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Sunday, Nov. 30

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

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

United Methodist: Worship at Conde, 8:15 a.m.; at Groton, 9:30 a.m. (3rd graders receiving Bibles); at Britton, 11:15 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 10:30 a.m.; No Sunday School.

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

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

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

Snow Queen Contest, 4 p.m.

4th grade GBB practice, 2 p.m.

1st grade GBB practice, 3:30 p.m.

2nd grade GBB practice, 4 p.m.
Dance Team practice, 5 p.m.

Mon., Dec. 1

Senior Menu: Hot beef combination, mashed potatoes, carrots, fruit

School Breakfast: Eggs.

School Lunch: Hot dogs, chips.

4th Grade GBB, 4 p.m.

JV/MS Boys BB at Faulkton Invite, 5:30 p.m.

5th Grade BBB, 6 p.m.

MS GBB hosts Clark/Willow Lake, 6:15 p.m.

Wrestling Kick-off Fundraiser, 6:30 p.m.

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1440

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

National Guard Shooting

The Trump administration plans to reexamine green card holders from 19 previously identified countries of concern (see list) after the suspect in Wednesday's shooting of two National Guard members in Washington, DC, was identified as an Afghan national living in the US legally. President Donald Trump also expressed intentions to permanently pause migration from poorer countries.

Charges for the suspect, Rahmanullah Lakanwal, were upgraded to first-degree murder after National Guard member Sarah Beckstrom, 20, died of wounds Thursday. Her counterpart, 24-year-old Andrew Wolfe, remains hospitalized in critical condition. Both are members of the West Virginia National Guard who had been deployed in Washington, DC, since August as part of Trump's crackdown on crime. The suspect's motive is unclear as of this writing. See witness photos used to analyze the attack [here](#).

The suspect immigrated to the US in 2021 through a special visa program after working with the CIA during the Afghanistan War. He was granted asylum in April.

At least 128 people killed and over 8 arrested after Hong Kong apartment fire.

Hong Kong's anticorruption agency has arrested subcontractors, engineering consultants, and project managers in connection with a deadly fire at a high-rise apartment complex. Officials said the blaze, which began Wednesday afternoon and spread across seven towers, was likely ignited by flammable construction netting used during an ongoing renovation project.

Ukraine president's chief of staff resigns amid corruption probe.

Ukrainian anticorruption agencies raided the residence and reportedly the office of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's chief of staff, Andrii Yermak, as part of a wider probe into a \$100M energy sector corruption scandal. The raid has intensified political turmoil in Ukraine, with lawmakers demanding accountability amid pressure to address corruption as the government seeks continued Western support.

At least 321 people killed in Southeast Asia flooding and landslides.

Large parts of Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia have been drenched by cyclone-fueled torrential rain and a rare tropical storm in the Strait of Malacca, a roughly 560-mile-long stretch of water that connects the Indian and Pacific oceans. The floods have displaced tens of thousands of people.

Mystery foot suggests new early human relative.

Scientists conclude a roughly 3.4 million-year-old fossil found in Ethiopia belonged to a previously unknown ancient human relative. The foot has an opposable big toe, hinting the owner was a skilled climber who spent more time in trees than Lucy, another human relative from the same time and place. The finding raises questions about humans' direct ancestors and suggests evolution may not have been linear.

Ancient West Texas rock art influenced Mesoamerican cosmology.

Researchers have found that Indigenous people along the US-Mexico border created Pecos River-style rock art—vast, multicolored murals—that date back 6,000 years and span roughly 175 generations. They also identified recurring symbols and motifs that point to a shared "cosmovision," reflecting beliefs about the universe.

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Judge dismisses Georgia election interference case against Trump and others.

Prosecutor Pete Skandalakis asked the judge to dismiss racketeering charges against President Donald Trump, Rudy Giuliani, and 17 others. He took over the case this month after his nonpartisan organization of Georgia prosecutors failed to find someone willing to replace Fani Willis, the original prosecutor who was disqualified from the case due to a romantic relationship with a prosecutor she had hired.

Olympic flame is lit for the Milano-Cortina 2026 Winter Olympics.

The Olympic flame was lit in Greece Wednesday ahead of the 2026 Winter Olympics, running Feb. 4-22. When the flame reaches Italy Thursday, it will begin a nearly 7,500-mile, 63-day relay to Milan's San Siro Stadium for the Feb. 6 opening ceremony. The flame is typically lit by capturing the sun's rays with a concave mirror, but overcast skies forced officials to use a backup flame kindled during a rehearsal.

Humankind(ness)

Today, we're sharing a story from reader Gabrielle M. in Madison, Indiana.

"My significant other travels often for work, sometimes getting into hotels very late at night. Recently, on one such occasion, he was waved over by the night manager, questioning what he was looking for in the vending area. Upon hearing that he was hungry and hadn't eaten dinner, (the manager) invited (my significant other) to join him in the takeout meal he had just procured from a local restaurant. Not taking no for an answer, he proceeded to take out two plates and dole out the hot, fresh food for the both of them. They shared a meal and proceeded to have a great conversation, all by the glow of the late-night lights."

NSU Women's Game Postponed

Aberdeen, S.D. – The Northern State University women's basketball team's non-conference contest at Sioux Falls scheduled for Saturday, November 29 has been postponed due to weather.

...WINTER WEATHER ADVISORY NOW IN EFFECT UNTIL 6 PM CST THIS EVENING...

- * WHAT...Snow. Additional snow accumulations between 1 and 3 inches.
- * WHERE...Brown, Clark, and Spink Counties.
- * WHEN...Until 6 PM CST this evening.
- * IMPACTS...Plan on slippery road conditions.

PRECAUTIONARY/PREPAREDNESS ACTIONS...

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

9th Annual Holiday Party Live and Silent Auctions Olive Grove Golf Clubhouse

Groton, SD

Bidding
closes at 9
p.m.
Live
Auction
begins at 9
p.m.

Sat., Dec. 6

Holiday Party:
6 p.m. to close
A variety of snacks
served



**Silent Auction Basket
Items**

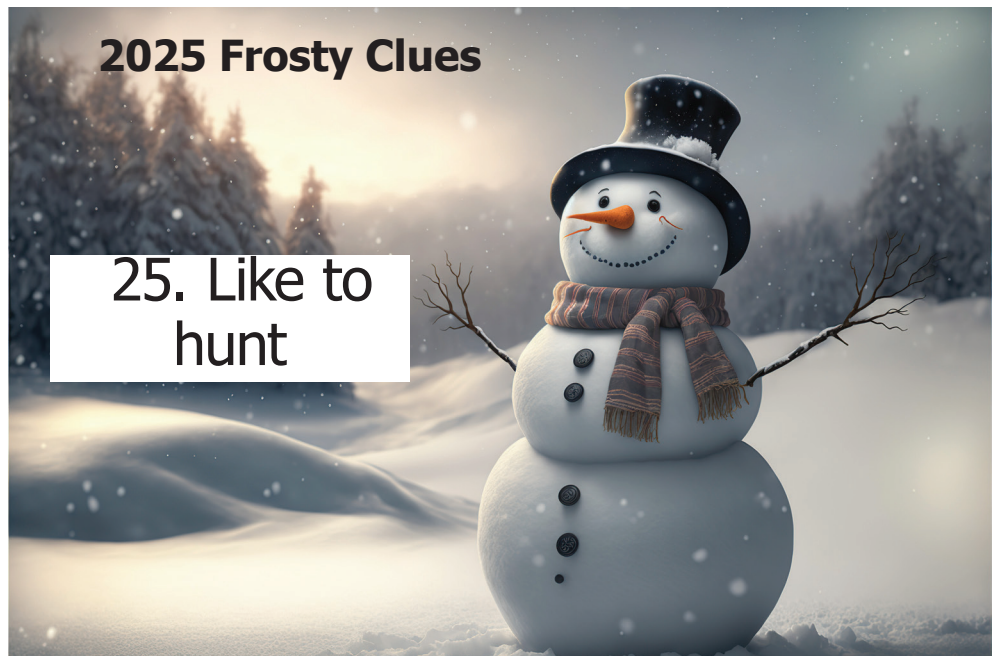
**Come on our for a fun evening
and support your local golf
course**

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

25. Like to
hunt



Pennington County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash
Where: Bombing Range Road and Sheep Mountain Road, Scenic, SD
When: 12:39 a.m., Friday, November 28, 2025

Driver 1: 37-year-old male from Fort Bidwell, CA, serious, non-life-threatening injuries
Vehicle 1: 2001 Mercedes Benz C-Class
Seat belt Used: Under investigation
Charges Filed: Vehicular Homicide and Driving Under the Influence of Alcohol, Drug or Intoxicant.
Passenger 1: 25-year-old male from Kyle, SD, fatal injuries
Seat belt Used: No

Pennington County, S.D.- One man died and another was seriously injured in a single vehicle crash early Friday morning in Scenic, SD.

The names of the persons involved have not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver of a 2001 Mercedes Benz C-Class was traveling southbound on Bombing Range Road near Sheep Mountain Road. The vehicle left the roadway to the right and overturned several times in the ditch. A passenger in the front seat was partially ejected during the crash and was pronounced deceased at the scene. The driver sustained serious, non-life-threatening injuries.

Names Released in Roberts County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash
Where: 105th Street and 456th Avenue, one mile east of Claire City, SD
When: 10:48 p.m., Sunday, November 23, 2025

Driver 1: Kasey Lee Stickland, 27-year-old male from Lidgerwood, ND, fatal injuries
Vehicle 1: 1992 GMC Sierra
Seat belt Used: Under investigation
Passenger 1: Garret Devon Kriz, 28-year-old male from Claire City, SD, serious, non-life-threatening injuries
Seat belt Used: Under investigation

Roberts County, S.D.- One man died and another was seriously injured Sunday evening in a single vehicle crash one mile east of Claire City, SD.

Preliminary crash information indicates Kasey Lee Stickland, the driver of a 1992 GMC Sierra, was traveling eastbound on 105th Street near 456th Avenue and lost control of the vehicle, entered the ditch and rolled.

Stickland sustained fatal injuries. A passenger in the vehicle, Garret Devon Kriz, received serious, non-life-threatening injuries.

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

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

Names Released in Hand County Fatal Crash

What: Two vehicle fatal crash
Where: N Broadway Avenue and 7th Street, Miller, SD
When: 11:38 a.m., Tuesday, November 25, 2025

Driver 1: Leland James Cain, 82-year-old male from Miller, SD, fatal injuries
Vehicle 1: 2022 Ford Edge
Seat belt Used: Under investigation

Driver 2: Joshua Dean Steffensen, 48-year-old male from Hetland, SD, no injuries
Vehicle 2: 2007 Peterbilt Conventional 379
Seat belt Used: Under investigation

Hand County, S.D.- A Miller, SD man died in a two vehicle crash Tuesday morning in Miller, SD.

Preliminary crash information indicates Leland James Cain, the driver of a 2022 Ford Edge, was traveling westbound on 7th Street and failed to come to a complete stop at the stop sign at the intersection of North Broadway Avenue. The Ford collided with a southbound semi in the intersection.

Cain sustained fatal injuries. The driver of the semi, Joshua Dean Steffensen, was not injured.

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

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



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Thanksgiving death brings the number of suspected prison drug overdose fatalities in 2025 to eight

BY: JOHN HULT

The state Division of Criminal Investigation will lead an inquiry into the eighth suspected fatal overdose in South Dakota's prison system this year.

The state Department of Corrections announced the Thanksgiving night death of 37-year-old Larry Thomas Dukes Franklin on Friday. Franklin was incarcerated at the South Dakota State Penitentiary's maximum security Jameson Annex in Sioux Falls.

DCI spokesman Tony Mangan confirmed that the agency is investigating the situation as a suspected overdose.

Franklin's death is the fourth this month in the state's prison system. Overdoses are suspected in two of the other November deaths, of 33-year-old Travis Long Fox at the penitentiary, and 46-year-old Timothy Tyree at Mike Durfee State Prison in Springfield.

Shane Ostercamp, 44, also died in November. He died in a comfort care setting in Springfield.

Five other inmates died of suspected or confirmed overdoses this year before November, all but one from a synthetic drug known as "K2" or "spice."

Attorney General Marty Jackley has indicted a handful of people in and outside the prison system for drug distribution, including one former corrections officer. Of the eight total suspected overdose deaths this year, four occurred after Jackley announced the most recent round of charges in mid-September. One of the deaths occurred less than a week after the press conference announcing them.

Twenty-two men have now died in Department of Corrections custody in calendar year 2025, the highest figure in recent memory. In addition to the drug deaths, four died by suicide and others died of natural causes.

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



The warden's office building at the South Dakota State Penitentiary in Sioux Falls.

(Photo by John Hult/South Dakota Searchlight)

Retired federal security engineer worries workforce cuts will leave U.S. vulnerable

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER



Daryl Zimmerman is president of the South Dakota Federation of the National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association.

(Photo by Seth Tupper/
South Dakota Searchlight)

Concern: That's what Daryl Zimmerman, president of the South Dakota Federation of the National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association, has heard over the last year from federal workers.

Concern about federal duties not being carried out effectively, concern for colleagues' wellbeing, concern about how the reduction in the federal workforce will affect the economy, and concern about jobs being cut at any moment.

About 154,000 federal employees took buyouts — officially described as deferred resignations — early this year, providing them with pay through the end of the fiscal year in exchange for leaving their position. The Trump administration made the offers as a way to reduce the size of the federal workforce. Office of Personnel Management Director Scott Kuper said recently that he expects the total decrease in the federal workforce to reach more than 300,000 eventually.

During the recent federal government shutdown, an estimated 670,000 federal employees were furloughed, and another 730,000 were required to work without pay.

Excluding contractors and postal workers, there are 8,123 federal civilian employees living in South Dakota. When retirees are added, South Dakota's "federal family" is just shy of 22,000, Zimmerman said. Just under 800 belong to his organization, which advocates for members, their pay and their benefits.

"The federal employee is there to serve the American public. We are here to help you," Zimmerman said. "We're not the enemy. We're not the root of the problem. We're just trying to do our job to take care of you."

'We've lost institutional knowledge'

Zimmerman worked for decades for the U.S. State Department as a security engineer. He was paid lower than what he would have received in the private sector, but he felt his role was noble. He felt called to serve his country even into retirement.

The 68-year-old participated in the State Department's re-employed annuitant program after he retired in 2010, which allows retired foreign service or civil service workers to temporarily fill staffing gaps or work on special projects. Zimmerman, who lives in Sturgis, would often live in a country overseas for a few months to fill critical roles.

Zimmerman retired completely in October 2024, and has since heard from former colleagues about Department of Government Efficiency cuts. A Trump executive order in February directed agency heads to "separate from Federal service temporary employees and reemployed annuitants working in areas that will likely be subject" to reductions in force.

A drastic reduction in the workforce means there aren't enough people to do necessary work, which requires cutting back programs, Zimmerman said. He thinks cutting back the State Department's re-employed annuitant program makes the problem worse and will jeopardize national security.

"I've seen programs cut that I don't think they've thought through the impact of those cuts," Zimmerman said.

It'll take years and significant costs to build back the federal government, even to verify and reanalyze the need of programs, let alone hire people back, Zimmerman said. Many federal jobs require a specialized skillset.

"We've lost institutional knowledge," Zimmerman said, "and that costs a lot of money and time to rebuild it back to where we need it to be."

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.

National Guard shooting suspect to face murder charge

Trump makes sweeping pledge to crack down further on immigration

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT AND ASHLEY MURRAY

The United States Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia announced Friday it has charged the man who allegedly shot two National Guard members earlier this week with first-degree murder after one of the soldiers died as a result of her injuries.

