The Pentagon's statement, posted on social media, cited a federal law that allows retired service members to be recalled to active duty on orders of the defense secretary for possible court martial or other measures.

It is extraordinary for the Pentagon, which until President Donald Trump's second term had usually gone out of its way to act and appear apolitical, to directly threaten a sitting member of Congress with investigation. It comes after Trump ramped up the rhetoric by accusing the lawmakers of sedition "punishable by DEATH" in a social media post days after the video was released last week.

In its statement Monday, the Pentagon suggested that Kelly's statements in the video interfered with the "loyalty, morale, or good order and discipline of the armed forces" by citing the federal law that prohibits such actions.

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"A thorough review of these allegations has been initiated to determine further actions, which may include recall to active duty for court-martial proceedings or administrative measures," the statement said.

Kelly said he upheld his oath to the Constitution and dismissed the Pentagon investigation as the work of "bullies."

"If this is meant to intimidate me and other members of Congress from doing our jobs and holding this administration accountable, it won't work," Kelly said in a statement.

What the lawmakers said in the video

Kelly was one of six Democratic lawmakers who have served in the military or intelligence community to speak "directly to members of the military." The other lawmakers are Sen. Elissa Slotkin and Reps. Jason Crow, Chris Deluzio, Maggie Goodlander and Chrissy Houlahan, who are seen as possible future aspirants for higher office and elevated their political profiles with the video's wide exposure.

Kelly, who was a fighter pilot before becoming an astronaut and then retiring at the rank of captain, told troops that "you can refuse illegal orders," while other lawmakers in the video said they needed troops to "stand up for our laws ... our Constitution."

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said Kelly was facing investigation because he is the only one of the lawmakers who formally retired from the military and is still under the Pentagon's jurisdiction.

"Kelly's conduct brings discredit upon the armed forces and will be addressed appropriately," Hegseth said on his personal X account. Of the wider group, he added that "their foolish screed sows doubt and confusion — which only puts our warriors in danger."

Kelly and the other lawmakers didn't mention specific circumstances in the video, but its release comes as the Trump administration has ordered the military to blow up small boats in the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean accused of ferrying drugs and continues its attempts at deploying National Guard troops into U.S. cities despite some legal setbacks.

Chief Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell said last week that "our military follows orders, and our civilians give legal orders."

Other Senate Democrats came to Kelly's defense, with Democratic leader Chuck Schumer accusing Trump of using the Pentagon "as his personal attack dog" and saying "this is what dictators do."

His fellow Democratic Arizona senator, Ruben Gallego, said "Mark told the truth — in America, we swear an oath to the Constitution, not wannabe kings."

What legal scholars say

In the past decade, there has been "a quiet but significant uptick in courts-martial of retired service-members, even for post-retirement offenses," Stephen Vladeck, a Georgetown University law professor, said in an email. He said there has been debate in the courts about their constitutionality but the practice is currently allowed.

But Kelly's status as a U.S. senator could complicate the Pentagon's investigation because the Constitution explicitly shields members of Congress from White House overreach, said Anthony Michael Kreis, a constitutional law professor at Georgia State University.

"Having a United States senator subject to discipline at the behest of the secretary of defense and the president — that violates a core principle of legislative independence," Kreis said in a phone interview.

Kreis said such protections were a reaction to the British monarchy, which had arbitrarily punished members of Parliament.

"Any way you cut it, the Constitution is fundamentally structurally designed to prevent this kind of abuse from happening," Kreis said.

Troops can reject unlawful orders

Troops, especially uniformed commanders, do have specific obligations to reject orders that are unlawful, if they make that determination.

While commanders have military lawyers on their staffs to consult with in making such a determination, rank-and-file troops who are tasked with carrying out those orders are rarely in a similar position and often have to rely on their superiors.

Broad legal precedence also holds that just following orders — colloquially known as the "Nuremberg

defense," as it was used unsuccessfully by senior Nazi officials to justify their actions under Adolf Hitler — doesn't absolve troops.

Yet, there has been little reaction online from troops to the lawmakers' video.

A former service member who helps run an online military forum and spoke on condition of anonymity to avoid retaliation said the lawmakers' message is unlikely even to reach troops because the video was posted only on X and was far too long to be reposted on platforms like TikTok where troops actually consume information.

US-backed aid company in Gaza shuts operations as Israel's military and defense minister clash

By JULIA FRANKEL and NATALIE MELZER Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — The U.S.- and Israel-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, set up to distribute aid to Gaza as an alternative to the United Nations but which Palestinians said endangered the lives of civilians as they tried to get food, said Monday it would shutter operations.

The foundation had already closed distribution sites after a U.S.-brokered ceasefire took effect six weeks ago in Gaza. It announced Monday that it was permanently shutting down, claiming it had fulfilled its mission. "We have succeeded in our mission of showing there's a better way to deliver aid to Gazans," GHF director John Acree said in a statement.

The operations of the GHF were shrouded in secrecy during its short time in operation, and the group never revealed its sources of funding and said little about the armed contractors who operated the sites.

It said its goal was to deliver aid to Gaza without it being diverted by Hamas.

Palestinians, aid workers and health officials have said the system forced aid-seekers to risk their lives to reach the sites by passing Israeli troops who secured the locations. Soldiers often opened fire, killing hundreds, according to witnesses and videos posted to social media. The Israeli military says it only fired warning shots as a crowd-control measure or if its troops were in danger.

GHF said there was no violence in the aid sites themselves but acknowledged the potential dangers people faced when traveling to them on foot. However, contractors working at the sites, backed by video accounts, said the American security guards fired live ammunition and stun grenades as hungry Palestinians scrambled for food.

GHF shuts

Acree said that GHF would hand off its work to the U.S.-led center in Israel overseeing the Gaza ceasefire, called the Civil-Military Coordination Center.

"GHF has been in talks with CMCC and international organizations now for weeks about the way forward and it's clear they will be adopting and expanding the model GHF piloted," he said.

Tommy Pigott, a deputy spokesperson for the U.S. State Department, said on social platform X that GHF had "shared valuable lessons learned with us and our partners."

GHF began operating in late May, nearly three months after Israel had halted food deliveries to Gaza, pushing the population toward famine.

Israel intended for the private contractor group to replace the U.N. food distribution system, claiming Hamas was diverting large amounts of aid. The U.N. denied the claims.

The U.N. had opposed the creation of GHF, saying the system gave Israel control over food distribution and could force the displacement of Palestinians. Throughout the war, the U.N. led a massive humanitarian effort with other aid groups, distributing food, medicine, fuel and other supplies at hundreds of centers around Gaza.

In the release, GHF said it had delivered over 3 million food boxes to Gaza, totaling 187 million meals.

Israel's military chief and defense minister in rare public clash

On Monday, Israel's defense minister clashed publicly with the military's chief of staff over the army's latest probes of its failures in the Oct. 7, 2023 attack on Israel by Palestinian militants that sparked the Israel-Hamas war.

Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz had said earlier that he would order a re-examination of the military's latest internal review into what happened Oct. 7, 2023, when Hamas-led militants killed around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted 251 people to Gaza. He also said he would be freezing new appointments in the army pending the conclusions of this new review. Israel's government has long resisted the establishment of a state commission of inquiry into the Oct. 7 attack.

In response, military Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Eyal Zamir said in a sharply worded statement Monday that the defense minister's move was "puzzling" and "not substantive." He said that freezing appointments would harm the military's "capabilities and its readiness for the upcoming challenges" and claimed he would continue to "hold posting discussions as planned, in accordance with his authority."

The army "is the only body in the country that has thoroughly investigated its own failures and taken responsibility for them," wrote Zamir. "If any further examination is required to complete the picture, it must take the form of an external, objective and independent commission" that will also probe "the interface between the military echelon and the political echelon."

Moments after Zamir put out the statement, Katz doubled down on his decision, releasing a statement saying he "respects" the military chief of staff, "who knows very well that he is subordinate to the prime minister, the defense minister and the government of Israel." He added he "does not intend to argue in the media" and reasserted his authority to decide on military appointments.

Following the military's latest review, Zamir sanctioned 13 army officials who were top commanders on Oct. 7, censuring some and forcing others into retirement.

The attack kick-started the war in Gaza, in which over 69,700 Palestinians have been killed and over 170,800 injured, according to Gaza's Health Ministry.

The ministry does not distinguish between civilians and combatants but has said women and children make up a majority of those killed. The ministry, part of the Hamas-run government and staffed by medical professionals, maintains detailed records viewed as generally reliable by independent experts.

Israel says it kills wanted militant in West Bank

In the occupied West Bank, the Israeli military said it killed a militant wanted in a May 2024 car ramming attack that killed two Israeli soldiers in the northern city of Nablus.

The army said that the suspect, identified as Ala Raouf Shetiyya, was armed and barricaded himself inside a building before he was shot dead.

Israel has launched a military offensive in the West Bank since the Oct. 7 attacks in what it says is a crackdown against Palestinian militants. Tens of thousands of civilians have been displaced, and while many of the dead were militants, Palestinians and rights groups say scores of stone throwers and uninvolved civilians have been killed.