Other charges include three counts of possession of a firearm during a crime of violence and two counts of assault with intent to kill while armed.

The attack shocked the country and has led to a renewed discussion about immigration policy as well as the war in Afghanistan and how the country withdrew during the Biden administration.

President Donald Trump announced late Thursday night he intends to "permanently pause migration from all Third World Countries," though he didn't specify which countries would be included or exactly how such an order would be implemented.

Trump wrote on social media he plans to "remove anyone who is not a net asset to the United States, or is incapable of loving our Country, end all Federal benefits and subsidies to noncitizens of our Country, denaturalize migrants who undermine domestic tranquility, and deport any Foreign National who is a public charge, security risk, or non-compatible with Western Civilization."

The post came just hours after U.S. Army Spc. Sarah Beckstrom, 20, died from injuries she sustained during a Wednesday shooting a couple of blocks from the White House. The other victim, U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Andrew Wolfe, 24, remained hospitalized in critical condition. Both were West Virginia National Guard members.

The alleged shooter, Rahmanullah Lakanwal, 29, an Afghan national who worked with United States forces, entered the country on Sept. 8, 2021, as part of Operation Allies Welcome, according to a statement from Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem.

No details of immigration proposals

The White House press office declined to say Friday which countries would have their residents barred from entering the United States under the new order, referring back to the president's social media posts, which did not include a list.

"Only REVERSE MIGRATION can fully cure this situation," Trump wrote. "Other than that, HAPPY THANKS-GIVING TO ALL, except those that hate, steal, murder, and destroy everything that America stands for — You won't be here for long!"

Homeland Security Assistant Secretary Tricia McLaughlin said in a Thursday afternoon statement the administration would pause immigration applications for Afghan nationals.



A small memorial of flowers and an American flag outside the Farragut West Metro station in Washington, D.C., near where two members of the West Virginia National Guard were shot on Nov. 26. (Photo by Andrew Leyden/Getty Images)

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"Effective immediately, processing of all immigration requests relating to Afghan nationals is stopped indefinitely pending further review of security and vetting protocols," she wrote.

The Trump administration will also review "all asylum cases approved under the Biden Administration," McLaughlin said, saying those cases required more vetting.

Biden Afghanistan policy blamed

In a separate post, Trump blamed former President Joe Biden for allowing the alleged shooter into the country.

McLaughlin echoed that sentiment.

Lakanwal "was paroled in by the Biden Administration. After that, Biden signed into law that parole program, and then entered into the 2023 Ahmed Court Settlement, which bound (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services) to adjudicate his asylum claim on an expedited basis. Regardless if his asylum was granted or not, this monster would not have been removed because of his parole."

The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, following two decades of war that began as a result of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, has been widely criticized.

Many of the Afghan nationals who aided the United States and allied countries were left behind as the Taliban quickly regained control.

The nonprofit #AfghanEvac, formed in August 2021 to help resettle Afghan refugees, criticized the administration's proposal to indefinitely halt the processing of immigration requests from Afghans.

"Our allies are under attack today because of the actions of one deranged man. Those actions should not be ascribed to an entire community," the organization posted on social media late Thursday.

In a lengthier statement issued Wednesday following the shooting of two National Guard members, the organization's president, Shawn VanDiver, said #AfghanEvac "expects and fully supports the perpetrator facing full accountability and prosecution under the law."

VanDiver continued: "AfghanEvac rejects any attempt to leverage this tragedy as a political ploy to isolate or harm Afghans who have resettled in the United States."

Motive unknown

Lakanwal had been residing in Washington state and drove across the country before the shooting, according to Jeanine Pirro, U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia.

Officials investigating the shooting have yet to release a possible motive.

Lakanwal was granted asylum in the U.S. in April, according to reporting by many media outlets, including NPR.

The Department of Homeland Security did not confirm for States Newsroom the date Lakanwal was granted asylum.

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.

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

Trump social media post claims to void Biden orders

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

President Donald Trump said Friday he will try to reverse any law, pardon or still-in-effect executive order that former President Joe Biden signed with an autopen, though it wasn't immediately clear how that would work or whether it would be legal.

Trump declared in a social media post that any documents Biden signed with the autopen are "hereby terminated, and of no further force or effect."

"I am hereby cancelling all Executive Orders, and anything else that was not directly signed by Crooked Joe Biden, because the people who operated the Autopen did so illegally," Trump alleged. "Joe Biden was not involved in the Autopen process and, if he says he was, he will be brought up on charges of perjury. Thank you for your attention to this matter!"

The White House press office didn't immediately respond to a request for the list of documents Trump believes he has the ability to rescind based on the manner they were signed.

States Newsroom also asked the Trump administration if officials believe the president would need to sign an executive order in order to implement his social media post.

Experts dismissed earlier autopen challenge

The post was similar to one Trump published in March when he claimed any pardons Biden signed with the autopen were void, something legal experts said at the time was "absurd" and a "red herring."

Trump brought up his frustration with autopen use again in June when he ordered the White House legal counsel and U.S. attorney general to investigate when and why Biden administration staff used an autopen.

Trump said during an Oval Office appearance at the time he hadn't found any evidence Biden aides violated the law.

"No, but I've uncovered the human mind," Trump said. "I was in a debate with the human mind and I didn't think he knew what the hell he was doing. So it's one of those things, one of those problems. We can't ever allow that to happen to our country."

Biden and spokespeople working for him have repeatedly said he knew what official documents were being signed in his name and rejected claims that White House staff used the autopen without his authorization or knowledge.

Biden released a statement in June following the Trump memorandum, saying the investigation "is nothing more than a distraction by Donald Trump and Congressional Republicans who are working to push disastrous legislation that would cut essential programs like Medicaid and raise costs on American families, all to pay for tax breaks for the ultra-wealthy and big corporations."

"Let me be clear: I made the decisions during my presidency. I made the decisions about the pardons, executive orders, legislation, and proclamations," Biden wrote at the time. "Any suggestion that I didn't is ridiculous and false."

While presidents have regularly rescinded their predecessors executive orders, usually within their first few days or weeks in office, Congress would very likely need to act in order to alter or eliminate any laws that Biden signed with an autopen. Trump seeking to overturn a law, or part of a law, unilaterally would likely lead to a lawsuit over whether he holds that power.



President Donald Trump speaks during an executive order signing in the Oval Office on Feb. 11, 2025. (Photo by Andrew Harnik/Getty Images)

Trump doesn't cite legal authority

It also wasn't immediately clear what legal authority Trump believes he has as president to undo pardons if Biden used an autopen to sign the documents.

David Super, a constitutional and administrative law professor at Georgetown University, told States Newsroom in March that "the Constitution does not require signatures for pardons. It simply says the president has the power to pardon."

"So if President Biden wanted to simply verbally tell someone they're pardoned, he could do that. It wouldn't have to be in writing at all," he said. "Administratively, of course, we want things in writing. It makes things a lot simpler, but there's no constitutional requirement."

Ashley Murray contributed to this report.

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.

Homeland Security wants state driver's license data for sweeping citizenship program

The Trump administration may turn to an obscure data-sharing network for access

BY: JONATHAN SHORMAN

The Trump administration wants access to state driver's license data on millions of U.S. residents as it builds a powerful citizenship verification program amid its clampdown on voter fraud and illegal immigration.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security seeks access to an obscure computer network used by law enforcement agencies, according to a federal notice, potentially allowing officials to bypass negotiating with states for the records.

The information would then be plugged into a Homeland Security program known as SAVE that Trump officials have deployed to search for rare instances of alleged noncitizen voters and to verify citizenship. The plan comes as the Trump administration demands states share copies of their voter files that include sensitive personal data that also is being plugged into SAVE; it is suing some states that refuse.

Trump officials tout the SAVE program as a boost for election integrity. But critics of the program warn the federal government is constructing a massive, centralized information source on Americans. They fear President Donald Trump or a future president could use the tool to surveil residents or target political enemies.

"What this SAVE database expansion will do is serve as a central pillar to build dossiers on all of us," said Cody Venzke, a senior policy counsel at the American Civil Liberties Union.

At the same time, Homeland Security Investigations and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE, conducted nearly 900,000 searches for state driver's license and other motor vehicle data over the past year using the same data-sharing network that Homeland Security wants to link to SAVE, according



A California Highway Patrol officer talks to a driver during a traffic stop in October. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security wants access to state driver's license data as it builds a powerful citizenship verification program.

(Photo by Justin Sullivan/Getty Images)

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to information provided to Congress. The network is called Nlets — formerly the National Law Enforcement Telecommunications System, now known as the International Justice and Public Safety Network.

Dozens of congressional Democrats in mid-November warned Democratic governors that Nlets makes driver's license data available to ICE, including from states that restrict cooperation with the agency. While ICE, a Homeland Security agency, has long had access to Nlets, some Democrats are voicing renewed alarm amid Trump's sweeping deportation campaign.

At least five states — Illinois, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York and Washington — have blocked Nlets' ability to share their driver's license records with ICE, according to the Nov. 12 letter from 40 Democratic lawmakers. Oregon also is taking steps to block access.

In Colorado, state Sen. Julie Gonzales said she is willing to advance bills to block the Nlets data sharing. Gonzales, a Democrat who chairs the Colorado Senate Judiciary Committee, has previously sponsored legislation to limit what personal information is shared with the federal government for immigration enforcement.

"It is like playing Whac-A-Mole, but the Constitution applies to ICE, too," Gonzales said.

The recent developments underscore the ongoing struggle between Democratic states and the Trump administration over how much access Homeland Security should have to their residents' personal data. For their part, some Republican state officials have voiced support for the administration's moves and want to aid the search for noncitizen voters and individuals in the country illegally.

Data and privacy experts told Stateline the current moment could lead to more centralization of personal data by the federal government and an eroding expectation of privacy when it comes to driver's license information. The federal government is for the first time essentially building a U.S. citizenship database, they said.

Homeland Security is proposing to take Nlets outside its intended use, said John Davisson, senior counsel and director of litigation at the Electronic Privacy Information Center, a Washington, D.C.-based research and advocacy group that argues privacy is a fundamental right.

Nlets is a nonprofit organization that facilitates data sharing among law enforcement agencies across state lines. At a basic level, Nlets is the system that allows police officers to quickly look up the driver's license information of out-of-state motorists they pull over.

States decide what information to make available through Nlets, and which agencies can access it. Each state has an Nlets member, typically that state's highway patrol or equivalent agency. Several federal law enforcement agencies also are members.

"It appears that DHS is eyeing it for something quite different, for mass extraction of driver's license information that would be far beyond the sort of targeted enforcement purposes of a system like Nlets," Davisson said.

Driver data idea floated in May

Homeland Security's SAVE program — Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements — was originally intended to help state and local officials verify the immigration status of individual noncitizens seeking government benefits. But it can now scan state voter rolls for alleged noncitizen voters.

In the past, SAVE could search only one name at a time. Now it can conduct bulk searches, allowing officials to potentially scan through information on millions of registered voters. Federal officials in May connected the program to Social Security data; linking driver's license data through Nlets would provide an additional mountain of data on U.S. residents.

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan group that advocates for voting rights, filed a federal lawsuit in September against Homeland Security over the transformation of SAVE. In its complaint, the organization accused the department of ignoring federal law to create comprehensive databases of American citizens' data.

U.S. District Court Judge Sparkle L. Sooknanan, a Biden appointee, last week declined to temporarily block SAVE's overhaul while the lawsuit proceeds. But Sooknanan wrote in an opinion that based on the current record, "the Court is troubled by the recent changes to SAVE and doubts the lawfulness of the

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Government's actions."

Homeland Security publicly confirmed it wants to connect Nlets to SAVE in an Oct. 31 Federal Register notice. The notice said driver's licenses are the most widely used form of identification, and by working with states and national agencies, including Nlets, "SAVE will use driver's license and state identification card numbers to check and confirm identity information."

The agency also privately floated its interest in Nlets months earlier.

According to minutes of a May virtual meeting of the National Association of Secretaries of State Elections Committee, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) official Brian Broderick told the group that his agency — the Homeland Security agency that administers SAVE — was seeking "to avoid having to connect to 50 state databases" and wanted a "simpler solution," such as Nlets.

The minutes were contained in records from the Texas Secretary of State's Office obtained by American Oversight, a nonpartisan transparency group that frequently files records requests. Mother Jones magazine first reported on the records.

Nlets and the Texas Secretary of State's Office didn't respond to requests for comment.

On Friday, National Association of Secretaries of State spokesperson Brittany Hamilton wrote in an email to Stateline that at that time, "we have not received specific updates from USCIS on this aspect of driver's license data potential usage."

In a statement, USCIS spokesperson Matthew Tragesser encouraged all federal, state and local agencies to use SAVE.

"USCIS remains dedicated to eliminating barriers to securing the nation's electoral process. By allowing states to efficiently verify voter eligibility, we are reinforcing the principle that America's elections are reserved exclusively for American citizens," Tragesser wrote.

State restrictions flawed, lawmakers say

Some Democrats are separately pushing to limit ICE's access to driver's license data through Nlets. The Nov. 12 congressional letter warned that while some states have restrictions on data sharing with immigration authorities, the limits are often ineffective because of major flaws.

State limits sometimes apply only to state motor vehicle agencies, which don't connect to Nlets — and often don't apply to state police agencies that do connect, the letter said. And even though state restrictions target data-sharing for immigration enforcement, Nlets doesn't indicate the purpose of a request.

"Because of the technical complexity of Nlets' system, few state government officials understand how their state is sharing their residents' data with federal and out-of-state agencies," wrote U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden of Oregon, U.S. Rep. Adriano Espaillat of New York and 38 other Democrats.

Homeland Security didn't address Stateline's questions about ICE's access to state driver's license data through Nlets.

Advocates for immigrants have long raised concerns about ICE access to state driver's license data through Nlets. Nineteen states allow residents to obtain driver's licenses regardless of immigration status, according to the National Immigration Law Center, an immigrant advocacy group. Those driver's license records represent a wealth of information on noncitizens.

While ICE can't use Nlets to obtain records of all noncitizens issued licenses, the agency can use the search tool to obtain a variety of information on individuals, such as date of birth, sex, address and Social Security number, according to the law center. Sometimes a photo is also available — a particular concern for immigrants and their advocates amid reports that ICE has deployed facial recognition tools in the field.

"I think that for many years, folks around the country that are concerned about privacy, that are concerned about immigrants, have been trying to sound the alarm about this issue," said Matthew Lopas, director of state advocacy and technical assistance at the National Immigration Law Center.

Stateline contacted all 50 state governors to ask about Nlets. Forty-one offices didn't respond and most others provided high-level statements or referred questions to other agencies.

But Maryland indicated it was taking "proactive measures" to ensure that federal agencies' access to its data through Nlets complies with state and federal law. A 2021 state law limits the sharing of driver's

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license data with federal immigration authorities.

Maryland "is working with Nlets to ensure that Marylanders' data is not misused for civil immigration enforcement absent a valid judicial warrant, and we intend to share more information on that effort as we are able," Rhyan Lake, a spokesperson for Maryland Democratic Gov. Wes Moore, said in a statement to Stateline.

The South Dakota Department of Public Safety, which is overseen by Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden, cautioned against limiting data-sharing among law enforcement. Records obtained through Nlets include data on wanted individuals and other information that can help identify potential threats to officers and agents, the department said in a statement provided by Director of Communications Brad Reiners.