Justice Department renews bid to unseal Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell grand jury materials

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The Justice Department on Monday renewed its request to unseal grand jury transcripts from Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell's sex trafficking cases, arguing they should be made public under a new law requiring the government to open its files on the late financier and his longtime confidante.

U.S. Attorney Jay Clayton cited the Epstein Files Transparency Act — passed by Congress last week and signed into law by President Donald Trump — in court filings asking Manhattan federal Judges Richard M. Berman and Paul A. Engelmayer to reconsider their decisions to keep the material sealed.

The Justice Department interprets the transparency act "as requiring it to publish the grand jury and discovery materials in this case," said the eight-page filings, which also bear the names of Attorney General Pam Bondi and her second-in-command, Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche.

The filings are among the first public indications that the Justice Department is working to comply with

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the transparency act, which requires that it release Epstein-related files in a searchable and downloadable format by Dec. 19.

The Justice Department asked Berman and Engelmayer for expedited rulings allowing the release of the grand jury materials, which contains testimony from law enforcement witnesses but no victims, arguing that the new law supersedes existing court orders and judicial policies that "would otherwise prevent public disclosure."

In its filing Monday, the Justice Department said any materials made public could be partially redacted to prevent the disclosure of things like victims' identifying information.

In an order late Monday, Engelmayer invited Maxwell and victims of Maxwell and Epstein to respond by Dec. 3 to the government's request. The government must respond to their filings by Dec. 10. The judge said he will rule "promptly thereafter."

The transparency act compels the Justice Department, the FBI and federal prosecutors to release the vast troves of material they've amassed during investigations into Epstein's decades-long sexual abuse of young women and girls. The law mandates the release of all unclassified documents and investigative materials, including files relating to immunity deals and internal Justice Department communications about whom to charge or investigate.

Berman has previously said that the grand jury transcripts in Epstein's case amount to about 70 pages, along with a PowerPoint slideshow and call log. The only witness to testify was an FBI agent who "had no direct knowledge of the facts of the case," Berman noted in his prior ruling.

The FBI agent testified on June 18, 2019, and July 2, 2019. The July 2 session ended with grand jurors voting to indict Epstein. He was arrested on July 6, 2019 and found dead in his jail cell on Aug. 10, 2019.

The same FBI agent testified before the Maxwell grand jury, which met in June and July 2020 and March 2021, the Justice Department has said. The only other witness was a New York City police detective.

The Justice Department first asked Berman to unseal the grand jury material in July, doing so at Trump's direction as the president sought to quell a firestorm after he reneged on a campaign promise to open up the government's so-called Epstein files.

Engelmayer, who presided over Maxwell's 2021 sex trafficking trial, ruled first.

In an Aug. 11 decision, he wrote that federal law almost never allows for the release of grand jury materials and that casually making the documents public was a bad idea. And he suggested that the Trump administration's real motive for wanting the records unsealed was to fool the public with an "illusion" of transparency.

Engelmayer wrote that after privately reviewing the grand jury transcripts that anyone familiar with the evidence would "learn next to nothing new" and "would come away feeling disappointed and misled."

"The materials do not identify any person other than Epstein and Maxwell as having had sexual contact with a minor. They do not discuss or identify any client of Epstein's or Maxwell's. They do not reveal any heretofore unknown means or methods of Epstein's or Maxwell's crimes," the judge said.

Berman, who presided over Epstein's 2019 case, ruled about a week later. He concluded that a "significant and compelling reason" to deny the Justice Department's request to unseal the Epstein grand jury transcripts was that information contained in them "pales in comparison" to investigative information and materials already in the Justice Department's possession.

Berman wrote in his Aug. 20 ruling that the government's 100,000 pages of Epstein-related files "dwarf" the grand jury transcripts, which he said were "merely a hearsay snippet of Jeffrey Epstein's alleged conduct."

Trump says he will visit Beijing in April and host China's Xi for a state visit later next year

By SEUNG MIN KIM and DIDI TANG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said Monday that he has accepted an invitation from Chinese leader Xi Jinping to visit Beijing in April and that he reciprocated by inviting Xi for a state visit to the U.S. later next year.

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Trump made the announcement after he spoke with Xi by phone nearly a month after the two leaders met in person in South Korea, saying they discussed issues including Ukraine, fentanyl and purchases of American soybeans.

"Our relationship with China is extremely strong!" Trump wrote in a Truth Social post.

Beijing, which announced the phone call first, said nothing about the state visits but noted that the two leaders discussed trade, Taiwan and Ukraine. Xi told Trump that Taiwan's return to mainland China is "an integral part of the postwar international order," the Chinese Foreign Ministry said — a crucial issue to Beijing that Trump did not mention in his post.

The omissions from each side signal that sticking points remain for the two superpowers even as they highlight common ground following a series of talks to ease a trade war that has threatened the global economy.

The conversation came as China-Japan relations have plunged to a new low following recent remarks from Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi. She said the military in Japan, a key U.S. ally, could get involved if China were to take action against Taiwan, the self-governing island that Beijing says must come under its rule.

"My best guess is China is worried about the escalation (in tensions) with Japan. The reference to Taiwan and the post-World War II order directly points to the spat with Japan over Taiwan," said Sun Yun, director of the China program at the Washington-based think tank Stimson Center. "They also talked about Ukraine. That is an issue China is interested in due to the new peace negotiation."

China's relations with Japan sour

Beijing has denounced Takaichi's remarks, with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi saying over the weekend that Japan "crossed a red line that should not have been touched."

Xi told Trump on Monday that China and the U.S. should "jointly safeguard the victory of World War II" after they fought together against fascism. The U.S. has taken no side on the sovereignty of the self-governed island but is opposed to the use of force to seize Taiwan. It is obligated by a domestic law to provide sufficient hardware to the island to deter any armed attack.

Trump has maintained strategic ambiguity about whether he would send U.S. troops in case of a war in the Taiwan Strait. His administration has urged Taiwan to increase its defense budget.

Taiwan's foreign ministry said it received official notification this month that the Trump administration approved \$330 million in arms sales to Taiwan, including fighter jet parts. Beijing immediately protested, saying it "grossly violated" the so-called "One China" principle, by which Beijing considers Taiwan to be part of Chinese territory.

Trump said nothing publicly about Taiwan, whereas the Chinese statement said Trump told Xi that the U.S. "understands how important the Taiwan question is to China."

Talk of Ukraine

The phone call coincided with the latest push by the Trump administration to end the war in Ukraine.

Xi expressed hope for a "fair, lasting and binding peace agreement" in Ukraine and said the crisis should be resolved "at its root," the Chinese Foreign Ministry said. Xi stressed Beijing's support for "all efforts that are conducive to peace," according to the statement.

However, Western governments have accused Beijing of enabling the war through its industrial support for Moscow.

Trump and Xi discussed trade

Trump said on social media that he spoke with Xi about "Fentanyl, Soybeans and other Farm Products, etc."

"We have done a good, and very important, deal for our Great Farmers — and it will only get better," Trump wrote.

Since he met Xi in South Korea in late October, "there has been significant progress on both sides in keeping our agreements current and accurate," Trump said.

Since then, China has ordered nearly 2 million metric tons of U.S. soybeans, ending a monthslong boy-

cott, according to data by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. That is still short of the 12 million metric tons that the White House said China has agreed to buy before next year.

Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins said Monday on CNBC that "every sign is their commitment remains true that they will indeed buy or purchase 12 million metric tons."

The White House also said China pledged to buy 25 million metric tons of soybeans in each of the next three years. China has yet to confirm such figures.

Beijing also placed export restrictions on 13 "drug-making" chemicals to the United States, Canada and Mexico, including those that are used to produce the synthetic opioid blamed for tens of thousands of overdose deaths in the U.S. every year. In return, the Trump administration reduced tariffs on Chinese goods.

In the call, Xi said ties with the U.S. have "generally maintained a steady and positive trajectory" following the leaders' summit and that the two sides should strive to make "more positive progress," according to the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

With the trade dispute easing, Trump wrote, "Now we can set our sights on the big picture."

Portland Trail Blazers coach Chauncey Billups pleads not guilty in rigged poker games case

By PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Portland Trail Blazers coach Chauncey Billups, a member of the Basketball Hall of Fame, pleaded not guilty Monday to charges he profited from rigged poker games involving several Mafia figures and at least one other ex-NBA player.

Billups, a five-time All Star who won a championship with the Detroit Pistons, was arraigned in a federal court in Brooklyn on money laundering conspiracy and wire fraud conspiracy charges, each carrying a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison.

Prosecutors say he was involved in a scheme to rig mob-backed illegal poker games in Manhattan, Las Vegas, Miami and the Hamptons. Others face charges of running an illegal gambling business, robbery conspiracy and extortion conspiracy. Prosecutors said Monday that plea negotiations have begun with some defendants but did not identify them.

U.S. District Court Judge Ramon Reyes said he hopes to bring the sprawling case to trial by next September, telling lawyers to "do what you have to do."

Billups, dressed in a dark grey suit, spoke only to answer yes-or-no questions from the judge. His lawyer, Marc Mukasey, entered his plea. They declined to comment after the hearing. Last month, another Billups lawyer called him a "man of integrity" who denies the allegations.

"To believe that Chauncey Billups did what the federal government is accusing him of is to believe that he would risk his Hall of Fame legacy, his reputation and his freedom," attorney Chris Heywood said after Billups first appeared in court on Oct. 23, when prosecutors first announced the indictment.

Billups, 49, was released on a \$5 million bond secured by his family's Colorado home. He must refrain from gambling, avoid contact with other defendants or alleged victims, surrender his passport and limit travel to seven states, including Oregon and New York, and Washington, D.C.

Inducted last year into the Naismith Memorial Hall of Fame, Billups was arguably the most prominent among more than 30 people charged in last month's sprawling federal takedown of illegal gambling operations linked to professional sports.

Ex-NBA player and assistant coach Damon Jones was also charged in the poker scheme, as well as another separate scheme to let gamblers exploit insider information about players to win NBA bets that implicated Miami Heat guard Terry Rozier.

In addition to Monday's arraignment, Billups and his co-defendants attended a status conference and are due back in court March 4.

Prosecutors say the poker-rigging scheme used altered card-shuffling machines, hidden cameras in chip trays, special sunglasses and X-ray equipment built into the table to read cards. They allege the operation defrauded victims of an estimated \$7 million starting in at least 2019.

Billups allegedly served as a celebrity “face card” that could draw wealthy, unsuspecting players to the games. Prosecutors said organizers texted during one game that a victim “acted like he wanted Chauncey to have his money” because he was “star struck.”

Prosecutors say Billups received a portion of the ill-gotten gains, including a \$50,000 wire transfer after a rigged game in October 2020.

Organizers also had to share their proceeds with the Gambino, Genovese and Bonanno mob families for operating within the illegal poker games run by the New York criminal enterprises, prosecutors said. In return, Mafia members allegedly carried out assault, extortion and robbery to collect debts and protect the operation.

During his NBA career, Billups earned about \$106 million. After retiring in 2014, he embarked on a career as a TV analyst before pivoting to coaching.

Billups was selected as the third overall pick in the 1997 draft by the Boston Celtics after starring in college for the Colorado Buffaloes. He played 17 years in the NBA, with stints with the Toronto Raptors, Denver Nuggets, Minnesota Timberwolves, New York Knicks and Los Angeles Clippers.

But he is perhaps most beloved in the Motor City, where he earned the nickname “Mr. Big Shot” for his knack of making clutch shots.

Billups was named the NBA Finals MVP during the Pistons’ title run in 2004 and had his No. 1 jersey retired by the team.

He was hired as Portland’s coach in 2021 and signed a multiyear extension with the Trail Blazers earlier this year after the team missed out on the playoffs for the fourth straight season in 2024. Billups previously served as an assistant coach for the Los Angeles Clippers.

After his arrest, he was placed on unpaid leave and the Trail Blazers named assistant coach and former NBA player Tiago Splitter as interim coach.

Wisconsin woman in 2014 Slender Man stabbing is found a day after walking away from group home

By TODD RICHMOND and KATHY MCCORMACK Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — The search for a missing Wisconsin woman who almost killed her sixth-grade classmate more than a decade ago to please horror character Slender Man ended Sunday night when police discovered her sleeping outside an Illinois truck stop.

Morgan Geyser, 23, was found at a truck stop in Posen, Illinois, police said early Monday. Posen is about 25 miles (40 kilometers) south of Chicago and about 170 miles (274 kilometers) south of Madison.

The Madison Police Department said Sunday that Geyser had cut off her electronic monitoring device and left her group home on the capital city’s west side. She was last seen around 8 p.m. Saturday with an adult acquaintance, the department said.

Geyser was found with a 42-year-old man who was charged with criminal trespassing and obstructing identification, Posen police said. He has since been released from custody. Geyser was expected to appear in court in Cook County on Tuesday morning for a hearing on extradition to Wisconsin.

Geyser’s attorney, Tony Cotton, had said that he did not know what happened with his client. He told The Associated Press in an email Monday morning that he had not yet spoken with Geyser and did not know what the circumstances of her departure were.

Sleeping on the sidewalk

Posen police posted a Facebook statement Monday morning saying officers were dispatched to the truck stop for a report of a male and female loitering behind the building. When officers arrived, they found Geyser and the man sleeping on the sidewalk.

Geyser initially gave officers a false name and repeatedly refused to provide her real name, the statement said. She finally told them that she didn’t want to tell them who she was because she had “done something really bad” and suggested they could “just Google” her. Officers took her and the man into custody without incident.

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State opposed Geyser release

Geyser pleaded guilty in 2017 to being a party to attempted first-degree intentional homicide in connection with the 2014 attack on her classmate, Payton Leutner. Geyser claimed, though, that she wasn't responsible because she was mentally ill. Waukesha County Circuit Judge Michael Bohren ordered her committed to a psychiatric hospital for 40 years and she was sent to the Winnebago Mental Health Institute.

Wisconsin law allows people who are committed in criminal cases to petition for release every six months. Geyser petitioned four times before Bohren finally signed off in January. Prosecutors urged the judge not to approve the release, saying that she couldn't be trusted.

The state Department of Health Services, which runs the mental health institution and is responsible for Geyser, tried to block Bohren's decision in March. Agency officials told the judge that Geyser didn't tell her therapy team that she had read "Rent Boy," a novel about murder and selling organs on the black market. They also alleged that she had been communicating with a man who collects murder memorabilia and sent him her own sketch of a decapitated body as well as a postcard saying she wants to be intimate with him.

Cotton, Geyser's attorney, defended her actions, saying she only read what staff allowed and Geyser cut off communication with the collector last year. Prior to that, he had visited her three times, Cotton said.

"Morgan is not more dangerous today," Cotton said at the March court hearing.

The judge concluded that Geyser wasn't trying to hide anything. She was ultimately released after a final plan was signed in September and placed in the Madison group home.

Police say state never notified them of Geyser's disappearance

The Madison Police Department said Sunday that it was not made aware that Geyser was missing until nearly 12 hours after she left the group home. The state Department of Corrections received an alert Saturday night that Geyser's ankle monitor had malfunctioned. The department contacted the group home where she lived about two hours later and was told she was not there and had removed the bracelet, Madison police said.

The Department of Corrections issued an apprehension request just after midnight. The Madison Police Department said it did not learn Geyser was missing until someone from the group home called the next morning.

The state Department of Health Services, which contracts with Corrections to care for convicts undergoing mental health treatment in state facilities such as Winnebago, said in an email responding to the police department's comments that the apprehension request is an arrest warrant. Once a warrant is issued, all law enforcement in the state is on official notice that the individual must be apprehended, according to the health department.

Attack designed to curry favor with Slender Man

Authorities say Geyser and her friend, Anissa Weier, also 12, lured Leutner to a suburban Milwaukee park after a sleepover. Geyser stabbed Leutner more than a dozen times while Weier egged her on. Leutner barely survived.

The girls later told investigators that they attacked Leutner to earn the right to be Slender Man's servants and they feared he'd harm their families if they didn't follow through.

Slender Man was created online by Eric Knudson in 2009 as a mysterious figure photo-edited into everyday images of children at play. He grew into a popular boogeyman, appearing in video games, online stories and a 2018 movie.

Weier pleaded guilty to being a party to attempted second-degree intentional homicide but not guilty by reason of mental disease, similar to Geyser's plea. She was also sent to the psychiatric center and granted release in 2021.

Steve Lyons, a spokesperson for the Leutner family, said in a statement Sunday that Payton Leutner was safe. Waukesha County District Attorney Lesli Boese said during a news conference Monday that no one notified the family that Geyser was on the loose until the victim-witness coordinator from her office contacted them on Sunday morning.

Jimmy Cliff, reggae giant and star of landmark film 'The Harder They Come,' dead at 81

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Jimmy Cliff, the charismatic reggae pioneer and actor who preached joy, defiance and resilience in such classics as "Many Rivers to Cross," "You Can Get it If You Really Want" and "Vietnam" and starred in the landmark movie "The Harder They Come," has died at 81.

His wife, Latifa Chambers, confirmed his death Monday. Chambers and Cliff's three children also posted a message on his social media sites that he died from a "seizure followed by pneumonia." Additional information was not immediately available.

"To all his fans around the world, please know that your support was his strength throughout his whole career," the announcement reads in part. "He really appreciated each and every fan for their love."

Cliff was a native Jamaican with a spirited tenor and a gift for catchphrases and topical lyrics who joined Kingston's emerging music scene in his teens and helped lead a movement in the 1960s that included such future stars as Bob Marley, Toots Hibbert and Peter Tosh. By the early 1970s, he had accepted director Perry Henzell's offer to star in a film about an aspiring reggae musician, Ivanhoe "Ivan" Martin, who turns to crime when his career stalls. Henzell named the movie "The Harder They Come" after suggesting the title as a possible song for Cliff.