"We reject the concerns outlined in the [Democratic lawmakers'] letter and remain deeply concerned about the potentially dangerous consequences of limiting access to this information," the statement says.

In Oregon, state officials plan to cut off ICE's Nlets access to its driver's license data, but no date has been set, Oregon State Police Capt. Kyle Kennedy, an agency spokesperson, wrote in an email.

"We are working with other states to assist in considering a path forward," Kennedy wrote.

Stateline reporter Jonathan Shorman can be reached at jshorman@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.

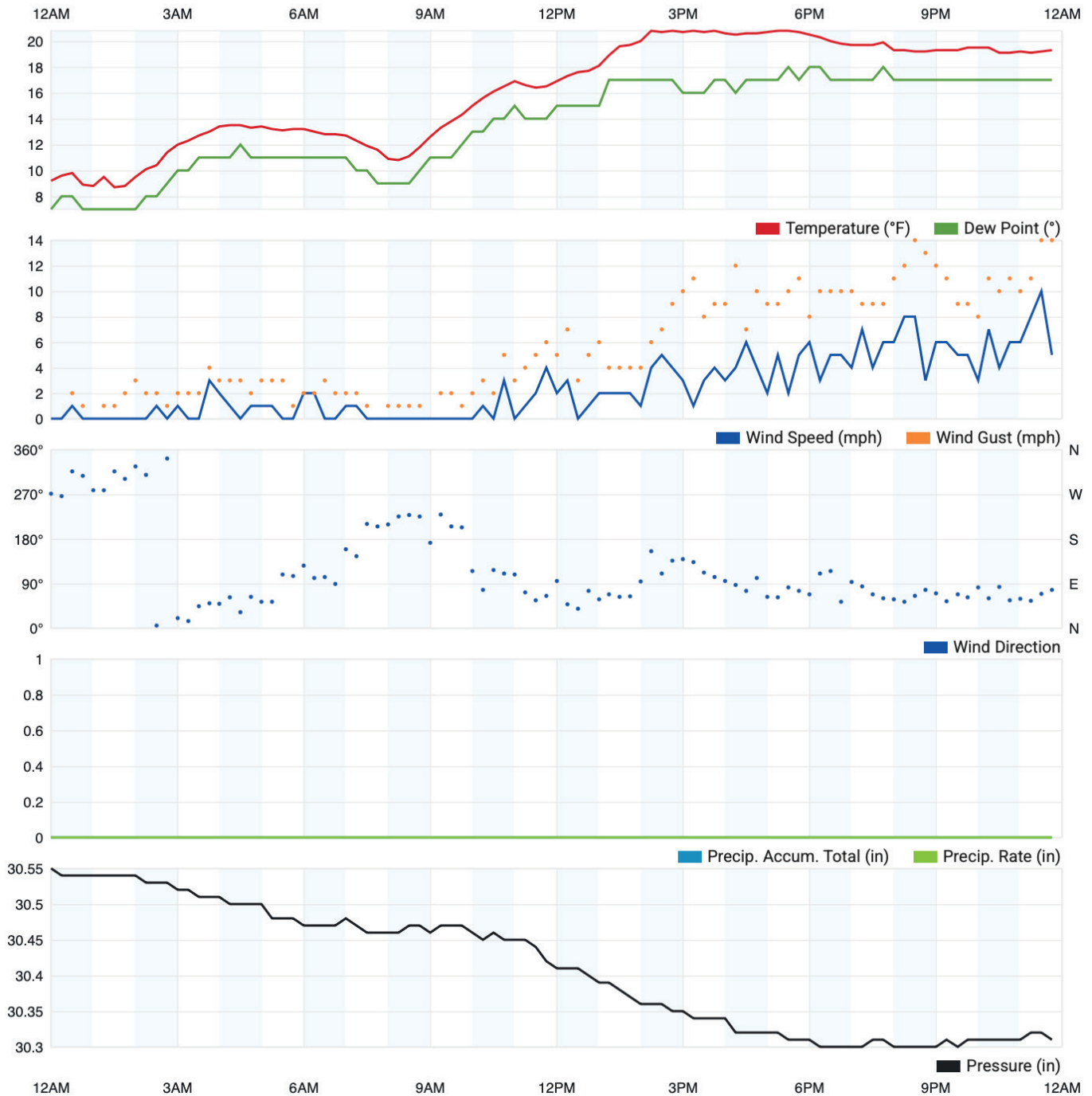
Jonathan Shorman covers democracy for Stateline, including elections, voting rights, fights over state vs. federal power, civil liberties and more.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

November 28, 2025



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Winter Weather Advi...

Today



100% → 50%


Tonight




Sunday



Sunday Night



Monday



High: 19 °F

Low: -2 °F

High: 11 °F

Low: -5 °F

High: 17 °F

Snow then
Chance Snow

Mostly Cloudy

Mostly Sunny

Mostly Cloudy

Mostly Sunny



Winter Storm Continues Today

November 29, 2025
3:39 AM

Be Weather Aware especially if you are traveling today!

Key Messages

- A band of snow will continue to track eastward with more light to moderate snow through the day today

Snow/Winds

- Light fluffy snow
- Wind gusts 20 to 35 mph
- Less blowing snow compared to last Tuesday's storm. However, drifting snow across roads is still possible

NEW What Has Changed

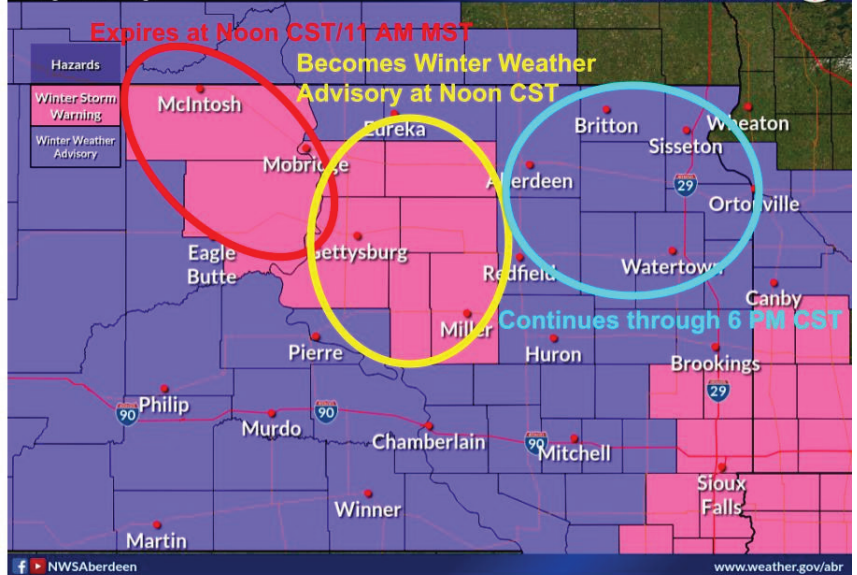
- Some headlines have been extended into the late afternoon/evening hours

Next Scheduled Update

- Final update

Winter Weather Headlines

Through this evening



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

A band of snow will continue to track eastward with more light to moderate snow through the day today. The Winter Storm Warning remains in effect until Noon CST/11 AM MST and the Winter Weather Advisory remains in effect for central SD until 3 PM and for eastern SD until 6 PM today.

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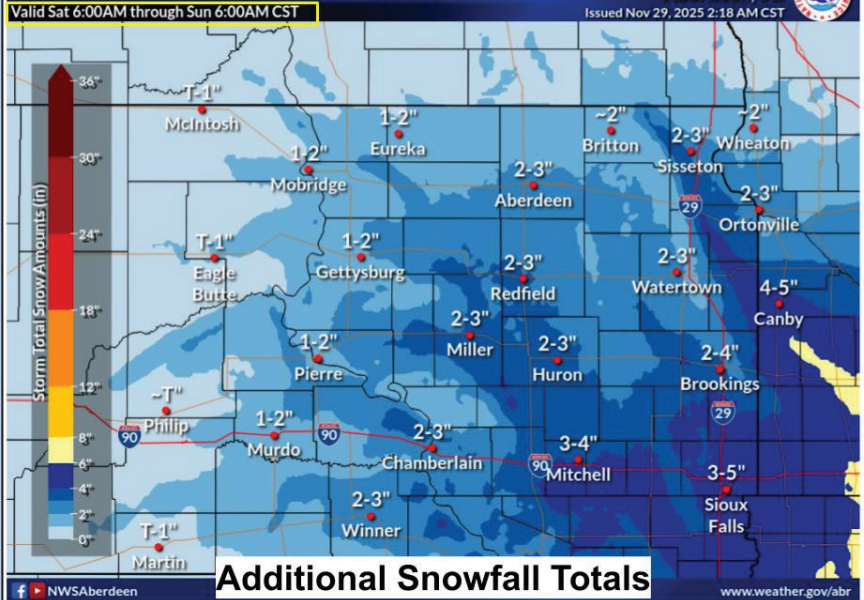
Additional Snowfall Amounts Through This Evening

November 29, 2025
3:42 AM

A Storm System will deliver snow to South Dakota and west central Minnesota

- A second surge of light snow continues this morning. Snow will gradually taper off west to east through this evening
- Additional snowfall totals of 2 to 3 inches possible with locally higher amounts
- Be sure to stay up to date on the latest forecast, especially if you are traveling

Expected Snowfall - Official NWS Forecast



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD



Wind Forecast and Timing

November 29, 2025
3:44 AM

Key Messages

- Wind gusts overall top out between 20 to 35 mph
 - **Minor blowing & drifting snow** is possible through this evening

Maximum Wind Gust Forecast (mph)

	11/29 Sat							11/30 Sun	
	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am
Aberdeen	18	20	23	24	24	17	16	16	17
Britton	14	17	21	23	23	20	17	17	18
Brookings	20	21	25	26	28	26	25	23	22
Chamberlain	15	20	28	32	31	28	23	20	17
Clark	26	20	24	26	26	24	23	21	20
Eagle Butte	20	28	31	31	29	23	22	18	17
Ellendale	17	18	22	23	23	17	18	20	20
Eureka	25	18	22	25	25	20	20	18	17
Gettysburg	26	21	25	29	28	23	21	20	18
Huron	16	18	23	28	29	25	23	21	20
Kennebec	14	25	33	37	36	29	23	20	18
McIntosh	18	23	25	28	26	22	20	17	15
Milbank	17	14	18	22	23	22	22	20	20
Miller	15	21	26	29	29	23	21	20	20
Mobridge	24	21	24	25	25	21	20	18	16
Murdo	16	29	35	36	35	26	22	18	16
Pierre	15	21	28	31	30	24	20	17	14
Redfield	15	20	25	29	29	22	20	18	18
Sisseton	13	13	18	21	22	21	20	20	20
Watertown	22	20	23	25	25	24	23	21	21
Webster	20	20	22	25	25	23	23	21	21
Wheaton	14	13	16	20	20	20	20	20	20



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Wind Chills Through Monday

November 29, 2025
3:47 AM

Key Messages

- Core of coldest air moves overhead Sunday & Monday
 - [Wind chills drop into the single digits to teens below zero](#)
 - Coldest overnight and early in the morning (outlined in red)

Minimum Wind Chill Forecast (°F)

	11/29 Sat			11/30 Sun			12/1 Mon				
	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm
Aberdeen	2	4	-4	-9	-14	-5	-17	-17	-8	2	-12
Britton	1	4	0	-9	-13	-6	-17	-17	-6	0	-10
Brookings	4	4	-1	-5	-7	-1	-8	-8	-5	4	1
Chamberlain	4	5	-1	-3	-6	4	-3	-3	2	13	2
Clark	3	0	-3	-8	-14	-7	-13	-13	-6	1	-6
Eagle Butte	-6	0	-10	-16	-19	-3	-12	-13	-9	5	-4
Ellendale	0	4	-3	-11	-17	-5	-22	-22	-12	-1	-11
Eureka	-2	0	-7	-13	-19	-9	-18	-19	-12	-4	-13
Gettysburg	-2	0	-5	-11	-15	-3	-13	-13	-8	2	-7
Huron	5	5	-2	-5	-10	-2	-6	-8	-4	9	-3
Kennebec	2	1	-3	-8	-10	3	-7	-7	-1	10	-3
McIntosh	-5	0	-8	-16	-20	-7	-18	-18	-15	0	-8
Milbank	6	5	1	-1	-6	-2	-10	-10	-3	7	-4
Miller	2	4	-4	-9	-12	-1	-10	-10	-3	6	-4
Mobridge	0	2	-5	-11	-13	-3	-12	-12	-7	4	-4
Murdo	-4	-1	-6	-10	-12	1	-8	-8	-1	10	0
Pierre	2	4	1	-3	-6	4	-3	-3	3	11	4
Redfield	3	4	-5	-9	-15	-3	-14	-14	-5	5	-9
Sisseton	6	5	1	-3	-10	-6	-14	-13	-6	5	-5
Watertown	3	2	-1	-4	-10	-4	-11	-12	-5	2	-3
Webster	3	2	-1	-6	-12	-6	-13	-14	-5	1	-6
Wheaton	4	7	1	-3	-9	-5	-12	-14	-7	4	-7

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 21 °F at 2:50 PM

Low Temp: 8 °F at 1:24 AM

Wind: 14 mph at 8:28 PM

Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 60 in 2021

Record Low: -26 in 1964

Average High: 36

Average Low: 14

Average Precip in Nov.: 0.72

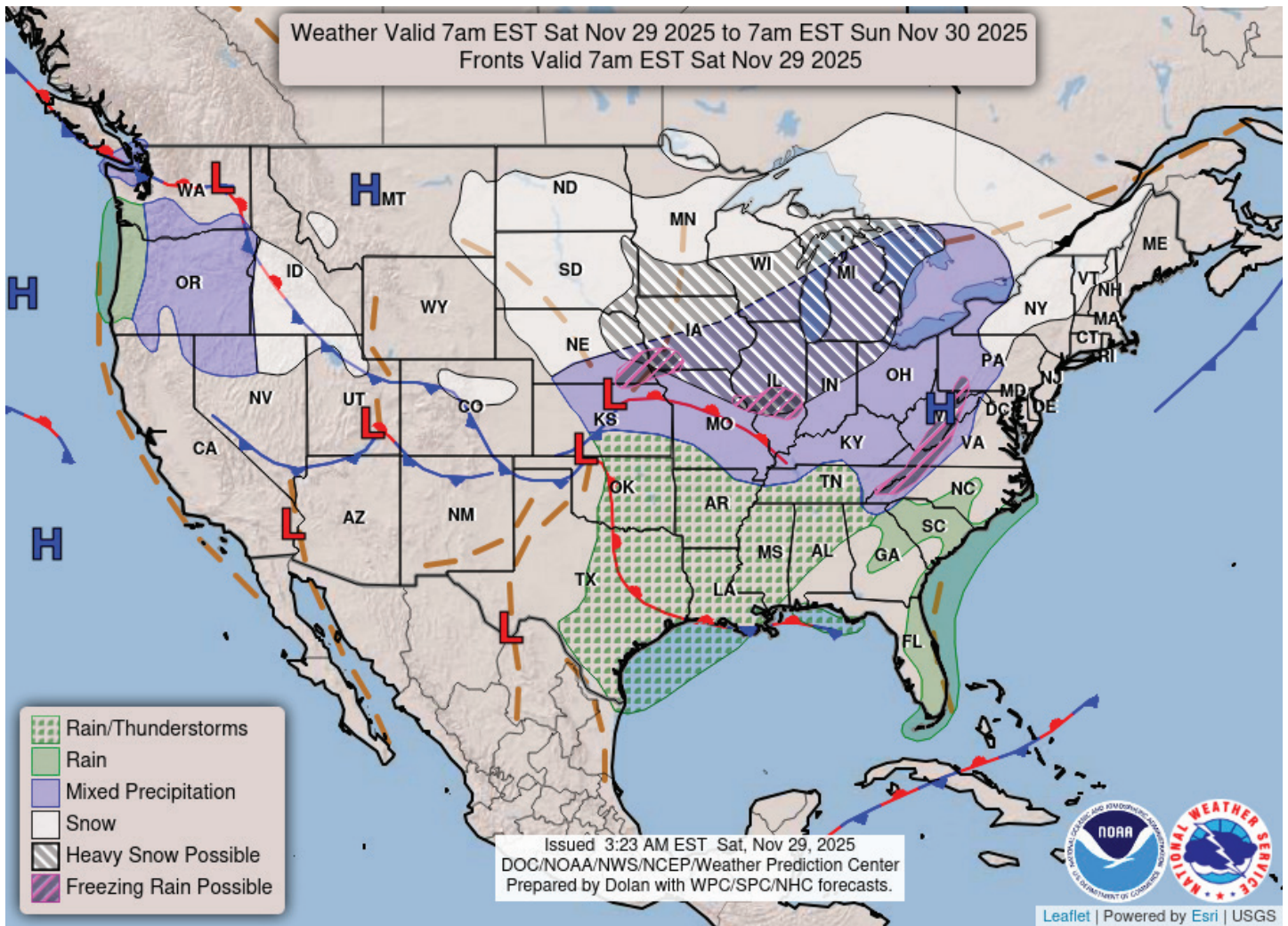
Precip to date in Oct.: 1.00

Average Precip to date: 21.19

Precip Year to Date: 24.51

Sunset Tonight: 4:51 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:51 am



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Today in Weather History

November 29, 1896: The mercury plunged to 51 degrees below zero at Havre Montana. It marked the culmination of a two week long cold wave. A stagnate high-pressure area similar to those over Siberia during the winter was the cause. During the month of November temperatures across Montana and the Dakotas averaged 15 to 25 degrees below normal. Aberdeen's low temperature on this day was 25 degrees below zero. The average temperature for the month was 9.7 degrees, or 19.6 degrees below normal.