"Ivanhoe was a real-life character for Jamaicans," Cliff told Variety in 2022, upon the film's 50th anniversary. "When I was a little boy, I used to hear about him as being a bad man. A real bad man. No one in Jamaica, at that time, had guns. But he had guns and shot a policeman, so he was someone to be feared. However, being a hero was the manner in which Perry wanted to make his name — an anti-hero in the way that Hollywood turns its bad guys into heroes."

"The Harder They Come," delayed for some two years because of sporadic funding, was the first major commercial release to come out of Jamaica. It sold few tickets in its initial run, despite praise from Roger Ebert and other critics. But it now stands as a cultural touchstone, with a soundtrack widely cited as among the greatest ever and as a turning point in reggae's worldwide rise.

For a brief time, Cliff rivaled Marley as the genre's most prominent artist. On an album that included Toots and the Maytals, the Slickers and Desmond Dekker, Cliff was the featured artist on four out of 11 songs, all well placed in the reggae canon.

"Sitting in Limbo" was a moody, but hopeful take on a life in restless motion. "You Can Get it If You Really Want" and the title song were calls for action and vows of final payments: "The harder they come, the harder they fall, one and all." Cliff otherwise lets out a weary cry on "Many Rivers to Cross," a gospel-style testament that he wrote after confronting racism in England in the 1960s.

"It was a very frustrating time. I came to England with very big hopes, and I saw my hopes fading," he told Rolling Stone in 2012.

The music lives on

Cliff's career peaked with "The Harder They Come," but, after a break in the late 1970s, he worked steadily for decades, whether session work with the Rolling Stones or collaborations with Wyclef Jean, Sting and Annie Lennox among others. Meanwhile, his early music lived on. The Sandinistas in Nicaragua used "You Can Get it If You Really Want" as a campaign theme and Bruce Springsteen helped expand Cliff's U.S. audience with his live cover of the reggae star's "Trapped," featured on the million-selling charity album from 1985, "We Are the World." Others performing his songs included John Lennon, Cher and UB40.

Cliff was nominated for seven Grammys and won twice for best reggae album: in 1986 for "Cliff Hanger" and in 2012 for the well-named "Rebirth," widely regarded as his best work in years. His other albums included the Grammy-nominated "The Power and the Glory," "Humanitarian" and the 2022 release "Refugees." He also performed on Steve Van Zandt's protest anthem, "Sun City," and acted in the Robin Williams comedy "Club Paradise," for which he contributed a handful of songs to the soundtrack and sang with Elvis Costello on the rocker "Seven Day Weekend."

His other honors included induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Jamaica's Order of Merit. In

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2019, the Jamaican government renamed Montego Bay's popular "hip strip" roadway Jimmy Cliff Boulevard. Two years later, Jamaican officials presented Cliff with an official passport in recognition of his status as a Reggae Ambassador.

He was born James Chambers in the parish of Saint James and, like Ivan Martin in "The Harder They Come," moved to Kingston in his youth to become a musician. In the early 1960s, Jamaica was gaining its independence from Britain and the early sounds of reggae — first called ska and rocksteady — were catching on. Calling himself Jimmy Cliff, he had a handful of local hits, including "King of Kings" and "Miss Jamaica," and, after overcoming the kinds of barriers that upended Martin, was called on to help represent his country at the 1964 World's Fair in New York City.

"(Reggae) is a pure music. It was born of the poorer class of people," he told Spin in 2022. "It came from the need for recognition, identity and respect."

Approaching stardom

His popularity grew over the second half of the 1960s, and he signed with Island Records, the world's leading reggae label. Island founder Chris Blackwell tried in vain to market him to rock audiences, but Cliff still managed to reach new listeners. He had a hit with a cover of Cat Stevens' "Wild World," and reached the top 10 in the UK with the uplifting "Wonderful World, Beautiful People." Cliff's widely heard protest chant, "Vietnam," was inspired in part by a friend who had served in the war and returned damaged beyond recognition.

His success as a recording artist and concert performer led Henzell to seek a meeting with him and flatter him into accepting the part: "You know, I think you're a better actor than singer," Cliff remembered him saying. Aware that "The Harder They Come" could be a breakthrough for Jamaican cinema, he openly wished for stardom, although Cliff remained surprised by how well known he became.

"Back in those days there were few of us African descendants who came through the cracks to get any kind of recognition," he told The Guardian in 2021. "It was easier in music than movies. But when you start to see your face and name on the side of the buses in London that was like: 'Wow, what's going on?'"

Officials say progress made on amending US peace plan for Ukraine

By BARRY HATTON and ISOBEL KOSHIW Associated Press

Officials on Monday said progress was made in urgent weekend talks on amending the U.S. peace proposal for Ukraine that many saw as favoring Russia, but the Kremlin said it hadn't seen the changes.

Washington's 28-point plan presented last week caused alarm by heavily aligning with Moscow's demands in the nearly four-year war caused by its invasion. The plan pressed Ukraine to hand over some territory to Russia and reduce its army. It also sought Europe's agreement that Ukraine will never be admitted into the NATO military alliance.

An adviser to Ukraine's president who attended the talks in Geneva between U.S. and Ukrainian officials told the AP they managed to discuss almost all the plan's points, and one unresolved issue is that of territory, which can only be decided at the head of state level. Ukraine and allies have ruled out territorial concessions.

Oleksandr Bevez also said the U.S. showed "great openness and understanding" that security guarantees are the cornerstone of any agreement for Ukraine. He said the U.S. would continue working on the plan, then the leaders of Ukraine and the U.S. will meet. After that, the plan would be presented to Russia.

Bevez would not say what if any compromises Ukraine made in the talks, and added that "everyone arrived stressed."

European officials, who say they were blindsided by the U.S. plan and that their own security is at stake, pressed Washington for changes in the Geneva talks.

"The negotiations were a step forward, but there are still major issues which remain to be resolved," Finnish President Alexander Stubb wrote on social media.

U.S. President Donald Trump, who had accused Ukraine of not being sufficiently grateful for U.S. military

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support while the talks were underway, on Monday suggested the process could be moving in the right direction.

"Is it really possible that big progress is being made in Peace Talks between Russia and Ukraine??? Don't believe it until you see it, but something good just may be happening," he wrote on social media.

Trump earlier gave Ukraine until Thursday to agree to the plan, but U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio downplayed the deadline, saying officials could keep negotiating.

But Russian officials still haven't seen the revised peace plan, a Kremlin spokesperson said. Dmitry Peskov added there was no plan for U.S. and Russian delegations to meet this week, but the Russian side remained "open for such contacts."

Yuri Ushakov, Russian President Vladimir Putin's foreign affairs adviser, said the plan the Kremlin had received before the Geneva talks had many provisions that "seem quite acceptable" to Moscow. He described European proposals "floating around" as "completely unconstructive."

Ukraine's allies plan talks on Tuesday

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said Ukraine's allies in the "coalition of the willing" — a broad term for about 30 countries supporting Kyiv — will hold talks about the negotiations on Tuesday by video.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz welcomed the "interim result" of the Geneva talks, saying the U.S. proposal "has now been modified in significant parts," without details.

The surprise emergence of the U.S. peace plan coincided with a bleak period for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. His country is under severe strain on the front line against Russia's bigger army, and it is short of money.

Meanwhile, Zelenskyy is trying to defuse a major corruption scandal that has tainted his government.

Zelenskyy late Sunday said of the Geneva talks: "Diplomacy has been reinvigorated, and that's good. Very good."

A call to Russia

Rubio, who directed the talks in Geneva, on Sunday called them "very worthwhile" and constituted the most productive day in "a very long time."

"I feel very optimistic that we can get something done," Rubio said.

Merz, the German leader, said Moscow must now become engaged in the process.

"The next step must be that Russia must come to the table," he said in Angola, where he was attending a summit between African and European Union countries. "This is a laborious process. It will move forward at most in smaller steps this week. I do not expect there to be a breakthrough this week."

Turkey also hopes to build bridges between Russia and Ukraine. Putin spoke by phone with Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Monday, the Kremlin spokesperson said.

Russian drones kill 4 in Ukraine

Russian drones hit residential areas of Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, overnight, killing four people and wounding 13, including two children, authorities said.

Eight residential buildings, an educational facility and power lines were damaged, according to the head of the regional military administration, Oleh Syniehubov.

Ukraine's air force said Russia fired 162 strike and decoy drones over the country overnight.

Trump pledge to 'immediately' end protections for Minnesota Somalis sparks fear and legal questions

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press

President Donald Trump's pledge to terminate temporary legal protections for Somalis living in Minnesota is triggering fear in the state's deeply-rooted immigrant community, along with doubts about whether the White House has the legal authority to enact the directive as described.

In a Truth Social post late Friday, Trump said he would "immediately" strip Somali residents in Minnesota of Temporary Protected Status, a legal safeguard against deportation for immigrants from certain countries.

The announcement drew immediate pushback from some state leaders and immigration experts, who

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characterized Trump's declaration as a legally dubious effort to sow fear and suspicion toward Minnesota's Somali community, the largest in the nation.

"There's no legal mechanism that allows the president to terminate protected status for a particular community or state that he has beef with," said Heidi Altman, vice president of policy at the National Immigration Law Center.

"This is Trump doing what he always does: demagoguing immigrants without justification or evidence and using that demagoguery in an attempt to take away important life-saving protections," she added.

The Trump administration has until mid-January to revoke the legal protection for Somalis nationally. But that move would affect only a tiny fraction of the tens of thousands of Somalis living in Minnesota. A report produced for Congress in August put the number of Somalis covered by TPS at just 705 nationwide.

"I am a citizen and so are (the) majority of Somalis in America," Minnesota Rep. Ilhan Omar, a Democrat from Somali, said in a social media post Friday. "Good luck celebrating a policy change that really doesn't have much impact on the Somalis you love to hate."

Still, advocates warned the move could inflame hate against a community at a time of rising Islamophobia.

"This is not just a bureaucratic change," said Jaylani Hussein, president of the Minnesota chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations. "It is a political attack on the Somali and Muslim community driven by Islamophobic and hateful rhetoric."

In his social media post, Trump claimed, without offering evidence, that Somali gangs had targeted Minnesota residents and referred to the state as a "hub of fraudulent money laundering activity."

Federal prosecutors have in recent weeks brought charges against dozens of people in a social-services fraud scheme. Some of the defendants hail from Somalia. "Accountability is coming," Minnesota Republican Rep. Tom Emmer wrote in response to that story.

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, a Democrat, has noted that Minnesota consistently ranks among the safest states in the country.

"It's not surprising that the President has chosen to broadly target an entire community," Walz said Friday. "This is what he does to change the subject."

In response to Trump's announcement, Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison his office was "exploring all of our options," adding that Trump "cannot terminate TPS for just one state or on a bigoted whim."

"Somali folks came to Minnesota fleeing conflict, instability and famine, and they have become an integral part of our state, our culture and our community," he added.

The protection has been extended 27 times for Somalis since 1991, with U.S. authorities determining that it was unsafe for people already in the United States to return there.

Somalia for decades has been regarded as one of the world's most dangerous countries. People have been fleeing ever since leader Siad Barre was removed in 1991 by clan-based militias and civil war erupted. The chaos later led to the rise of the al-Qaida-linked al-Shabab militant group, which still holds parts of the country and carries out deadly attacks in the capital, Mogadishu, and elsewhere against the fragile federal government.

Community advocates note that the Somali diaspora in Minnesota has helped to revitalize downtown corridors in Minneapolis and plays a prominent role in the state's politics.

"The truth is that the Somali community is beloved and long-woven into the fabric of many neighborhoods and communities in Minnesota," said Altman. "Destabilizing families and communities makes all of us less safe and not more."

As part of a broader push to adopt hardline immigration policies, the Trump administration has moved to withdraw various protections that had allowed immigrants to remain in the United States and work legally.

That included ending TPS for 600,000 Venezuelans and 500,000 Haitians who were granted protection under President Joe Biden. The Trump administration has also sought to limit protections previously extended to migrants from Cuba and Syria, among other countries.

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Arizona jumps to No. 2 behind Purdue in AP Top 25, Alabama into top 10; Kansas falls out of rankings

By AARON BEARD AP Basketball Writer

Purdue remained at No. 1 in The Associated Press men's college basketball poll, while Arizona jumped to No. 2 to continue its opening-month rise after another impressive win against a ranked opponent.

The Boilermakers (6-0) earned 46 of 61 first-place votes in Monday's poll to remain at the top after beating then-No. 15 Texas Tech by 30 to win the Baha Mar Championship in the Bahamas.

The Wildcats (5-0) earned 11 first-place votes to jump two spots. That came after last week's win at then-No. 3 UConn, part of run that began with a victory over reigning NCAA champion Florida in Las Vegas and a win against a ranked UCLA team in Los Angeles.

Arizona was ranked No. 13 in the preseason AP Top 25, but jumped to No. 5 after the Florida win before inching up to No. 4 last week.

The top tier

Houston, which spent a week at No. 1 earlier this month, slid a spot to No. 3 to make room for the Wildcats, while Duke and UConn rounded out the top five.

Louisville, Michigan, Alabama, BYU and Florida rounded out the top 10, with the Crimson Tide rising from No. 11 after its win against then-No. 8 Illinois in Chicago.

Rising

No. 11 Michigan State had the week's biggest jump, climbing six spots after beating Kentucky in the Champions Classic.

No. 17 Tennessee climbed three spots, while No. 16 North Carolina and No. 23 N.C. State each rose two spots.

In all, 11 teams moved up from last week's poll.

Sliding

Kentucky's 17-point loss to the Spartans triggered the week's biggest fall of seven spots to No. 19, while the 13th-ranked Illini and 20th-ranked Red Raiders each tumbled five spots.

In all, six teams fell from last week's poll.

Status quo

Six teams stayed locked in last week's position, including five of the top 10 teams and No. 14 St. John's.

Comings and goings

No. 24 Vanderbilt and No. 25 Indiana were the new additions to the poll, replacing Wisconsin (No. 23 last week) and Kansas (24th).

The Commodores spent one week at No. 24 last season, which before Monday stood as the only AP Top 25 ranking for the program since December 2015.

It is the second straight year the Jayhawks, who lost to Duke in the Champions Classic last week, have fallen out of the poll at least once. Before last season, Kansas had been ranked in every poll but one — missing one week during the 2020-21 season played amid the COVID-19 pandemic — dating to the 2009-10 season.

Conference watch

The Southeastern Conference didn't have a team ranked higher than eighth, yet posted the biggest overall haul of any conference with seven ranked teams, including No. 21 Auburn and No. 22 Arkansas.

The Big Ten was next with six AP Top 25 teams, followed by the Big 12 with five, the Atlantic Coast Conference with four, the Big East with two and the West Coast Conference with one.

Stores keep prices down in a tough year for turkeys.

Other Thanksgiving foods may cost more

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

CHELSEA, Mich. (AP) — Old Brick Farm, where Larry Doll raises chickens, turkeys and ducks, was fortunate this Thanksgiving season.

Doll's small farm west of Detroit had no cases of bird flu, despite an ongoing outbreak that killed more than 2 million U.S. turkeys in the last three months alone. He also avoided another disease, avian metapneumovirus, which causes turkeys to lay fewer eggs.

"I try to keep the operation as clean as possible, and not bringing other animals in from other farms helps mitigate that risk as well," said Doll, whose farm has been in his family for five generations.

But Doll still saw the impact as those diseases shrank the U.S. turkey flock to a 40-year low this year. The hatchery where he gets his turkey chicks had fewer available this year. He plans to order another 100 hatchlings soon, even though they won't arrive until July.

"If you don't get your order in early, you're not going to get it," he said.

Thanksgiving costs vary

The shrinking population is expected to cause wholesale turkey prices to rise 44% this year, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Despite the increase, many stores are offering discounted or even free turkeys to soften the potential blow to Thanksgiving meal budgets. But even if the bird is cheaper than last year, the ingredients to prepare the rest of the holiday feast may not be. Tariffs on imported steel, for example, have increased prices for canned goods.

As of Nov. 17, a basket of 11 Thanksgiving staples — including a 10-pound frozen turkey, 10 Russet potatoes, a box of stuffing and cans of corn, green beans and cranberry sauce — cost \$58.81, or 4.1% more than last year, according to Datasembly, a market research company that surveys weekly prices at 150,000 U.S. stores. That's higher than the average price increase for food eaten at home, which rose 2.7% in September, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Datasembly showed a 2% decline in the retail price of a 10-pound turkey as of Nov. 17. Pricing out Thanksgiving meals isn't an exact science, and the firm's tally differed from other estimates.

The American Farm Bureau Federation, which uses volunteer shoppers in all 50 states to survey prices, reported that Thanksgiving dinner for 10 would cost \$55.16 this year, or 5% less than last year. The Wells Fargo Agri-Food Institute, using NielsenIQ data from September, estimated that feeding 10 people on Thursday using store-brand products would cost \$80 this year, which is 2% to 3% lower than last year's estimate.

Tempting turkey prices

Grocery chains are also offering deals to attract shoppers. Discount grocer Aldi is advertising a \$40 meal for 10 with 21 items. Kroger said shoppers could feed 10 people for under \$50 with its menu of store-brand products.

Earlier this month, President Donald Trump touted Walmart's Thanksgiving meal basket, which he said was 25% cheaper than last year. But that was because Walmart included a different assortment and fewer products overall this year.

"We're seeing some promotions being implemented in an effort to draw customers into the store," David Ortega, a professor of food economics and policy at Michigan State University, said.