November 29, 1996: Widespread freezing rain laid down a thick layer of ice across a large part of north-east South Dakota and west central Minnesota on the 29th and 30th, making driving on area highways and Interstate 29 treacherous. Later on the 29th, the freezing rain changed over to snow. Snowfall amounts ranged from 2 to 4 inches across the area. Numerous accidents occurred throughout the weekend with mainly minor injuries. Many cars and trucks also went into ditches. The South Dakota Highway Patrol reported in, one three hour period that along I-29, from the Clear Lake exit to the Codington County line 40 to 45 vehicles were in the ditch. Many activities and sporting events were also postponed or cancelled.

November 29, 2002: High winds of 30 to 50 mph, gusting to near 70 mph, occurred much of the afternoon across central and north central South Dakota. A tractor-trailer, carrying a load of livestock, was overturned on Highway 12 about three miles east of Mobridge. The tractor was totaled, four cattle were killed, and the driver suffered minor injuries. High winds of 30 to 50 mph, with gusts to near 60 mph, also occurred across Roberts and Grant counties in the late afternoon hours.

1896 - The mercury plunged to 51 degrees below zero at Havre, MT. It marked the culmination of a two week long cold wave caused by a stagnate high pressure area similar to those over Siberia during the winter. During the month of November temperatures across Montana and the Dakotas averaged 15 to 25 degrees below normal. (David Ludlum)

1969 - Dense fog along the Jersey Turnpike resulted in a chain reaction of vehicle collisions during the morning rush hour. A propane truck jackknifed and was struck by a trailer truck, and other vehicles piled into the fiery mass. (David Ludlum)

1975 - Red River was buried under 34 inches of snow in 24 hours, establishing a record for the state of New Mexico. (The Weather Channel)

1985 - The temperature at Bismarck, ND, plunged to 30 degrees below zero to establish their record low for the month of November. The high that day was 4 degrees below zero. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Snow blanketed the Upper Mississippi Valley, with heavy snow reported near Lake Superior. Up to ten inches of snow was reported in Douglas County and Bayfield County of Wisconsin. Brule WI received nine inches of snow. Heavy rain soaked the Middle Atlantic Coast States, while gale force winds lashed the coastline. Flooding was reported in Maryland and Virginia. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Nine inches of snow at Alta UT brought their total for the month to 164 inches, surpassing their previous November record of 144 inches. Snowbird UT, also in the Little Cottonwood Valley, surpassed their November record of 118 inches of snow. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Strong Santa Ana winds diminished over southern California, but record cold was reported in some of the California valleys, with readings of 27 degrees at Redding and 31 degrees at Bakersfield. Gale force winds, gusting to 44 mph at Milwaukee WI, produced snow squalls in the Great Lakes Region. Sault Ste Marie MI finished the month of November with a record 46.8 inches of snow. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1991 - A tornado struck southeast Springfield, Missouri, causing F4 damage. Shortly after touchdown, the tornado reached F3 intensity, approximately 3 miles north of the town of Nixa. While crossing Highway 65, the tornado picked up a truck and dropped it onto a frontage road, killing one passenger and injuring ten others. The tornado intensified to F4 strength as it moved through the Woodbridge and Natural Bridge Estates subdivisions where 15 homes were destroyed. Altogether, two people were killed and 64 others were injured.

Praise Builds Courage

Praising God can move our hearts from fear to courageous faith.

2 Chronicles 20:14-30: 4 Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Jahaziel son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite and descendant of Asaph, as he stood in the assembly.

15 He said: "Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the Lord says to you: 'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's. 16 Tomorrow march down against them. They will be climbing up by the Pass of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the gorge in the Desert of Jeruel. 17 You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you, Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you.'"

18 Jehoshaphat bowed down with his face to the ground, and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell down in worship before the Lord. 19 Then some Levites from the Kohathites and Korahites stood up and praised the Lord, the God of Israel, with a very loud voice.

20 Early in the morning they left for the Desert of Tekoa. As they set out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Listen to me, Judah and people of Jerusalem! Have faith in the Lord your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful." 21 After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the Lord and to praise him for the splendor of his[a] holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying:

"Give thanks to the Lord,
for his love endures forever."

22 As they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated. 23 The Ammonites and Moabites rose up against the men from Mount Seir to destroy and annihilate them. After they finished slaughtering the men from Seir, they helped to destroy one another.

24 When the men of Judah came to the place that overlooks the desert and looked toward the vast army, they saw only dead bodies lying on the ground; no one had escaped. 25 So Jehoshaphat and his men went to carry off their plunder, and they found among them a great amount of equipment and clothing[b] and also articles of value—more than they could take away. There was so much plunder that it took three days to collect it. 26 On the fourth day they assembled in the Valley of Berakah, where they praised the Lord. This is why it is called the Valley of Berakah[c] to this day.

27 Then, led by Jehoshaphat, all the men of Judah and Jerusalem returned joyfully to Jerusalem, for the Lord had given them cause to rejoice over their enemies. 28 They entered Jerusalem and went to the temple of the Lord with harps and lyres and trumpets.

29 The fear of God came on all the surrounding kingdoms when they heard how the Lord had fought against the enemies of Israel. 30 And the kingdom of Jehoshaphat was at peace, for his God had given him rest on every side.

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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Believers often think of praise as a byproduct of good fortune, but praise is always appropriate. When messengers came with warnings of an advancing army, King Jehoshaphat became fearful. But as he recalled the Lord's sovereignty and past faithfulness, he remembered that God provides solutions to seemingly hopeless situations.

The divine solution seemed strange and rather unnerving: "You need not fight in this battle; station yourselves, stand and see the salvation of the Lord on your behalf" (2 Chron. 20:17). But in the next instant, the king and his people were on their faces worshipping the Lord. Praise magnifies God's presence, making His followers more aware of Him standing with them.

The Israelites knew their Protector was in their midst; they trusted He had a plan because praise had reminded them that this was always true of God. Jehoshaphat's heart traveled a spectrum from fearful to helpless to courageous (2 Chronicles 20:3; 2 Chronicles 20:12; 2 Chronicles 20:20).

The Lord intervened personally and miraculously for the Israelites. He will do the same for you. The next time you face a troubling situation, choose praise. God will release His power in your life, giving you courage and filling your heart with joy.

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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:
11.28.25

6 7 13 39 48 4

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$90,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.26.25

7 19 25 26 28 7

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$8,120,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 2 Mins 13 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.28.25

19 28 32 41 47 16

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 17 Mins 13 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.26.25

1 8 11 17 22

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$102,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 17 Mins 13 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.26.25

6 19 28 39 53 15

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 46 Mins 13 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
11.26.25

7 8 15 19 28 3

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$719,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 46 Mins 13 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

US halts all asylum decisions as suspect in shooting of National Guard members faces murder charge

By COLLIN BINKLEY and BEN FINLEY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration has halted all asylum decisions and paused issuing visas for people traveling on Afghan passports days after a shooting near the White House that left one National Guard member dead and another in critical condition.

Investigators continued Saturday to seek a motive in the shooting, in which the suspect, Rahmanullah Lakanwal, now faces charges including first-degree murder.

Lakanwal is a 29-year-old Afghan national who worked with the CIA during the Afghanistan War. He applied for asylum during the Biden administration and was granted it this year under Trump, according to a group that assists with resettlement of Afghans who helped U.S. forces in their country.

The Trump administration has seized on the shooting to vow to intensify efforts to rein in legal immigration, promising to pause entry from some poor countries and review Afghans and other legal migrants already in the country. That is in addition to other measures, some of which were previously set in motion.

Specialist Sarah Beckstrom, 20, died after the Wednesday shooting, and Staff Sgt. Andrew Wolfe, 24, was hospitalized in critical condition. They were deployed with the West Virginia National Guard as part of Trump's crime-fighting mission in the city. The president also has deployed or tried to deploy National Guard members to other cities to assist with his mass deportation efforts but has faced court challenges.

U.S. Attorney Jeanine Pirro's office said the charges against Lakanwal also include two counts of assault with intent to kill while armed. In an interview on Fox News, she said there were "many charges to come."

Asylum decisions halted

Trump called the shooting a "terrorist attack" and criticized the Biden administration for enabling entry by Afghans who worked with U.S. forces.

The director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Joseph Edlow, said in a post on the social platform X that asylum decisions will be paused "until we can ensure that every alien is vetted and screened to the maximum degree possible."

Experts say the U.S. has rigorous vetting systems for asylum-seekers. Asylum claims made from inside the country through USCIS have long faced backlogs. Critics say the slowdown has been exacerbated during the Trump administration.

Also Friday, Secretary of State Marco Rubio said his department paused "visa issuance for ALL individuals traveling on Afghan passports."

Shawn VanDiver, president of the San Diego-based group #AfghanEvac, said in response: "They are using a single violent individual as cover for a policy they have long planned, turning their own intelligence failures into an excuse to punish an entire community and the veterans who served alongside them."

The suspect

Lakanwal lived in Bellingham, Washington, about 80 miles (130 kilometers) north of Seattle, with his wife and five children, former landlord Kristina Widman said.

Neighbor Mohammad Sherzad said Lakanwal was polite and quiet and spoke little English.

Sherzad said he attended the same mosque as Lakanwal and heard from other members that he was struggling to find work. He said Lakanwal "disappeared" about two weeks ago.

Lakanwal worked briefly this summer as an independent contractor for Amazon Flex, which lets people use their own cars to deliver packages, according to a company spokesperson.

Investigators are executing warrants in Washington state and other parts of the country.

Lakanwal entered the U.S. in 2021 through Operation Allies Welcome, a Biden administration program that resettled Afghans after the U.S. withdrawal, officials said. Lakanwal applied for asylum during that administration, but his asylum was approved this year under the Trump administration, #AfghanEvac said

in a statement.

Lakanwal served in a CIA-backed Afghan Army unit, known as one of the special Zero Units, in the southern province of Kandahar, according to a resident of the eastern province of Khost who identified himself as Lakanwal's cousin and spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals.

The man said Lakanwal started out working for the unit as a security guard in 2012 and was later promoted to become a team leader and a GPS specialist.

Beckstrom 'exemplified leadership, dedication'

Beckstrom enlisted in 2023 after graduating high school and served with distinction as a military police officer with the 863rd Military Police Company, the West Virginia National Guard said.

"She exemplified leadership, dedication, and professionalism," the guard said in a statement, adding that Beckstrom volunteered for the D.C. deployment.

Pope visits Istanbul's Blue Mosque, but does not pray, as he focuses on unifying Christians

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ISTANBUL, Turkey (AP) — Pope Leo XIV visited Istanbul's iconic Blue Mosque on Saturday but didn't stop to pray, as he opened an intense day of meetings and liturgies with Turkey's Christian leaders where he again emphasized the need for Christians to be united.

Leo took his shoes off and, in his white socks, toured the the 17th-century mosque, looking up at its soaring tiled domes and the Arabic inscriptions on its columns as an imam pointed them out to him.

The Vatican had said Leo would observe a "brief moment of silent prayer" in the mosque, but he didn't. An imam of the mosque, Asgin Tunca, said he had invited Leo to pray, since the mosque was "Allah's house," but the pope declined.

Speaking to reporters after the visit, Tunca said he had told the pope: "It's not my house, not your house, (it's the) house of Allah," he said. He said he told Leo: "If you want, you can worship here," I said. But he said, "That's OK."

"He wanted to see the mosque, wanted to feel (the) atmosphere of the mosque, I think. And was very pleased," he said.

Later, Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni said: "The pope experienced his visit to the mosque in silence, in a spirit of contemplation and listening, with deep respect for the place and the faith of those who gather there in prayer."

The Vatican then sent out a corrected version of its bulletin about the trip, removing reference to the planned "brief moment of silent prayer," without further explanation. No reason was given for why Leo's planned tour guide also changed.

Leo, history's first American pope, was following in the footsteps of his recent predecessors, who all made high-profile visits to the Sultan Ahmed Mosque, as it is officially known, in a gesture of respect to Turkey's Muslim majority.

Papal visits to Blue Mosque often raise questions

But the visits have always raised questions about whether the pope would pray in the Muslim house of worship, or at the very least pause to gather thoughts in a meditative silence.

There were no doubts in 2014 when Pope Francis visited: He stood for two minutes of silent prayer facing east, his head bowed, eyes closed and hands clasped in front of him. The Grand Mufti of Istanbul, Rahmi Yaran, told the pope afterwards, "May God accept it."

When Pope Benedict XVI visited Turkey in 2006, tensions were high because Benedict had offended many in the Muslim world a few months earlier with a speech in Regensburg, Germany that was widely interpreted as linking Islam and violence.

The Vatican added a visit to the Blue Mosque at the last minute in a bid to reach out to Muslims, and Benedict was warmly welcomed. He observed a moment of silent prayer, head bowed, as the imam prayed next to him, facing east.

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Benedict later thanked him "for this moment of prayer" for what was only the second time a pope had visited a mosque, after St. John Paul II visited one briefly in Syria in 2001.

Hagia Sophia left off itinerary

Past popes have also visited the nearby Hagia Sophia landmark, once one of the most important historic cathedrals in Christianity and a United Nations-designated world heritage site.

But Leo left that visit off his itinerary on his first trip as pope. In July 2020, Turkey converted Hagia Sophia from a museum back into a mosque, a move that drew widespread international criticism, including from the Vatican.