That's despite a sharp increase in wholesale turkey prices since August. In the second week of November, frozen 8-16 pound hens were averaging \$1.77 per pound, up 81% from the same period last year, according to Mark Jordan, the executive director of Leap Market Analytics, which closely follows the poultry and livestock markets.

Avian viruses are the main culprit. But another reason for turkey's higher wholesale prices has been an increase in consumer demand as other meats have gotten more expensive, Jordan said. Beef prices were up 14% in September compared to last year, for example.

"For a big chunk of the population, they look at steak cuts and say, 'I can't or I don't want to pay \$30

a pound,'" Jordan said.

That's the case for Paul Nadeau, a retired consultant from Austin, Texas, who plans to smoke a turkey this week. Nadeau said he usually smokes a brisket over Thanksgiving weekend, but the beef brisket he buys would now cost more than \$100. Turkey prices are also up at his local H-E-B supermarket, he said, but not by as much.

"I don't know of anything that's down in price since last year except for eggs," Nadeau said.

Tariffs and weather

Trump's tariffs on imported steel and aluminum are also raising prices. Farok Contractor, a distinguished professor of management and global business at the Rutgers Business School, said customers are paying 10 cents to 40 cents more per can when companies pass on the full cost of tariffs.

Tariffs may be partly to blame for the increased cost of jellied cranberry sauce, which was up 38% from last year in Datasembly's survey. But weather was also a factor. U.S. cranberry production is expected to be down 9% this year, hurt by drought conditions in Massachusetts, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

In Illinois, where most of the country's canning pumpkins are grown, dry weather actually helped pumpkins avoid diseases that are more prevalent in wet conditions, said Raghela Scavuzzo, an associate director of food systems development at the Illinois Farm Bureau and the executive director of the Illinois Specialty Growers Association. Datasembly found that a 30-ounce can of pumpkin pie mix cost 5% less than last year.

Farm to table

Back at Old Brick Farm, which has been in his family since 1864, Doll walked among his turkeys the week before Thanksgiving, patting their heads as they waddled between their warm barn and an open pasture. In a few days, he planned to deliver them to an Amish butcher.

Doll sold all 92 turkeys he raised this year, with customers paying \$6.50 per pound for what many tell him is the best turkey they've ever tasted. He enjoys a little profit, he said, and the good feeling of supplying a holiday meal.

"I just love it, to think that, you know, not only are we providing them food, but the centerpiece of their Thanksgiving dinner," he said.

Takeaways from the first G20 summit in Africa and a look ahead to the next one at Trump's golf club

By GERALD IMRAY Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — The first Group of 20 summit in Africa that ended Sunday broke new ground by putting the priorities of poor countries at the top of the bloc's agenda.

Host South Africa negotiated a summit declaration signed by some of the world's richest and top emerging economies that agreed to give more global attention to issues that especially affect developing nations.

They included the impact of climate change on poor countries, the rising debt levels and unfair borrowing conditions they face, and their call for help to transition to green energy sources.

But the United States, a G20 founding member and the world's biggest economy, boycotted the summit, didn't sign the declaration, and the Trump administration has declared it is opposed to South Africa's agenda — especially the parts that focus on climate change.

From Monday, the U.S. takes over the rotating presidency of the G20, leaving the long-term impact of the South African declaration unclear.

Africa top of the agenda

The 21-member G20 was formed in 1999 to tackle global economic problems. Members include the U.S., China, Russia, India, France, Germany and the U.K., but also nations like Brazil, Indonesia and South Africa, and the European Union and African Union.

The 122-point declaration issued at the Johannesburg summit is not a binding document, but rather an

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indication of consensus.

It says nations agreed to work together to help mobilize public and private finance to help poor countries recover from climate-related disasters, which are becoming increasingly devastating for them.

Africa contributes the least to global warming, for example — around 2-3% of global emissions, according to the U.N. — but is experiencing some of its worst impact. Recent cyclones made stronger by climate change caused billions of dollars of damage across Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe.

Some developing nation representatives were invited to the summit as guests and explained their challenges around debt and borrowing, especially in Africa. Sierra Leone President Julius Maada Bio, head of the West African economic bloc, said countries in his region faced up to eight times higher interest rates for international loans than rich countries.

Namibia President Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah said her country was viewed as high-risk by lenders despite recently paying back a \$750 million bond on time.

"Africa doesn't need charity," Bio said, "but fair borrowing conditions."

The limits of the G20

While leaders called the Johannesburg summit a milestone, questions were raised over the effectiveness of the bloc in confronting some of the biggest crises.

The war in Ukraine was mentioned just once in the declaration, in a general reference calling for the end of conflicts. The ongoing African crisis of the Sudan civil war also had just one mention in the same paragraph and no proposals to end it despite its destructive impact on the region.

French President Emmanuel Macron said the G20 was at an inflection point because it was "struggling to have a common standard on geopolitical crises."

The US takes over

The summit ended with an uncomfortable moment. Traditionally, the host country hands over a symbolic wooden gavel to the nation taking over the G20 presidency, but no U.S. official was there to receive it from South African President Cyril Ramaphosa because of the boycott.

The U.S. wanted to send a representative from its embassy, but South Africa refused that, saying it was an insult for Ramaphosa to hand over to what it called a junior official.

After the ceremony, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva picked up the gavel and playfully swung it at an official next to him while saying to Ramaphosa in comments picked up by microphones: "I'll take it to them (the U.S)."

The G20 works on a "troika" system where the previous, current and next summit hosts work together through the year.

That means the U.S. will have to work over the next 12 months with South Africa, a country it has repeatedly singled out for criticism and sanctions since Trump returned to office, leaving their relations at their lowest since the end of apartheid 31 years ago.

Trump's golf club next

Trump said that the G20 summit in 2026 will be at his golf club in Doral near Miami, Florida, but insisted his family's business would not make any money off it.

The G20 under U.S. leadership will also look very different, U.S. officials said, as they criticized South Africa for inviting so many extra nations to this weekend's summit as guests. South Africa said it wanted to be as inclusive as possible.

"We have whittled down the G20 back to basics," U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said. "The G20 had become basically the G100 this past year."

Trump has called for South Africa to be thrown out of the G20 over his widely rejected claims it is violently persecuting its Afrikaner white minority, and a South African government spokesperson was asked if South Africa had any fears that the U.S. might refuse to give its delegations visas to travel next year for the dozens of G20 meetings that take place in the months ahead of a summit.

"Like any other country, they can decide to give you a visa or not," South African spokesperson and Cabinet Minister Khumbudzo Ntshavheni said. "It doesn't change the price of bread."

'Bel-Air' cast reflects on series, building its own legacy and identity entering final season

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr. AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Olly Sholotan first realized that "Bel-Air" had stepped out the shadows of the beloved '90s sitcom starring Will Smith when a young boy approached him at a flea market after the show's first season.

"He looked up at me and said 'You are the first Black boy I've ever seen cry on TV,'" recalled Sholotan, who plays Carlton Banks on the dramatized reboot of "The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air." At a time when some questioned whether the reimagined series could stand apart from its sitcom roots, Sholotan said the encounter made him realize viewers were embracing the drama, allowing it to carve out its own identity.

"In that moment, I realized what the old idea of Carlton was," he said. "This was something different."

Such moments helped cement "Bel-Air" as one of Peacock's most visible homegrown titles, expanding the possibilities for Black-led prestige television as the streamer worked to define its original programming slate. The series returns Monday for its fourth and final season with the cast reflecting on its impact and the evolution of the characters who began the show "in the shadow of the original," as actor Simone Joy Jones — who plays Lisa Wilkes — puts it.

"The culture really showed up for our show," said Coco Jones, a Grammy-winning singer who stars as Hilary Banks. "I think people saw themselves in these characters. That's carried all the way into this season."

Why "Bel-Air's" story ends now

Behind the scenes, the show's ambitions came with a price. Industry reports have cited high production costs as a key factor in the decision to end the series, which carried a long roster of executive producers including creator Morgan Stevenson Cooper, Will Smith, Terence Carter, James Lassiter, Miguel Melendez, Benny Medina, the late Quincy Jones and original sitcom creators Andy and Susan Borowitz. Some of them still receive compensation tied to the '90s franchise.

Creative decisions often moved between the writers' room, Westbrook Studios and Universal Television, contributing to a large-scale production rarely afforded to a young Black ensemble.

Showrunner Carla Banks Waddles said sustaining that scale required constant coordination.

"Every episode meant bringing all those people together under one vision," she said. "It takes collaboration, communication and compromise."

Still, Waddles said the team never viewed "Bel-Air" as an open-ended series.

"We never wanted to run on forever to the point where people asked, 'Is that show still on?'" she said. "By the end of the series, audiences will feel like we told a complete story."

Jabari Banks — who stars as Will — echoed that sentiment, saying the ending aligns with what the creators intended.

"From the start, we didn't want to be a show that dragged on," he said. "By the time you reach the end, it really does feel like a complete story. Four seasons of a great show, cover to cover."