After the mosque visit, Leo held a private meeting with Turkey's Christian leaders at the Syriac Orthodox Church of Mor Ephrem. In the afternoon, he was expected to pray with the spiritual leader of the world's Orthodox Christians, Patriarch Bartholomew, at the patriarchal church of Saint George.

There, they were to sign a joint statement. The Vatican said in his remarks to the patriarchs gathered, Leo reminded them "that division among Christians is an obstacle to their witness."

He pointed to the next Holy Year to be celebrated by Christians, in 2033 on the anniversary of Christ's crucifixion, and invited them to go to Jerusalem on "a journey that leads to full unity."

Leo was ending the day with a Catholic Mass in Istanbul's Volkswagen Arena for the country's Catholic community, who number 33,000 in a country of more than 85 million people, most of whom are Sunni Muslim.

Marking an important moment in Christian history

Leo had prayed with these Christian leaders on Friday in Iznik, at the site of the A.D. 325 Council of Nicaea, the highlight of his trip. The occasion was to mark the 1,700th anniversary of the council, the unprecedented meeting of bishops that produced the creed, or statement of faith, that is still recited by millions of Christians today.

Standing over the ruins of the site, the men recited the creed. Leo urged them "to overcome the scandal of the divisions that unfortunately still exist and to nurture the desire for unity."

The Nicaea gathering took place at a time when the Eastern and Western churches were still united. They split in the Great Schism of 1054, a divide precipitated largely by disagreements over the primacy of the pope, and then in other splintering divisions. But even today, Catholic, Orthodox and most historic Protestant groups accept the Nicene Creed, making it a point of agreement and the most widely accepted creed in Christendom.

As a result, celebrating its origins at the site of its creation with the spiritual leaders of the Catholic and Orthodox churches and other Christian representatives marked a historic moment in the centuries-old quest to reunite all Christians.

Airlines adopt software fix for Airbus A320 after plane has sudden altitude drop

By AUDREY McAVOY Associated Press

Airlines around the world canceled and delayed flights heading into the weekend to fix software on a widely used commercial aircraft after an analysis found the computer code may have contributed to a sudden drop in the altitude of a JetBlue plane last month.

Airbus said Friday that an examination of the JetBlue incident revealed that intense solar radiation may corrupt data critical to the functioning of flight controls on the A320 family of aircraft.

The FAA joined the European Union Aviation Safety Agency in requiring airlines to address the issue with a new software update. More than 500 U.S.-registered aircraft will be impacted.

The EU safety agency said it may cause "short-term disruption" to flight schedules. The problem was introduced by a software update to the plane's onboard computers, according to the agency.

In Japan, All Nippon Airways, which operates more than 30 planes, canceled 65 domestic flights for Saturday. Additional cancellations on Sunday were possible, it said.

The software change comes as U.S. passengers were beginning to head home from the Thanksgiving

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holiday, which is the busiest travel time in the country.

American Airlines has about 480 planes from the A320 family, of which 209 are affected. The fix should take about two hours for many aircraft and updates should be completed for the overwhelming majority on Friday, the airline said. A handful will be finished Saturday.

American expected some delays but it said it was focused on limiting cancellations. It said safety would be its overriding priority.

Air India said via the social platform X that its engineers were working on the fix and completed the reset on more 40% of aircraft that need it. There were no cancellations, it said.

Delta said it expected the issue to affect less than 50 of its A321neo aircraft. United said six planes in its fleet are affected and it expects minor disruptions to a few flights. Hawaiian Airlines said it was unaffected.

Mike Stengel, a partner with the aerospace industry management consulting firm AeroDynamic Advisory, said the fix could be addressed between flights or on overnight plane checks.

"Definitely not ideal for this to be happening on a very ubiquitous aircraft on a busy holiday weekend," Stengel said from Ann Arbor, Michigan. "Although again the silver lining being that it only should take a few hours to update the software."

At least 15 JetBlue passengers were injured and taken to the hospital after the Oct. 30 incident on board the flight from Cancun, Mexico, to Newark, New Jersey. The plane was diverted to Tampa, Florida.

Airbus, which is registered in the Netherlands but has its main headquarters in France, is one of the world's biggest airplane manufacturers, alongside Boeing.

The A320 is the primary competitor to Boeing's 737, Stengel said. Airbus updated its engine in the mid-2010s, and planes in this category are called A320neo, he said.

The A320 is the world's bestselling single-aisle aircraft family, according to Airbus' website.

An archaeologist is racing to preserve Sudan's heritage as war threatens to erase its cultural past

By LOUISE DEWAST Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — In a dimly lit office in a corner of the French National Institute for Art History, Sudanese archaeologist Shadia Abdrabo studies a photograph of pottery made in her country around 7,000 B.C. She carefully types a description of the Neolithic artifact into a spreadsheet.

As the war between the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) rages on, the curator from Sudan's National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums (NCAM) is on a yearlong research grant in France with one mission: to build an online database of the African nation's archaeological sites, museum collections and historical archives.

Soon after the war in Sudan started, in April 2023, museums were looted and destroyed. It's unclear what exactly went missing, but Abdrabo says her task is to find out — and time is of the essence.

"We have to work fast to secure our collections. We've already lost two museums and we don't want to lose more," Abdrabo told The Associated Press.

She says two regional museums in El Geneina and Nyala were almost completely destroyed, while in Khartoum, the National Museum — which held an estimated 100,000 objects before the war — was ransacked by militias who posted videos online of their fighters inside the storeroom.

The National Museum had pieces dating back to prehistoric times, including from the Kerma Kingdom and the Napatan era when Kushite kings ruled the region as well as from the Meroitic civilization that built Sudan's pyramids. Other galleries displayed later Christian and Islamic objects.

Among its most valuable items were mummies dating back to 2,500 B.C., some of the oldest and most archaeologically significant in the world as well as royal Kushite treasures.

'Entire archives vanished'

UNESCO raised the alarm on reports of plundering saying the "threat to culture appears to have reached an unprecedented level."

"My heart was broken, you know? It's not just objects that we lost. We lost research, we lost studies,

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we lost many things," Abdrabo said.

Last month, hundreds of people were left dead and more than 80,000 others forced into displacement after the capture of North Darfur's capital, El Fasher, by the RSF. For Abdrabo the work is deeply personal.

"I'm from Nubia, from the north, an area filled with monuments, archaeological sites and ancient life," she said. The region was home to some of the world's earliest kingdoms that rivaled ancient Egypt in power and wealth.

She was working at the national museum in the capital Khartoum when the war started.

"We thought it would finish soon ... but then life started getting really difficult: not just the bombing, but there was no electricity, no water," she said. With her three sisters, she fled north — first to Atbara, then to Abri, and eventually to Port Sudan.

During that time, Abdrabo and her NCAM colleagues worked tirelessly to try and protect Sudan's 11 museums and sites — some designated with UNESCO World Heritage status — moving pieces to safe rooms and secret locations.

But efforts to protect Sudan's art were too slow, said Ali Nour, a Sudanese cultural heritage advocate.

"While applications were being drafted, sites were being emptied. While risk assessments were reviewed, entire archives vanished," Nour wrote in an article for the U.K.-based International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works.

Urgent recovery efforts

UNESCO said it carried out inventories, trained police and customs officers to recognize stolen antiquities, while appealing to collectors "to refrain from acquiring or taking part in the import, export or transfer of ownership of cultural property from Sudan."

But, unlike similar cultural emergencies that followed wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, "Sudan has not benefited from strong media coverage denouncing the degradation and plundering of its cultural heritage," according to researcher Meryam Amarir. "This lack of visibility has reduced the international response."

Ancient Sudan was connected, through trade and military activity, with Egypt, the Mediterranean world and Mesopotamia, and was the source of much of the gold available in the region, according to Geoff Emberling of the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology at the University of Michigan.

"If we're interested in these ancient cultures, then we have to be interested in Sudan," said Emberling, who is involved with the recently established Sudan Cultural Emergency Recovery Fund.

The task force, requested by NCAM, aims to unite institutions, scholars, and donors around the urgent recovery efforts of Sudan's heritage.

"What Shadia Abdrabo is doing is urgently essential — establishing what's missing," Emberling told the AP. "And with a team of about 15 Sudanese now working in the museum in Khartoum to clean and restore what has been damaged, they will soon be able to compare what remains there now."

'I cry when I talk about this'

Abdrabo has funding until April 2026 to finish compiling the data and building a platform, but she worries it won't be enough time.

The work is painstaking. Some datasets arrive as spreadsheets, others as handwritten inventories or photographs taken decades ago. Colleagues at the Louvre, the British Museum and others lend support but she works mostly alone.

"I'm trying to finish this database but it's a lot. I've done about 20% of the work. Just for the national museums, I've recorded 1,080 objects so far ... and then I have to do other museums, sites, archives... I need to add pictures, ID numbers, coordinates ..."

As the winter settles over Paris, the crisis in Sudan drives Abdrabo.

"We are working on tracking what has been looted," she said. "I cry when I talk about this. My only goal and message is to bring back as much as possible, to do as much as I can for Sudan, but it's not easy for us."

It's not just the war itself, but the consequences of it that could affect the country's heritage: "militias, people displaced... it's not safe for the art to be in unsecure locations," she added.

"Until the war finishes we just don't know what is going to happen."

Turkish official says Black Sea tankers may have been hit by mines, missiles or drones

By ANDREW WILKS and SUZAN FRASER Associated Press

ISTANBUL (AP) — Two oil tankers said to be part of Russia's "shadow fleet" that were set ablaze off Turkey's Black Sea coast may have been hit by mines, drones or missiles, a senior Turkish official said Saturday.

Tankers Kairos and Virat were struck in quick succession late Friday afternoon, prompting rescue operations. Crew members on board both vessels were reported to be safe.

Turkish Transport and Infrastructure Minister Abdulkadir Uraloglu said rescue services first received reports that the Kairos may have hit a mine before being told of an explosion on the Virat.

"Our crews indicate that there were explosions on the other ship and that these were also caused by external interference," Uraloglu told broadcaster NTV early Saturday.

"The first things that come to mind for external interference could be a mine, a missile, a marine vessel or a drone. We don't have definitive information on this," he added.

The OpenSanctions database, which tracks people or organizations involved in sanctions evasion, describes the vessels as part of a shadow fleet of ships used to evade sanctions imposed on Russia following its 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Ukraine has carried out successful naval strikes against Russian shipping during the war, particularly using explosives-packed marine drones. However, Ukrainian missions have largely been limited to the waters of the northern Black Sea.

The Gambian-flagged Kairos caught fire in the Black Sea approximately 28 nautical miles (52 kilometers) off the coast of Turkey's Kocaeli province, Turkey's Directorate General of Maritime Affairs said. It was sailing empty toward Russia's Novorossiysk port.

Within an hour, the maritime authority reported that a second tanker, Virat, was "struck" while sailing in the Black Sea about 35 nautical miles (64 kilometers) off the Turkish coast. It did not provide further details.

Rescue teams were dispatched to the scene to provide assistance. All 20 crew members aboard the Virat were safe, although heavy smoke was reported in the engine room, the maritime authority said.

All 25 crew aboard the Kairos were safely evacuated, Kocaeli Gov. Ilhami Aktas said.

The VesselFinder website showed the Virat was anchored north of the Bosphorus, not far from its current position, on Nov. 4. The Kairos' last position was on Nov. 26 south of the Dardanelles Strait connecting the Aegean Sea and the Sea of Marmara.

The United States sanctioned the Virat in January this year, followed by the European Union, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and Canada, according to the OpenSanctions website. Similarly, the EU sanctioned the Kairos in July this year, followed by the U.K. and Switzerland.

"The shadow tanker fleet continues to provide multibillion-dollar revenues for the Kremlin bypassing sanctions, disguising its activities under the flags of third countries, using complex schemes to conceal owners and poses significant environmental threats," OpenSanctions says in its website entry on the Kairos.

The Virat, built in 2018, uses "irregular and high-risk shipping practices" and has previously sailed under the flags of Barbados, Comoros, Liberia and Panama, OpenSanctions says.

The Kairos, formerly flagged as Panamanian, Greek and Liberian, was built in 2002.

Ukraine's military intelligence service, the GUR, says on its website that both ships visit Russian ports and have a history of shutting off their automatic identification systems, which transmit a ship's position.

They have also docked at ports in China, Turkey and India, among other locations.

Trump officials and judge face off over flights to El Salvador in rare, high-stakes contempt probe

By SUDHIN THANAWALA Associated Press

Two planes carrying Venezuelan migrants out of the U.S. were midair on March 15 when a federal judge in Washington ordered the Trump administration to turn them around.

Instead, the planes landed in El Salvador hours later, touching off an extraordinary power struggle between the judicial and executive branches of the U.S. government over what happened and why the judge's order went unexecuted.

That fight entered a critical phase on Friday when U.S. District Judge James Boasberg relaunched an investigation to determine whether the Republican administration deliberately ignored his instruction, letting the planes continue onto El Salvador.

The judge previously concluded it did and threatened to have the responsible official or officials prosecuted on a contempt charge. The administration has denied any violation.

But an appeals court threw Boasberg's decision out. The contempt probe appeared dead until in yet another twist, a larger panel of judges on the same appeals court ruled on November 14 that the investigation could proceed.

Here's a look at what makes this case unusual and what could happen now:

Criminal contempt inquiries such as Boasberg's are extremely rare

They are a last resort, former federal judges Jeremy Fogel and Liam O'Grady told The Associated Press in an interview Monday conducted on Zoom.

"The judge has to believe that some line may have been crossed that you can't ignore," said Fogel, who spent 20 years on the bench in Northern California before retiring in 2018.

Fogel said the issues raised by Boasberg's contempt probe — whether the migrants were deprived of their due process rights and whether the court's authority was flouted — meet that standard.

"Whatever actually happened, I think it would be very hard for him to just let it go," the judge said.

O'Grady, who served in Alexandria, Virginia, just outside Washington, for 16 years, credited Boasberg for his efforts to determine the facts.

"He's making sure that his record is absolutely clear," O'Grady said.

Boasberg wants to start with written statements

On Friday, Boasberg ordered the administration to submit declarations by December 5 from all officials involved in the decision not to return the flights to the U.S. He said he will then decide whether to seek testimony from witnesses.

The declarations should detail the officials' roles in the decision, the judge said in the brief order.

Justice Department attorneys had urged him to abandon the probe, but Boasberg said he must determine whether Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem or anyone else "should be referred for potential contempt prosecution."

"In other words, the Court must decide if: (1) the court order was 'clear and reasonably specific'; (2) 'the defendant violated the order'; and (3) 'the violation was willful,'" he wrote.

In a court filing on Tuesday, Justice Department attorneys said Noem decided the migrants aboard the flights could be transferred to El Salvador after receiving advice from the Homeland Security department's acting general counsel, Joseph Mazzara.

Mazzara had received legal advice about the planes from Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche and Principal Associate Deputy Attorney General Emil Bove, according to the filing.

The administration has defended its decision about the planes

The judge's directive to return them was made verbally in court but not included in his written order, government attorneys said in the court filing on Tuesday.

That order blocked the administration from removing "any of the individual Plaintiffs from the United States for 14 days," but said nothing about the flights already airborne.

The two planes had already departed U.S. territory and airspace, so the migrants aboard them had

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already been “removed” and therefore fell outside of the court’s order, Justice Department lawyers said in the court filing.

“Accordingly, the Government maintains that its actions did not violate the Court’s order — certainly not with the clarity required for criminal contempt — and no further proceedings are warranted or appropriate,” they wrote.

A federal appeals court judge said in August that the administration’s interpretation of Boasberg’s order was plausible. The order “could reasonably have been read” as only prohibiting the government from “expelling detainees from United States territory,” wrote Gregory Katsas, a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit. Katsas was appointed by President Donald Trump.

The White House has been hostile to judges that check its power

Trump officials have chafed at judicial oversight and repeatedly contested the power of judges to review executive branch policies, particularly on immigration.

“There is a deliberate effort to push the boundaries and try to curtail the authority of trial courts,” said David Noll, a Rutgers Law School professor who writes about the intersection of the law and politics.

Noll said he expects the Justice Department to fight the inquiry from the start, with “lots of appeals and chest thumping” that Boasberg is exceeding his authority.

Trump has already attacked Boasberg. After the March 15 ruling, Trump derided the judge as a “troublemaker and agitator” and called for his impeachment. Boasberg was nominated to the bench by Democratic President Barack Obama and currently serves as the chief judge of the federal court for the District of Columbia.

In July, the Justice Department filed a misconduct claim against him, alleging he told Chief Justice John Roberts and other federal judges in March that the administration would trigger a constitutional crisis by disregarding federal court rulings.

Boasberg has framed the contempt inquiry as an effort to uphold the U.S. Constitution, which he says requires compliance with judicial orders. Separately, he is considering a request to require the administration to give at least 137 of the migrants, who are now back in Venezuela, a chance to challenge their gang designation.

He has accused Trump administration officials of rushing the migrants out of the U.S. and said significant evidence had surfaced indicating that many of them were not connected to the Tren de Aragua gang.

Contempt findings can carry fines and prison time

But history shows such punishments are rarely issued or allowed to stand against the government.

A survey of thousands of federal court opinions published in the Harvard Law Review in 2018 turned up 82 contempt findings against government officials and agencies since the end of World War II. Judges issued or tried to issue fines in 16 of those cases, but higher courts blocked them in all but three.

Prison time is even more uncommon. Judges locked up or credibly threatened to lock up a federal agency official in only four of the cases, and high courts similarly intervened to block the sanction, the study by Yale Law School professor Nicholas Parrillo found.

Noll, the Rutgers Law professor, said if the inquiry moves ahead, it could influence public debate about whether the administration can carry out its mass deportation policy legally.

“A lot of a district court’s power just comes from the ability to get an issue in front of the public,” he said in a phone interview on Tuesday.

Suspect in shooting of National Guard members faces murder charge as US halts all asylum decisions

By COLLIN BINKLEY and BEN FINLEY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Charges against the man accused of shooting two National Guard members have been upgraded to first-degree murder after one of the soldiers died, the U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia announced Friday, while investigators continued to seek a motive.

Specialist Sarah Beckstrom, 20, and Staff Sgt. Andrew Wolfe, 24, were hospitalized in critical condition

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after the Wednesday afternoon shooting near the White House. President Donald Trump announced Thursday evening that Beckstrom had died.

U.S. Attorney Jeanine Pirro's office said the charges against Rahmanullah Lakanwal, a 29-year-old Afghan national who worked with the CIA during the Afghanistan War, now include one count of first-degree murder and two counts of assault with intent to kill while armed.

The Trump administration said Friday it is halting all asylum decisions and has also paused issuing visas for people traveling on Afghan passports.

Beckstrom and Wolfe were deployed with the West Virginia National Guard as part of Trump's crime-fighting mission that federalized the D.C. police force. The president also has deployed or tried to deploy National Guard members to other cities to assist with his mass deportation efforts but has faced court challenges.

Asylum decisions halted

Trump called the shooting a "terrorist attack" and criticized the Biden administration for enabling Afghans who worked with U.S. forces during the Afghanistan War to enter the U.S. The president has said he wants to "permanently pause migration" from poorer nations and expel millions of immigrants from the country.

The director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Joseph Edlow, said in a post on the social platform X that asylum decisions will be paused "until we can ensure that every alien is vetted and screened to the maximum degree possible."

Experts say the U.S. has rigorous vetting systems for asylum-seekers. Asylum claims made from inside the country through USCIS have long faced backlogs. Critics say the slow down has been exacerbated during the Trump administration.

In an interview on Fox News, Pirro said there are "many charges to come" beyond the upgraded murder charge. She said her heart goes out to the family of Beckstrom, who volunteered to serve and "ended up being shot ambush-style on the cold streets of Washington, D.C."

Pirro said officials have been working around the clock to determine the suspect's motive. Investigators are executing warrants in the state of Washington, where Lakanwal lived, and other parts of the country.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth visited National Guard troops in the nation's capital Friday and led them in a prayer for Beckstrom and Wolfe.

"Some of you may have known her," Hegseth said of Beckstrom. "Obviously a beautiful human being and a great American willing to serve her country brutally targeted."

Hegseth said he and his wife briefly visited Wolfe on Thursday night "to be there, lay hands on him, pray over him."

Wolfe remains in "very critical condition," West Virginia Gov. Patrick Morrisey said Friday. He ordered state flags to be flown at half-staff in recognition of Beckstrom's death.

Lakanwal entered the US in 2021

Lakanwal has been living in Bellingham, Washington, about 80 miles (130 kilometers) north of Seattle, with his wife and five children, said his former landlord, Kristina Widman.

Mohammad Sherzad, a neighbor of Lakanwal's, told the AP in a phone interview Friday that Lakanwal was polite, quiet and spoke very little English.

Sherzad said he attended the same mosque as Lakanwal and had heard from other members that Lakanwal was struggling to find work. Some of his children attended the same school as Lakanwal's children, Sherzad said.

"He was so quiet and the kids were so polite, they were so playful. But we didn't see anything bad about him," Sherzad said. Sherzad said Lakanwal "disappeared" about two weeks ago.

Lakanwal had briefly worked as an independent contractor for Amazon Flex, which allows people to use their own cars to deliver packages, a company spokesperson shared with The Associated Press. Lakanwal delivered packages from the end of July to the end of August and hadn't been active since.

Lakanwal entered the U.S. in 2021 through Operation Allies Welcome, a Biden administration program that resettled Afghans after the U.S. withdrawal from the country, officials said. Lakanwal applied for

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asylum during the Biden administration, but his asylum was approved under the Trump administration, #AfghanEvac said in a statement.

In a Thanksgiving address to the troops Thursday, Trump said that Lakanwal "went cuckoo. I mean, he went nuts."

Lakanwal served in a CIA-backed Afghan Army unit, known as one of the special Zero Units, in the southern province of Kandahar, according to a resident of the eastern Afghan province of Khost who identified himself as Lakanwal's cousin. He said Lakanwal was originally from the province and that his brother had worked in the unit as well.

The cousin spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals. He said Lakanwal had started out working as a security guard for the unit in 2012 and was later promoted to become a team leader and a GPS specialist.

Zero Units were paramilitary units manned by Afghans but backed by the CIA that also served in front-line fighting with CIA paramilitary officers. Activists had attributed abuses to the units. They played a key role in the chaotic U.S. withdrawal from the country, providing security around Kabul International Airport as the Americans withdrew from the country.

On Wednesday night, Trump called for the reinvestigation of all Afghan refugees who had entered under the Biden administration initiative that brought roughly 76,000 people to the country, many of whom had worked as interpreters and translators.

The program has faced intense scrutiny from Trump and others over allegations of gaps in the vetting process, even as advocates say there was extensive vetting and the program offered a lifeline to people at risk of Taliban reprisals.

Beckstrom 'exemplified leadership, dedication, and professionalism'

Beckstrom had enlisted in 2023, the same year she graduated high school, and served with distinction as a military police officer with the 863rd Military Police Company, the West Virginia National Guard said in a statement.

"She exemplified leadership, dedication, and professionalism," the statement said, adding that Beckstrom "volunteered to serve as part of Operation D.C. Safe and Beautiful, helping to ensure the safety and security of our nation's capital."

The president called Beckstrom an "incredible person, outstanding in every single way."

Trump says he plans to pardon former Honduran President Hernandez for 2024 drug trafficking sentence

By JOSH BOAK and CHRISTOPHER SHERMAN Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, FLA. (AP) — President Donald Trump said Friday that he will be pardoning former Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez, who in 2024 was convicted for drug trafficking and weapons charges and sentenced to 45 years in prison.

The president explained his decision on social media by posting that "according to many people that I greatly respect," Hernandez was "treated very harshly and unfairly."

In March of last year, Hernandez was convicted in U.S. court of conspiring to import cocaine into the U.S.A. He had served served two terms as the leader of the Central American nation of roughly 10 million people.

Hernandez has been appealing his conviction and serving time at the U.S. Penitentiary, Hazelton in West Virginia.

Shortly after Trump's announcement, Hernández's wife and children gathered on the steps on their home in Tegucigalpa and knelt in prayer, thanking God that Hernández would return to their family after almost four years apart.

It was the same home that Honduran authorities hauled him out of in 2022 just months after leaving office. He was extradited to the United States to stand trial.

García said they had just been able to speak with Hernández and tell him the news.

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"He still didn't know of this news and believe me, when we shared it his voice broke with emotion," she said.

García thanked Trump, saying that Trump had corrected an injustice, maintaining that Hernández's prosecution was a coordinated plot by drug traffickers and the "radical left" to seek revenge against the former president.

She said they had not been told exactly when Hernández would return, but said "we hope that in the coming days."

A lawyer for Hernandez, Renato C. Stabile, expressed gratitude for Trump's actions.

"A great injustice has been righted and we are so hopeful for the future partnership of the United States and Honduras," Stabile said. "Thank you President Trump for making sure that justice was served. We look forward to President Hernandez's triumphant return to Honduras."

A separate lawyer for Hernandez, Sabrina Shroff, declined comment.

The post was part of a broader message by Trump backing Nasry "Tito" Asfura for Honduras' presidency, with Trump saying the U.S. would be supportive of the country if he wins. But if Asfura loses the election this Sunday, Trump posted that "the United States will not be throwing good money after bad, because a wrong Leader can only bring catastrophic results to a country, no matter which country it is."

Asfura, 67, is making his second run for president for the conservative National Party. He was mayor of Tegucigalpa and has pledged to solve Honduras' infrastructure needs. But he has previously been accused of embezzling public funds, allegations that he denies.

In addition to Asfura, there are two other likely contenders for Honduras' presidency: Rixi Moncada, who served as the finance and later defense secretary before leaving to run for president for the incumbent democratic socialist Libre party, and Salvador Nasralla, a former television personality who is making his fourth bid for the presidency, this time as the candidate for the Liberal Party.

Trump has framed Honduras' election as trial for democracy, suggesting in a separate Truth Social post that if Asfura loses, the country could go the way of Venezuela and fall under the influence of that country's leader, Nicolás Maduro.

Trump has sought to apply pressure on Maduro, ordering a series of strikes against boats suspected of carrying drugs, building up the U.S. military presence in the Caribbean with warships including the Navy's most advanced aircraft carrier, the USS Gerald R. Ford.

The U.S. president has not ruled out taking military action or covert action by the CIA against Venezuela, though he has also floated that he was open to speaking with Maduro.

Outgoing Honduran President Xiomara Castro has leaned into a leftist stance, but she has kept a pragmatic and even cooperative attitude in dealing with the U.S. administration and she has received visits from Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem and U.S. Army Gen. Laura Richardson, when she was the commander of U.S. Southern Command. The president has even backed off his threats to end Honduras' extradition treaty and military cooperation with the U.S.

Under Castro, Honduras has also received its citizens deported from the U.S. and acted as a bridge for deported Venezuelans who were then picked up by Venezuela in Honduras.

Argentine President Javier Milei, a staunch admirer of Trump, also gave his support to Asfura in Honduras on Friday.

"I fully support Tito Asfura, who is the candidate who best represents the opposition to the leftist tyrants who have destroyed Honduras," the libertarian president said on his X account.

Hungary's Orbán seeks more Russian oil and gas at Kremlin talks with Putin

By JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán held talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin on Friday, once again shunning efforts by his European Union partners to isolate Moscow over its invasion of neighboring Ukraine nearly four years ago.

The trip to Moscow is the second since last year for Orbán, who is widely considered Putin's closest partner among all EU leaders. Hungary is one of only a few EU countries to continue importing large quantities of Russian fossil fuels, and Orbán has strongly opposed efforts by the bloc to wean its 27 member nations off Russian energy supplies.

"We have important areas of cooperation, and we haven't given up on any area of that cooperation, no matter the external pressure," Orbán said. "Russian energy forms the basis of Hungary's energy supply, now and in the future."

Orbán has long argued for a cessation of hostilities in Ukraine but without outlining what that might mean for the country's territorial integrity or future security. That stance has dismayed Hungary's EU and NATO allies, who accuse Russia of breaking international law and threatening the security of Eastern European countries.

In his opening remarks at the Kremlin talks, Putin noted Orbán's "balanced position" on the war in Ukraine. A little less than four hours later, the Kremlin reported that the talks ended.

Orbán seeks Russian oil and gas after Trump exemption

Earlier this month, Orbán traveled to Washington for a meeting with U.S. President Donald Trump and succeeded in securing an exemption to sanctions the Trump administration placed on Russian energy companies Lukoil and Rosneft — an allowance Orbán said ensured Hungary's continued energy security.

Orbán said Friday that following Hungary's exemption from U.S. sanctions, "now all we need is oil and gas, which we can buy from the Russians. I am going there to ensure Hungary's energy supply at an affordable price both this winter and next year."

Orbán has long argued Russian energy imports are indispensable for his country's economy, and that switching to fossil fuels sourced from elsewhere would cause an immediate economic collapse — a claim some critics dispute. As the rest of Europe has gradually cut off Russian energy, Hungary has maintained and even increased its imports, and argued against an EU plan to eliminate all Russian fossil fuels by the end of 2027.

Trump's envoy expected in Moscow for talks on peace plan

The Trump administration has said it is seeing signs that its sanctions on major Russian oil producers are crimping the economic engine that has allowed Moscow to continue to fund its war in Ukraine. Prices for Russian oil have plunged as major Indian and Chinese buyers moved to comply with U.S. sanctions before they went into effect last week, according to a senior Treasury Department official.

Meanwhile, Trump last week released a plan for ending the nearly four-year war. The 28-point proposal heavily favored Russia, prompting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to quickly engage with American negotiators. European leaders, fearing for their own future facing Russian aggression, scrambled to steer the negotiations toward accommodating their concerns.

Trump said Tuesday that his plan to end the war had been "fine-tuned", and that he's sending envoy Steve Witkoff to Russia to meet with Putin and Army Secretary Dan Driscoll to meet with Ukrainian officials. He suggested he could eventually meet with Putin and Zelenskyy, but not until further progress has been made in negotiations.

Russian state news agency RIA Novosti on Friday cited Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov as saying that Putin will host Witkoff for talks "in the first half" of next week, promising to announce the exact date "in due time." Putin is scheduled travel to India for talks with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi later in the week, on Dec. 4-5, according to the Kremlin.

Peskov said earlier on Friday that the "main parameters" of the peace plan, revised during Ukraine-U.S.

talks in Geneva last weekend, were relayed to Russia, and there will be “a discussion in Moscow” next week.

Ukrainian drones cause damage in Russia

In other developments, Russia’s Defense Ministry reported Friday that its air defenses intercepted 136 Ukrainian drones over a number of Russian regions and the annexed Crimea overnight. Damage to cars, residential buildings and houses was reported by authorities in the Rostov and Voronezh regions near the border with Ukraine.

But the Ukrainian general staff said its forces struck an oil refinery in Saratov, Russia, the general staff wrote in a statement on Telegram. A series of explosions started a fire, the message said.