What viewers will see in the final season

As the creative team brings the story to its planned conclusion, the final season pushes each member of the Banks family into pivotal turning points that define who they'll become.

Will tries to balance the excitement and pressure of senior year with the expectations that have shaped his journey, while Carlton confronts the fallout from choices that could threaten his future.

An unexpected power shift threatens the longtime bond between Phil and Geoffrey, whose loyalty to the Banks family is tested. Viv re-evaluates motherhood as she attempts to reinvent herself, Hilary begins a deeper path of self-exploration, and Ashley enters high school determined to challenge the status quo.

Cassandra Freeman, who plays Viv, said the final stretch brings a natural evolution to the characters.

"She (Viv) starts off as a politician's wife, but by this season, she lets herself take center stage in her own life," Freeman said. "That journey toward self-expression really lands this season."

The final season also deepens one of the show's most resonant themes: redefining Black masculinity on screen.

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Jimmy Akingbola, who plays Geoffrey, said the drama allowed its male characters to show a spectrum of emotion rarely portrayed on television.

"Black men being vulnerable is a superpower, not a weakness," he said, noting how his character's conflicts with Uncle Phil highlight love and accountability rather than confrontation.

"There's not one way to be masculine," said Jordan L. Jones, who plays Jazz. "Showing insecurity, showing care. That's part of the power too."

How "Bel-Air" became a springboard for cast

While "Bel-Air" is ending, several cast members are seeing major career breakthroughs.

Coco Jones' role as Hilary boosted her visibility and her music. She won a Grammy in the best R&B performance category for her song "ICU" in 2024 and released her debut album "Why Not More?" this year. She's also in the upcoming thriller "Help" and "That's Her," which are both in post-production.

"TV and film are a big avenue to be seen," Coco Jones said. "It unlocked more fans and more opportunities for people to Google me and then see that I make music too."

Jabari Banks starred in last year's "Bad Genius" a feature film directed by J.C. Lee. He said the TV series reshaped his life in ways he didn't expect.

"It opened every door," he said. "I bought my mom a car. This show changed my life in every way."

Sholotan continues to build a dual path as an actor and musician. He credits the emotional depth of the character for expanding how audiences see young Black men on screen.

"Black men being vulnerable is a superpower," he said. "What we showed was something different and important."

Waddles hopes the show's legacy mirrors the heart of the original sitcom that inspired it.

"Love, redemption, forgiveness and family," she said. "Loving each other through it. That's what we wanted to leave behind, and I'm proud of that."

Things to know about the growing pressures facing Zelenskyy during a crucial week of diplomacy

By ISOBEL KOSHIW Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy faces a crucial week of diplomacy, testing his abilities to stand his ground while demonstrating to the United States that he is willing to compromise.

Since a draft of a 28-point U.S.-Russia brokered peace plan was leaked to the press on Thursday, Ukraine and its European allies have been trying to buy time and ensure their interests are represented in any deal.

The draft has triggered alarm in Kyiv and European capitals for favoring Russian demands and goals. It calls for limiting the size of Ukraine's army as well as handing over Ukrainian territory that Russia has occupied — while asking Kyiv to relinquish any hope of holding Russia accountable for its invasion or seeking justice in the thousands of war crimes allegations leveled at Moscow.

The dial appeared to swing back somewhat more favorably for Kyiv after U.S. and Ukrainian delegations met in Geneva on Sunday. Both sides said discussions were "productive" and would continue. Zelenskyy said he felt Trump was "hearing" Ukraine in a statement late Sunday after the Geneva talks ended.

All this is playing out as Zelenskyy tries to stem public anger from a major corruption scandal and Russia makes slow but steady advances across parts of the 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line and relentlessly bombs Ukraine's power plants, causing severe electricity shortages as colder weather sets in.

Here are some things to know about the growing pressures confronting Zelenskyy.

Ukraine and Europe push back

After the plan was leaked, U.S. President Donald Trump set a hard deadline for Kyiv to sign on to it before Thanksgiving, jolting Ukraine and Europe.

Ukraine and European leaders made a series of statements, stressing how grateful they are to Trump for his efforts to end the war while stating the need to ensure Kyiv has input into any deal.

In a joint statement on Friday, European leaders said they welcomed the plan, saying it contained "im-

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portant elements" and could be used as "a basis that will require additional work."

The U.S. and Ukraine dispatched delegations to Geneva with the aim of hashing out an agreement on Sunday.

Speaking after the Geneva talks, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio appeared to roll back on the hard deadline, saying that "more time is needed."

The U.S. and Ukraine said the talks were "productive" but neither side shared details of the issues still unresolved.

"It is important that European partners support our positions and our people," Zelenskyy said on Monday, emphasizing his reliance on European support in the face of U.S. pressure and at times open hostility from Trump, who claimed Sunday that Zelenskyy showed "zero gratitude" for U.S. support.

Peace talks distract from Zelenskyy's domestic woes

Zelenskyy sent his beleaguered presidential chief of staff, Andrii Yermak, to Geneva for talks with Rubio on Sunday, glossing over intense pressure to fire him.

Zelenskyy faced an unprecedented rebellion from his own lawmakers last week after investigators revealed a \$100 million corruption scandal involving top Ukrainian officials.

Although Yermak was not accused of any wrongdoing, several senior lawmakers in Zelenskyy's party said Yermak should take responsibility for the debacle to restore public trust. Some said that if Zelenskyy didn't fire him, the party could split, threatening the president's parliamentary majority.

But Zelenskyy resisted, saying Yermak was key to the negotiation process, according to a leading party lawmaker, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the issue publicly. On Friday, Zelenskyy urged Ukrainians to unite and "stop the political games" in light of the U.S. pressure.

"All of us together must not forget or confuse who exactly is the enemy of Ukraine today," Zelenskyy said in an address to the nation.

Zelenskyy is not under imminent threat

Despite the recent week of unprecedented criticism, including rebellion from within his own party, Zelenskyy's own position has not come under fire.

Even if Zelenskyy's grip on parliament weakens and his popularity plummets, it would be nearly impossible to legally unseat him while the war is still going on — unless he voluntarily resigns. Russia's invasion triggered martial law in Ukraine, indefinitely postponing presidential and parliamentary elections.

Ukraine's presidential term is normally five years and before the war the next elections had been scheduled for the spring of 2024.

But Zelenskyy will need support from parliament to push through any peace deal and questions about Yermak could resurface. And if he were to seek reelection after the war, his chances could be hurt if Yermak is still in the picture, political analysts say.

Pressure on the front and across the country

Against this backdrop, Russia's better equipped army has scaled up attacks along the front line and against energy facilities in the rear, putting further strain on Ukraine.

The Russian army continues to steadily advance in multiple areas. Russian forces are pushing into the towns of Kupiansk and Pokrovsk, where the fiercest battles rage.

Russian attacks on Ukraine's power plants in November have resulted in some of the worst electricity shortages since the war began. Meanwhile, after Russia destroyed much of Ukraine's gas extraction capabilities in two mass attacks this year, its state gas company, Naftogaz, has had to raise emergency funds to import expensive gas.

UConn's narrow victory keeps Huskies No. 1 in women's AP Top 25, South Carolina, UCLA and Texas next

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

UConn passed its first test of the season to remain No. 1 in The Associated Press Top 25 women's basketball poll on Monday.

The Huskies received 30 of the 32 first-place votes from a national media panel after beating No. 6 Michigan 72-69 last Friday in the Naismith Hall of Fame Women's Showcase.

South Carolina, UCLA and Texas followed UConn. That trio heads to Las Vegas this week for a Thanksgiving tournament that will have the Bruins and Longhorns facing each other. The Gamecocks play Duke in the other game Wednesday. The second day of the tournament is the next day.

LSU remained fifth with Michigan staying in the sixth spot after the close loss to the defending champions. Maryland, TCU, Oklahoma and Iowa State rounded out the top 10. The Cyclones are in the top 10 for the first time this season.

Rising Hawkeyes

Iowa made the biggest jump in the poll this week, climbing eight places to No. 11. The Hawkeyes knocked off then-No. 7 Baylor in the WBCA Showcase in Florida to remain unbeaten. It's the team's best ranking since Caitlin Clark led them to the NCAA championship game in 2024.

Falling down

North Carolina State, Baylor, Southern California and Oklahoma State all dropped in the poll after losses. The Wolfpack were stunned by Rhode Island and fell nine places to No. 25. The Bears fell eight spots to 15th after losing to Iowa. The Trojans dove seven places to 18th after a two-point loss to Notre Dame. The Cowgirls dropped to 24th after a loss at St. John's.

Conference supremacy

The Southeastern Conference has eight teams in the rankings again this week, including three of the top five. The Big Ten has seven schools in the poll, the Big 12 five and the Atlantic Coast Conference four. The Big East has one.

Game of the Week

No. 3 UCLA vs No. 4 Texas, Wednesday. A top five showdown in Las Vegas with two teams that made the Final Four last season. The Bruins have a size advantage with Lauren Betts while the Longhorns have one of the top players in the country in wing Madison Booker.

Here's what's next in the fight to curb climate change, now that talks in Brazil have ended

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

BELEM, Brazil (AP) — After an agreement from U.N. climate talks in the Amazon that fell short of many nations' expectations, experts found some bright spots alongside weighty reasons for worry in the fight against global warming.

The Associated Press asked 17 experts — diplomats, analysts, advocates and scientists — the simple question: After the talks, known as COP30, in the city of Belem, what's next?

"We leave here with a clear signal, very very clear signal, that we have entered the era of implementation," said U.N. Climate Executive Secretary Simon Stiell. "As we move forward, it's about doing. It's about rolling sleeves up."

Others look at the key failure of not delivering a road map to phase out coal, oil and gas — the main causes of warming. The road map had the public support of Brazil's president and more than 80 nations, but powerful opponents.

"This should have been the moment. A COP in the Amazon, a president calling for a fossil fuel transition road map, the science screaming for action. But the world blinked again," Panama climate negotiator Juan Carlos Monterrey Gómez said. "The next year will be harder on communities and ecosystems. Impacts

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will intensify, because emissions are not slowing down.”

Specifics in the deal to build on

Stiell pointed to seven different paragraphs in the agreements from Belem that could spur action for reduced greenhouse gas emissions and fewer fossil fuels. The COP presidency highlighted 117 “action agenda” items mostly for business to put pledges into real-life action.

That agenda includes a promise of \$1 trillion for improving energy grids and infrastructure; ramping up the production of biofuels; industrial decarbonization plans in developing countries; \$5.5 billion toward a fund to pay countries to keep their forests standing; and other pledges of funding, including from the private sector, for projects in areas like farming and adaptation. Among the most ambitious actions is a push to raise \$1 trillion for renewable electrical grids and energy storage.

One specific action that Stiell and several others emphasized was a new “global implementation accelerator,” a voluntary and cooperative system designed to help nations that want to do more than they’ve previously proposed in their climate fighting plans. The emphasis is on getting money to where it’s needed.

“If the ‘ambition accelerator’ can help to do this, it will make a massive difference to the global warming outlook,” said Bill Hare, CEO of the climate science and policy institute Climate Analytics.

A road map outside of U.N. talks

Because they couldn’t get a consensus at the talks in Belem, the COP30 presidency promised to create two new “road maps,” one to guide the transition away from fossil fuels and another to stop deforestation. But those road maps won’t have the force of something agreed upon in UN talks.

COP30 President André Corrêa do Lago said his office will study both areas extensively and use science and economics to come up with those plans. He said they would be tailored to different countries’ needs.

Do Lago also promised that his office will join with Colombia and the Netherlands to organize a special fossil fuel phaseout conference scheduled next April.

“If they come with real timelines, accountability and finance, they have the potential to shape global action and hold governments to their word,” said Mariana Paoli of the anti-poverty group Christian Aid. “They don’t have power on their own, but they can create the structure around which real change is built.”

A flawed process exposed

COPs need consensus, which often means the weakest deals because they have to please everyone, experts said.

“In future negotiations, it will be essential to control the petrostates,” New Climate Institute founder Niklas Hohne said. “They have understood that this process can be dangerous for them and they put even more effort than ever into blocking any progress.”

“The outcome of COP30 reminds us once again that action dependent on global consensus will never be enough to tackle the climate crisis at scale,” said Katharine Hayhoe, chief scientist at The Nature Conservancy.

Yet Paoli said these conferences are not powerless. She said they are “slow and imperfect, yet they have still moved the world forward — sometimes in unexpected ways.”

That means a mixed future

“Over the next year, we are likely to see continued escalation of climate impacts alongside gradual progress on climate action,” said Mohamed Adow, director of PowerShift Africa. “Renewable energy expansion will continue, but so will new fossil fuel investments in many parts of the world.”

Johan Rockstrom, director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Research, said all forms of extreme weather and climate events will increase, hitting the most vulnerable people hardest and threatening the survival of coral reefs and the very Amazon that hosted the talks.

“These are unacceptable outcomes of a solvable problem,” Rockstrom said.

Reasons for hope and action

With the United States’ federal government withdrawing from climate action under President Donald Trump, states, cities and businesses are cutting emissions in a way that will allow the U.S. to reach its climate goal, said former U.S. climate envoy Trigg Talley, now a representative of America’s All In.

“The COPs are only one part of a wide tapestry for action on climate change,” said World Resources

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Institute's International Climate Director David Waskow. "We need to pull all the levers at our disposal to limit global warming."

"The giant boulder of climate action is already rolling down the hill in the right direction," Hayhoe said. "It already has millions of hands on it. And as each of us adds our hand too, it goes a little faster."

Op-Ed: Why AP is standing for your right to speak freely

By JULIE PACE AP Executive Editor

NEW YORK (AP) — The Associated Press is back in a courtroom Monday defending itself and our principles against the White House, continuing to fight for the right of the press and public to speak freely without being targeted by their government based on its preferences.

This is not a controversial idea. Yet this foundational American freedom remains under threat.

It's why AP took a stand nine months ago when the government blocked us from covering presidential events because of what we call a body of water. We strongly believe this case could have much wider implications, not only for other news organizations, but for anyone in America.

Those ripples are becoming more evident since we first took this case to court.

In the last few months, we have seen the White House take legal action against other news organizations; the Pentagon require reporters to agree to a new press policy incompatible with journalistic standards; and journalists from other outlets restricted from covering the White House over what they've written.

All this makes it as important as it has ever been to be clear about the role of the press in a democracy and what exactly is at stake.

When we talk about press freedom, we are really talking about your freedom. Reporters ask questions, photographers take pictures, and video journalists record history on your behalf to ensure that you are informed about the things you don't have the time to unearth, watch or learn about for yourself.

Letting the government control which journalists can cover the highest office in the land and setting rules about what those journalists can say or write is a direct attempt to undercut the First Amendment. It should worry all of us. Because if a president of any party can use personal and political preference to choose which journalists to allow in – and kick others out because of the words they use – it means you are not getting a full picture of what is happening. It results in a filtered look at whoever holds the highest office, not the rigorous coverage the public deserves.

Independent, accurate, factual journalism is essential to civil society. AP journalists contribute to this every day. We bear witness, ask hard questions and document history as it unfolds, on behalf of the public. We always strive to get it right – and to own up to mistakes when we make them. We don't advocate or take a side. Our mission is to report the facts, plain and simple, so you can decide. That's it.

When fundamental freedoms are at stake, however, it becomes our duty, as an independent, not-for-profit news organization, with no owner and no shareholders, to stand up. On behalf of all of us.

Because, after all, AP's freedom of speech is yours, too.

Today in History: November 25 John F. Kennedy laid to rest at Arlington

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Tuesday, Nov. 25, the 329th day of 2025. There are 36 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Nov. 25, 1963, the body of President John F. Kennedy was laid to rest at Arlington National Cemetery after a funeral procession through Washington, D.C. An estimated 1 million people lined the somber procession route.

Also on this date:

In 1783, following the conclusion of the Revolutionary War, the last remaining British troops in the United States were evacuated from New York City.

In 1961, the USS Enterprise was commissioned; it was the first nuclear-powered aircraft carrier and

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remains the longest naval vessel ever built, at 1,123 feet (342 meters).

In 1986, the Iran-Contra affair erupted as President Ronald Reagan and Attorney General Edwin Meese revealed that profits from secret arms sales to Iran had been diverted to Nicaraguan rebels.

In 1999, Elian Gonzalez, a 5-year-old Cuban boy, was rescued by two sport fishermen off the coast of Florida, setting off an international custody battle that eventually saw him repatriated to his father in Cuba.

In 2001, as the war in Afghanistan entered its eighth week, CIA officer Johnny "Mike" Spann was killed during a prison uprising in Mazar-e-Sharif that erupted while he was interviewing detainees, becoming the first American combat casualty of the conflict.

In 2016, Fidel Castro, who led his rebels to a victorious revolution in 1959, embraced Soviet-style communism and defied the power of 10 U.S. presidents during his half-century of authoritarian rule in Cuba, died at age 90.

In 2020, Argentine soccer great Diego Maradona died of a heart attack at age 60. Maradona led Argentina to the 1986 World Cup title before later struggling with cocaine use and obesity.

Today's Birthdays: Football Hall of Fame coach Joe Gibbs is 85. Actor John Larroquette is 78. Dance judge Bruno Tonioli (TV: "Dancing with the Stars") is 70. Musician Amy Grant is 65. Football Hall of Famer Cris Carter is 60. Rapper-producer Erick Sermon is 57. Actor Jill Hennessy is 57. Actor Christina Applegate is 54. Former NFL quarterback Donovan McNabb is 49. Television personality Jenna Bush Hager and twin sister Barbara Pierce Bush, daughters of former President George W. Bush, are 44. Soccer manager and former player Xabi Alonso is 44. Actor Stephanie Hsu is 35.