Ukraine also conducted aerial strikes against Russian air defense units and drone storage and fuel depots in the occupied territories.

Late Friday evening, Ukraine’s Air Force said that it had detected several Russian missiles launched at the Khmelnytskyi region. At least one of the missiles was an aero-ballistic Kinzhal missile. Regional authorities didn’t immediately comment on the attack.

Russia attacks Kyiv and Dnipro

Russia launched attacks on Ukraine’s capital, Kyiv, and the southern city of Dnipro early on Saturday, just before a second round of peace negotiations was set to begin.

Residential buildings and houses were damaged in six locations across Kyiv’s Shevchenkivskiy, Solomianskyi and Darnytskyi districts, according to the head of the Kyiv city administration, Tymur Tkachenko. He added that four people were injured.

It was not immediately clear what, if anything, was hit in Dnipro. Ukraine’s public broadcaster, Suspilne, reported explosions in the city.

Ukrainian peace negotiators are due to meet their U.S. counterparts in America this weekend, according to an official in Ukraine’s presidential administration who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the talks. A U.S. delegation is then expected to travel to Moscow for talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin in the second half of next week.

Death toll rises to 128 in Hong Kong residential fire as 8 more arrested over towers’ renovation

By DAVID RISING and CHAN HO-HIM Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — Hong Kong firefighters found dozens more bodies Friday in an intensive apartment-by-apartment search of a high-rise complex where a massive fire engulfed seven buildings, and authorities arrested another 8 people involved in the towers’ renovation. The death toll in one of the city’s deadliest blazes rose to 128, and many remain unaccounted for.

First responders found that some fire alarms in the complex, which housed many older people, did not sound when tested, said Andy Yeung, the director of Hong Kong Fire Services, though he did not say how many were not working or if others were.

The blaze jumped rapidly from one building to the next as foam panels and bamboo scaffolding covered in netting apparently installed by a construction company caught fire.

Authorities on Friday arrested seven men and one woman, ranging in age from 40 to 63, including scaffolding subcontractors, directors of an engineering consultant company and project managers supervising the renovation, the Independent Commission Against Corruption said in a statement.

On Friday, crews prioritized apartments from which they had received emergency calls during the blaze but were unable to reach in the hours that the fire burned out of control, Derek Armstrong Chan, a deputy director of Hong Kong Fire Services, told reporters. It took firefighters a day to bring the fire under control, and it was not fully extinguished until Friday morning — some 40 hours after it started.

Even two days after the fire began, smoke continued to drift out of the charred skeletons of the buildings from the occasional flare-up.

More bodies may be found

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Some 200 people remain unaccounted for, Secretary for Security Chris Tang told reporters. That includes 89 bodies that have not yet been identified. Yet more bodies might be recovered, authorities said, though crews have finished a search for anyone living trapped inside.

More than 2,300 firefighters and medical personnel were involved in the operation, and 12 firefighters were among the 79 people injured, Yeung said. One firefighter was also killed, he had said previously.

Katy Lo, 70, a resident of Wang Fuk Court, was not home when the fire started Wednesday. She rushed back roughly an hour later to see that the blaze had spread to her building.

"That's my home.... I still can't really believe what happened," Lo said on Friday as she registered for government assistance for affected households. "This all still feels like a bad dream."

The dead included two Indonesian migrant workers, the Indonesian foreign ministry said Thursday. About 11 other migrants from the country who were working as domestic helpers in the apartment complex remained missing, Indonesian Consul General Yul Edison said.

The government said all official flags in the city will be lowered to half staff in mourning from Saturday to Monday. The city's leader, John Lee, will lead a three-minute silence Saturday from the government headquarters.

The apartment complex of eight, 31-story buildings in Tai Po district, a suburb near Hong Kong's border with mainland China, was built in the 1980s and had been undergoing a major renovation. It had almost 2,000 apartments and some 4,800 residents.

Highly flammable foam panels blamed

Three men — the directors and an engineering consultant of a construction company — were arrested Thursday on suspicion of manslaughter, and police said company leaders were suspected of gross negligence.

Police have not identified the company where the suspects worked, but documents posted to the homeowners association's website showed that the Prestige Construction & Engineering Company was in charge of renovations. Police have seized boxes of documents from the company, where phones rang unanswered Thursday.

In addition to the new arrests Friday, the anti-corruption agency also searched the suspects' offices and seized relevant documents and bank records.

Police said they found highly flammable plastic foam panels attached to the windows on each floor of the one unaffected tower. The panels were believed to have been installed by the construction company but the purpose was not clear.

Preliminary investigations showed the fire started on a lower-level scaffolding net of one of the buildings, and then spread rapidly as the foam panels caught fire, said Tang, the secretary for security.

"The blaze ignited the foam panels, causing the glass to shatter and leading to a swift intensification of the fire and its spread into the interior spaces," Tang said.

Authorities suspected some materials on the exterior walls of the high-rise buildings did not meet fire resistance standards, allowing the unusually fast spread of the fire.

Authorities planned immediate inspections of housing complexes undergoing major renovations to ensure scaffolding and construction materials meet safety standards.

The fire was the deadliest in Hong Kong in decades. A 1996 fire in a commercial building in Kowloon killed 41 people. A warehouse fire in 1948 killed 176 people, according to the South China Morning Post.

Israeli forces kill at least 13 people in southern Syria raid, officials and residents say

By ABDULRAHMAN SHAHEEN Associated Press

DAMASCUS, Syria (AP) — Israeli forces raided a Syrian village and opened fire when they were confronted by residents on Friday, killing at least 13 people, Syrian officials said, in the deadliest Israeli attack since its troops seized a swath of southern Syria a year ago.

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Syria's Foreign Ministry called the attack a "horrific massacre" and said women and children were among those killed.

The Syrian state news agency SANA said Israeli forces entered the village of Beit Jin aiming to seize local men and opened heavy fire after being confronted by residents. Dozens of families fled the area.

Israel said Friday it conducted an operation to apprehend suspects from the Jamaa Islamiya militant group in Beit Jin who were planning IED and rocket attacks into Israel. It said other militants opened fire at the troops, injuring six, and that troops returned fire, including bringing in air support. It said the operation had concluded, all of the suspects were apprehended and a number of militants were killed.

A local official in the village, Walid Okasha, told The Associated Press that those killed were civilians. Among the dead were a man, his wife, his two children and his brother as well as another man who had gotten married the day before.

Firas Daher, a Beit Jin resident, told the AP that troops moved in around 3 a.m. and were met by "slight resistance, with light weapons." Troops responded with drones and helicopters and fire from heavy machine guns. "Whenever anyone would move inside the village or any car would move, it would get hit. When we tried to take injured people to the hospital, they would hit the car carrying them," he said.

Since the fall of former Syrian President Bashar Assad in December 2024, Israeli forces have held a slice of southern Syria that was previously a U.N.-patrolled buffer zone under a 1974 disengagement agreement.

Troops have regularly carried out operations in villages and towns inside and outside the zone, including raids snatching people it says are suspected militants. Israel has also launched hundreds of airstrikes on Syrian military sites and pushed for a demilitarized zone south of Damascus.

Israeli raids have several times been met by armed local residents. In April, troops raided the town of Nawa, and when confronted by residents, the military carried out airstrikes in the town, killing nine people. A month earlier, Israeli forces killed six people in the village of Koayiah in similar clashes during a raid.

In a previous raid on Beit Jin in June, Israeli forces seized several people who they said were Hamas members — a characterization disputed by residents — and killed a man whose family said had a history of schizophrenia.

Israel says it seized the 400-square-kilometer (155-square-mile) demilitarized buffer zone in southern Syria in a pre-emptive move to prevent militants from moving into the area after Islamist insurgents toppled Assad. It says the move is temporary, but critics accuse Israel of taking advantage of Syria's turmoil for a land grab. Israel still controls the Golan Heights that it captured from Syria during the 1967 Mideast war and later annexed — a move not recognized by most of the international community.

Syrian officials have condemned the Israeli incursions as a violation of Syria's sovereignty. On Friday the government called for the international community to take "urgent action" to halt Israeli incursions.

Israel has viewed Syria's new government, headed by former insurgent leader Ahmed al-Sharaa, with suspicion. The two countries, which do not have diplomatic relations, have been negotiating a potential security agreement to de-escalate.

The deaths in Syria followed a series of strikes by Israel's air force in parts of southern Lebanon on Thursday. Israel says its ongoing strikes are aimed at preventing Hezbollah from rebuilding after a devastating war last year ended with a ceasefire.

The United Nations on Tuesday said Israel had killed at least 127 civilians, including children, in its strikes on Lebanon since the ceasefire a year ago. Things escalated earlier this week with an Israeli strike in Lebanon's capital, Beirut, killing a senior Hezbollah official whom Israel described as the group's chief of staff.

Guinea-Bissau soldiers appoint ally of deposed president as prime minister

By ASSANA SAMBU and MARK BANCHEREAU Associated Press

BISSAU, Guinea-Bissau (AP) — Soldiers in Guinea-Bissau on Friday appointed a close ally of the deposed president as prime minister, after seizing power following disputed national elections earlier this week.

The country's new military leader, Gen. Horta Inta-a, announced the appointment of finance minister

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Ilídio Vieira Té as prime minister in a decree.

Vieira Té is a close ally of the deposed President Umaro Sissoco Embaló, having served as his party's campaign director during the legislative election on Sunday.

Soldiers seized power on Wednesday, three days after the closely contested presidential election. During the ongoing military takeover, the president told French media over the phone he had been deposed and arrested.

The opposition claimed that Embaló had "fabricated" the coup to avoid an election defeat in Sunday's vote. The military takeover and the reported arrest of Embaló were manufactured to disrupt election results, according to his rival Fernando Dias, who, like Embaló, claimed to have won the vote.

The former Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathan, who was in Guinea-Bissau during the military takeover as the head of the West African Elders Forum (WAEF) Election Mission observer group, accused Embaló on Friday of staging a "ceremonial coup" to stay in power.

"A military doesn't take over governments and allow the sitting president that they overthrew to address press conferences and announce that he has been arrested," Jonathan told reporters.

Guinea-Bissau, one of the world's poorest countries, has been dogged by coups and attempted coups since its independence from Portugal more than 50 years ago, including a coup attempt in October. The country of 2.2 million people is known as a hub for drug trafficking between Latin America and Europe, a trend that experts say has fueled its political crises.

Calm returns in capital, deposed president leaves the country

The High Military Command on Friday lifted the curfew it imposed during its military takeover and authorized the movement of people and public transportation across all neighborhoods of the capital, Bissau.

Calm has returned to the capital, with people and vehicles circulating through the city's streets after army checkpoints were lifted. The main stock exchange and markets in outlying districts, as well as commercial banks, have also reopened.

Embaló, meanwhile, arrived in neighboring Senegal on Thursday with a flight chartered by the Senegalese government, which has been "in direct communication with all concerned Guinea-Bissau actors," Senegal's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement. The country promised to work with partners to restore democracy in Guinea-Bissau.

Senegalese Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko on Friday described the military takeover in Guinea-Bissau as a "scheme," echoing claims that the coup was manufactured to disrupt election results. He called for the release of arrested opposition members.

"The democratic process must be carried through to the end and the results announced," Sonko said during a parliamentary session.

Regional bloc suspends Guinea-Bissau

Late Thursday, the West African regional bloc known as ECOWAS said it is suspending Guinea-Bissau from its decision-making bodies "until the restoration of full and effective constitutional order in the country."

ECOWAS said it also "reserves the right to use all options" allowed under its rules, "including sanctions on all entities deemed culpable of disrupting the electoral and democratic process."

The regional bloc said a mediation team, led by the body's chair and including the presidents of Togo, Cabo Verde and Senegal, will travel to Bissau to "engage the leaders of the coup with a view to ensuring the full restoration of constitutional order."

Widely seen as West Africa's leading political and regional authority, the 15-nation ECOWAS was formed in 1975 to promote economic integration in member states. The bloc often collaborates with members' governments to solve domestic challenges on various fronts from politics to economics and security.

It has struggled in recent years to reverse coups in the region where citizens have complained of not benefiting from rich natural resources.

Sanctions against junta-led Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso and threats of military intervention in Niger to reverse the coup eventually led to the three countries' withdrawal from the bloc earlier this year.

Bakary Sambe, who heads the Senegal-based Timbuktu Institute for Peace Studies, said the situation in Guinea-Bissau is still unclear, and any immediate decision by ECOWAS regarding sanctions would seem

rushed and counterproductive.

"We are in a state of total uncertainty, caught between an unfinished electoral process and a disruption of constitutional order caused by a coup, which has led to contradictory interpretations and various questions," he said.

"The regional organization appears to have learned from the mistakes made in Niger and is trying as much as possible to temper its inclination to impose sanctions," Sambe added.

Zelenskyy's chief of staff resigns after anti-corruption investigators search home

By ILLIA NOVIKOV and ISOBEL KOSHIW Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced Friday the resignation of his powerful chief of staff, Andrii Yermak, who was also the country's lead negotiator in talks with the U.S., after Yermak's residence was searched by anti-corruption investigators.

The unprecedented search at the heart of Ukraine's government was a blow for the Ukrainian leader that risked disrupting his negotiating strategy at a time when Kyiv is under intense U.S. pressure to sign a peace deal nearly four years after Russia's full-scale invasion.

Yermak has long been a trusted confidant of Zelenskyy, who has resisted persistent pressure to replace him.

In a nod to the controversy over Yermak's long stay at his side, Zelenskyy said Russia was waiting for Ukraine to make missteps and upset the delicate and tense peace negotiations.

"We don't have a right to retreat or argue between ourselves. If we lose unity, we risk losing everything — ourselves, Ukraine, our future," Zelenskyy said. "We must unite, we must hold on. We have no other choice. We won't have another Ukraine."

"To preserve our internal strength, there must be no reasons to be distracted at anything else except for defense of Ukraine," he added. "I don't want anybody to be questioning Ukraine, and that's why we have today's decisions."

In his nightly address, Zelenskyy announced that he was "resetting" the presidential office. He said Yermak had submitted his resignation and that he would begin consultations Saturday to appoint a new chief of staff.

Yermak's name did not appear on a list of officials that Zelenskyy said would make up the Ukrainian delegation for the next round of negotiations with the United States.

The delegation will now be jointly lead by Andrii Hnatov, the head of Ukraine's armed forces; Andrii Sybiha, Ukraine's foreign minister; and Rustem Umerov, head of Ukraine's security council, Zelenskyy said. He said negotiations would happen "soon."

Two national agencies fighting corruption in Ukraine said their search targeted Yermak. Oleksii Tkachuk, a spokesperson for Yermak, said the anti-graft agencies had not served Yermak a notice of suspicion, meaning he was not a suspect in an investigation. Yermak was not told what the searches related to, Tkachuk said.

Yermak confirmed the search of his apartment inside the presidential compound in downtown Kyiv, where checkpoints limit public access. Media reports said Yermak's office was also searched, but investigators declined to comment on that.

It was not clear where Zelenskyy or Yermak were at the time of the morning raid.

"The investigators are facing no obstacles," Yermak wrote on the messaging app Telegram. He said he was cooperating fully with them and that his lawyers were present.

In an interview Thursday with The Atlantic, Yermak said that as long as Zelensky is president, "no one should count on us giving up territory. He will not sign away territory."

Ukraine, he said, is prepared to discuss only the question of what land each side controls, as indicated by the location of the front lines.

"All we can realistically talk about right now is really to define the line of contact," Yermak said.

Energy sector scandal

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The National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine and the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office are leading a major investigation into a \$100 million energy sector scandal involving top Ukrainian officials that has dominated domestic headlines in recent weeks.

It was not clear if the searches were connected to the case, and a spokesperson for the NABU, Anton Tarnikov, declined to comment, citing legal restrictions on revealing details on an ongoing probe.

The head of Ukraine's parliamentary anti-corruption committee, Anastasiia Radina, said on social media that Yermak's resignation was "better late than never."

Mykyta Porturaev, a lawmaker with Zelenskyy's party who last week called for Yermak's resignation and for a cross-party government to be established, said the anti-corruption raid deepened Ukraine's political crisis.

Yermak "definitely had political responsibility," Porturaev told The Associated Press. "Of course he had to go."

A spokesperson for the European Commission, Guillaume Mercier, told Ukrainian news outlet Radio Svoboda on Friday that they were following developments closely and that the searches showed that Ukraine's anti-corruption agencies were working. He said fighting corruption was central to the country's European Union accession.

Investigators suspect that Tymur Mindich, a one-time business partner of Zelenskyy, was the plot's mastermind. Mindich has fled the country, with any criminal proceedings against him likely to be carried out in absentia. Two top government ministers have resigned in the scandal.

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

Political turmoil for Zelenskyy

The scandal has heaped more problems on Zelenskyy as he seeks continued Western support for Ukraine's war effort and tries to ensure continued foreign funding. The European Union, which Ukraine wants to join, has told Zelenskyy he must crack down on graft.

Zelenskyy faced an unprecedented rebellion from his own lawmakers earlier this month after investigators published details of their energy sector investigation.

Although Yermak was not accused of any wrongdoing, several senior lawmakers in Zelenskyy's party said Yermak should take responsibility for the debacle in order 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 defied them.

Zelenskyy urged Ukrainians to unite and "stop the political games" in light of the U.S. pressure to reach a settlement with Russia.

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

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

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

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

Russia outlaws Human Rights Watch as crackdown on dissent continues

The Associated Press undefined

Russian authorities on Friday outlawed Human Rights Watch as an "undesirable organization," a label that under a 2015 law makes involvement with such organizations a criminal offense.

The designation means the international human rights group must stop all work in Russia, and opens

those who cooperate with or support the organization to prosecution.

"For over three decades, Human Rights Watch's work on post-Soviet Russia has pressed the government to uphold human rights and freedoms," the executive director at Human Rights Watch, Philippe Bolopion, said in a statement. "Our work hasn't changed, but what's changed, dramatically, is the government's full-throttled embrace of dictatorial policies, its staggering rise in repression, and the scope of the war crimes its forces are committing in Ukraine."

The decision by the Russian prosecutor general's office is the latest move in an unrelenting crackdown on Kremlin critics, journalists and activists, which has intensified to unprecedented levels since Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

In a separate statement on Friday, the office said it was opening a case against Russian feminist punk band Pussy Riot that would designate the group as an extremist organization.

Meanwhile, on Thursday, Russia's Supreme Court designated the Anti-Corruption Foundation set up by the late opposition activist Alexei Navalny as a terrorist group. The ruling targeted the foundation's U.S.-registered entity, which became the focal point for the group when the original Anti-Corruption Foundation was designated an "undesirable organization" by the Russian government in 2021.

"There is no doubt that other organizations will soon be designated as 'terrorists' — independent media, human rights projects, and local initiatives," the foundation said in a statement.

"This is a political strategy used by the Russian authorities: to declare anyone who interferes with their theft and endless war an enemy of the state."

Russia's list of "undesirable organizations" currently covers more than 275 entities, including prominent independent news outlets and rights groups. Among those are prominent news organizations like Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, think tanks like Chatham House, anti-corruption group Transparency International, and environmental advocacy organization WWF.

Founded in 1978, Human Rights Watch monitors and researches human rights violations in countries across the world. It has been outspoken in its opposition to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and recently published an investigation into Russian forces using drones to deliberately chase, injure and kill civilians living in Ukraine's Kherson region.

Paris prosecutor says arrested man is thought to be 4th member of Louvre heist gang

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — A man arrested by French police earlier this week is thought to be the fourth member of the team that stole France's crown jewels from the Louvre Museum, the Paris prosecutor said Friday, meaning that the entire gang that carried out the brazen heist is now believed to have been caught.

Prosecutor Laure Beccau, whose office is heading the investigation, said the 39-year-old man has a criminal record, with six previous convictions, including for receiving stolen goods, for which he was given a 2-month suspended prison sentence in 2010.

He has now been handed preliminary charges of robbery by an organized gang, punishable by 15 years imprisonment, and criminal conspiracy, which can carry a 10-year sentence if he is convicted for his suspected role in the stunning Oct. 19 theft at the world's most-visited museum. The robbery gang's haul of loot was worth an estimated 88 million euros (\$102 million) — a monetary value that didn't include the jewels' huge historical value to France.

The prosecutor's statement didn't say what role, exactly, the man is thought to have played in the daylight heist, carried out with angle grinders, a freight lift and subterfuge, with robbers dressed as workers in bright vests.

Three other people also taken into police custody for questioning this week have been released without charge, the prosecutor said.

Police investigators are continuing their work "to locate the stolen jewels and to precisely determine each person's role in this organized criminal group, as well as to clarify how the theft was planned and

perpetrated," she said.

The robbery is believed to have been carried out by a four-person team — with two breaking into the museum's ornate Apollo Gallery where the jewels were displayed and then being whisked away on motorbikes by two associates who waited outside.

Three men, the robbery team's other suspected members, were arrested in October and handed preliminary charges of theft by an organized gang and criminal conspiracy. DNA traces were found at the scene or on items linked to the robbery.

Police also arrested a woman in October. She faces preliminary charges of complicity in theft and criminal conspiracy. She is the longtime partner of one of the alleged robbers. The couple have children together and live in the northern suburbs of Paris, also home to other suspects.

The woman denied any involvement, her lawyer said.

The haul hasn't been recovered. It includes a diamond-and-emerald necklace Napoleon gave to Empress Marie-Louise, jewels tied to 19th-century Queens Marie-Amélie and Hortense, and Empress Eugénie's pearl-and-diamond tiara.

The robbery has focused attention on security at the Louvre. The museum's director has acknowledged a "terrible failure" and promised the installation of new surveillance cameras and anti-intrusion systems.

The thieves took less than eight minutes to force their way into the museum and leave, using a freight lift to reach one of the building's windows. Footage from museum cameras showed that the two who broke into the Apollo Gallery used grinders to cut into jewelry display cases.

The emerald-set imperial crown of Napoleon III's wife, Empress Eugénie, containing more than 1,300 diamonds, was later found outside the museum.

What a federal ban on THC-infused drinks and snacks could mean for the hemp industry

By STEVE KARNOWSKI and GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The production lines at Indeed Brewing moved quickly, the cans filling not with beer, but with THC-infused seltzer. The product, which features the compound that gets cannabis users high, has been a lifeline at Indeed and other craft breweries as alcohol sales have fallen in recent years.

But that boom looks set to come to a crashing halt. Buried in the bill that ended the federal government shutdown this month was a provision to ban those drinks, along with other impairing beverages and snacks made from hemp, which have proliferated across the country in recent years. Now the \$24 billion hemp industry is scrambling to save itself before the provision takes effect in November 2026.

"It's a big deal," said Ryan Bandy, Indeed's chief business officer. "It would be a mess for our breweries, for our industry, and obviously for a lot of people who like these things."

Here's what to know about the looming ban on impairing products derived from hemp.

Congress opened the door in 2018

Marijuana and hemp are the same species. Marijuana is cultivated for high levels of THC in its flowers. Low-THC hemp is grown for its sturdy fibers, food or wellness products. "Rope, not dope" was long the motto of farmers who supported legalizing hemp.

After states began legalizing marijuana for adult use over a decade ago, hemp advocates saw an opening at the federal level. As part of the 2018 farm bill, Congress legalized the cultivation of industrial hemp to give farmers, including in Republican Sen. Mitch McConnell's home state of Kentucky, a new cash crop.

But the way that law defined hemp — as having less than 0.3% of a specific type of THC, called delta-9 — opened a huge loophole. Beverages or bags of snacks could meet that threshold and still contain more than enough THC to get people high. Businesses could further exploit the law by extracting a non-impairing compound, called CBD, and chemically changing it into other types of impairing THC, such as delta-8 or delta-10.

The result? Vape oil, gummy candies, chips, cookies, sodas and other unregulated, untested products

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laden with hemp-derived THC spread around the country. In many places, they have been available at gas stations or convenience stores, even to teens. In legal marijuana states, they undercut heavily taxed and regulated products. In others, they evaded the prohibition on recreational use of weed.

Some states, including Indiana, have reported spikes in calls to poison-control centers for pediatric exposure to THC.

A patchwork of state regulations

Dozens of states have since taken steps to regulate or ban impairing hemp products. In October, Democratic California Gov. Gavin Newsom signed a bill banning the sale of intoxicating hemp products outside the state's legal marijuana system.

Texas, which has a massive hemp market, is moving to regulate sales of impairing hemp, such as by restricting them to those over 21. In Nebraska, lawmakers have instead considered a bill to criminalize the sale and possession of products containing hemp-based THC.

Washington state adopted a program to regulate hemp growing. But the number of licensed growers has cratered since the state banned intoxicating hemp products outside of the regulated cannabis market in 2023. Five years ago, there were 220, said Trecia Ehrlich, cannabis program manager with the state agriculture department. This year, there were 42, and with a federal ban looming, she expects that number to drop by about half next year.

Minnesota made infused beverages and foods legal in 2022 for people 21 and older. The products, which must be derived from legally certified hemp, have become so popular that Target is now offering THC drinks at some of its stores in the state.

They've also been a boon to liquor stores and to small Minneapolis brewers like Indeed, where THC drinks make up close to one-quarter of the business, Bandy said. At Bauhaus Brew Labs, a few blocks away, THC drinks account for 26% of their revenues from distributed products and 11% of revenues at the brewery's taproom.

A powerful senator moves to close the loophole

None of that was what McConnell intended when he helped craft the 2018 farm bill. He finally closed the loophole by inserting a federal hemp THC ban in the measure to end the 43-day federal government shutdown, approved by the Senate on Nov. 10.

"It will keep these dangerous products out of the hands of children, while preserving the hemp industry for farmers," McConnell said. "Industrial hemp and CBD will remain legal for industrial applications."

Some in the legal marijuana industry celebrated, as the ban would end what they consider unfair competition.

They were joined by prohibitionists. "There's really no good argument for allowing these dangerous products to be sold in our country," said Kevin Sabet, president and CEO of Smart Approaches to Marijuana.

But the ban doesn't take effect for a year. That has given the industry hope that there is still time to pass regulations that will improve the hemp THC industry — such as by banning synthetically derived THC, requiring age restrictions on sales, and prohibiting marketing to children — rather than eradicate it.

"We are very hopeful that cooler heads will prevail," said Jonathan Miller, general counsel of the industry group U.S. Hemp Roundtable. "If they really thought there was a health emergency, there would be no year-long period."

The federal ban would jeopardize more than 300,000 jobs while costing states \$1.5 billion in lost tax money, the group says.

Drew Hurst, president and chief operating officer at Bauhaus Brew Labs, has no doubt his company would be among the casualties.

"If this goes through as written currently, I don't see a way at all that Bauhaus could stay in business," Hurst said.

What comes next?

A number of lawmakers say they will push for regulation of the hemp THC industry. Kentucky's second senator, Republican Rand Paul, introduced an amendment to strip McConnell's hemp language from the

crucial government-funding bill, but it failed on a lopsided 76-24 vote.

Minnesota's Democratic U.S. senators, Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith, are among those strategizing to save the industry. Klobuchar noted at a recent news conference that the ban was inserted into the unrelated shutdown bill without a hearing. She suggested the federal government could allow states to develop their own regulatory frameworks, or that Minnesota's strict regulations could be used as a national model.

Kevin Hilliard, co-founder of Insight Brewing in Minneapolis, said the hemp industry needs a solution before planting time next spring.

"If a farmer has uncertainty, they're not going to plant," Hilliard said.

Death toll from floods in Thailand reaches 145 as receding water reveals widespread damage

BANGKOK (AP) — The death toll from flooding in southern Thailand has reached at least 145, officials said Friday, as receding waters started to reveal devastating damage across the region.

More than 1.2 million households and 3.6 million people have been affected by floods triggered by heavy rains in 12 southern provinces, the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation said Friday.

Government spokesperson Siripong Angkasakulkiat said in a news conference in Bangkok that flooding has killed 145 people in eight provinces, particularly in Songkhla province which recorded at least 110 deaths.

He said search and rescue efforts have become more successful as floodwaters started to recede further.

Songkhla province recorded a sharp increase in the death toll after flooding began to subside. News reports showed rescuers gained more access to residential areas that had previously been submerged under high water and recovered more bodies, particularly in Hat Yai, the largest city in the south.

The disaster department reported Friday morning that waters have receded in most of the affected areas, but levels remain high in some locations. The Meteorological Department said rainfall has decreased in the south but warned of thunderstorms in some areas.

The flooding caused severe disruption, leaving thousands of people stranded, rendering streets impassable and submerging low-rise buildings and vehicles.

Videos and photos from the affected areas on Friday show damaged roads, fallen power poles, household appliances and debris washed away by floodwaters piled along the streets. Abandoned cars were overturned or stacked atop one another, apparently swept away by powerful currents.

Today in History: November 29, the Sand Creek Massacre

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Saturday, Nov. 29, the 333rd day of 2025. There are 32 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Nov. 29, 1864, a Colorado militia launched an unprovoked attack on an encampment of Cheyenne and Arapahoe tribal members, killing an estimated 230 people.

Also on this date:

In 1929, Navy Lt. Cmdr. Richard E. Byrd, pilot Bernt Balchen, radio operator Harold Gatty and photographer Ashley McKinney made the first airplane flight over the South Pole.

In 1961, Enos the chimpanzee was launched from Cape Canaveral aboard the Mercury-Atlas 5 spacecraft, which orbited Earth twice before splashing down safely south of Bermuda.

In 1981, film star Natalie Wood drowned at age 43 while boating off California's Santa Catalina Island with her husband Robert Wagner and actor Christopher Walken.

In 1987, a Korean Air 707 jetliner en route from Abu Dhabi to Bangkok was destroyed by a bomb planted by North Korean agents, killing all 115 people aboard.

In 2001, former Beatle George Harrison died in Los Angeles following a battle with cancer; he was 58.

In 2012, the United Nations voted overwhelmingly to grant Palestine non-observer member state status, a vote that came exactly 65 years after the General Assembly adopted a plan to divide Palestine into

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separate states for Jews and Arabs.

In 2022, Oath Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes was convicted of seditious conspiracy for his role in the Jan. 6, 2021, U.S. Capitol rioting. (Sentenced to 18 years in prison in 2023, he was freed in 2025 under President Donald Trump's sweeping grant of clemency to all 1,500-plus people charged in the insurrection.)

Today's Birthdays: Filmmaker Joel Coen is 71. Actor-TV personality Howie Mandel is 70. Actor Cathy Moriarty is 65. Actor Kim Delaney is 64. Actor Andrew McCarthy is 63. Actor Don Cheadle is 61. Pop singer Jonathan Knight (New Kids on the Block) is 57. Baseball Hall of Famer Mariano Rivera is 56. Actor Brian Baumgartner is 53. Actor Anna (AH'-nuh) Faris is 49. Rapper The Game is 46. Actor Gemma Chan is 43. Actor Lucas Black is 43. NFL quarterback Russell Wilson is 37.