

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Tues., Dec. 2

- Senior Menu: Roast pork, baked potato, Normandy blend, fruit, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: Scones  
School Lunch: Chicken nuggets, fries.  
St. John's Lutheran: Ladies Aid LWML Christmas Party, noon.  
United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.  
5th Grade GBB, 4:15 p.m.  
7th Grade BBB, 6 p.m.  
MS GBB at Redfield, 7th at 6:30 p.m., 8th at 7:30 p.m.  
Youth wrestling sign up, 6:30 p.m.  
Council meeting, 7 p.m.



## Wed., Dec. 3

- Senior Menu: Hamburger cabbage soup, chicken salad sandwich, fruit, oatmeal raisin cookie.  
School Breakfast: Breakfast pizza.  
School Lunch: Pizza crunchers, green beans.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.; Sarah Circle, 5 p.m.; League, 6:30 p.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.; DFC Supper, 6 p.m.; Advent Service, 7 p.m.  
United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.  
Groton C&MA: Kid's Club, Youth Group, Adult Bible Study, 7 p.m.  
Groton Chamber Meeting, noon, at city hall.  
6th Grade GBB Practice, 6 p.m.  
5th Grade BBB Practice, 6 p.m.  
6th Grade BBB Practice, 7:30 p.m.

**Groton Daily Independent**  
**PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445**  
**Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460**

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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.**

## Monsoon Death Toll

Cyclone-fueled flooding across Southeast Asia, including in Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam, has now killed at least 1,200 people. Roughly 800 remain missing, and hundreds of thousands have been displaced since last week. Officials say entire low-lying districts have been submerged as rivers overflowed and landslides buried nearby communities.

Indonesia (at least 604 deaths) and Sri Lanka (at least 355 deaths—the country's deadliest natural disaster) are hardest hit, with some areas receiving a month's worth of rain in 48 hours. Rescue crews face washed-out roads, collapsed bridges, and power outages, while military units have been deployed to help with evacuations and deliver aid to overcrowded shelters.

Meteorologists say the disaster stems from a rare overlap of monsoon rains and cyclone systems, reflecting a broader pattern of erratic weather linked to a warming climate. Officials warn that more heavy rain could arrive this week, and damage assessments may take weeks as floodwaters recede.

## Cox v. Sony

The Supreme Court heard oral arguments yesterday in Cox Communications v. Sony Music—a case that could determine internet service providers' level of responsibility for pirated content on their networks.

In 2023, pirated movies and TV shows were downloaded nearly 19 billion times, costing the US economy more than \$29B, per industry estimates. That same year, music piracy sites saw more than 17 billion visits. Most internet service providers are part of a voluntary alert system to crack down on piracy. Cox—the US' third-largest broadband provider—is not.

Entertainment companies say Cox's inaction has allowed customers to illegally distribute over 10,000 copyrighted works. In 2019, a jury sided with Sony, compelling Cox to pay \$1B in damages. Cox is appealing the verdict, saying it should not be held liable for actions it does not take.

The Supreme Court is expected to rule on the case by June of next year.

## Global GLP-1 Guidance

The World Health Organization yesterday issued its first-ever guidance on treating obesity with glucagon-like peptide-1 therapies, conditionally recommending the drug class for long-term use in nonpregnant adults alongside a healthy diet, regular exercise, and medical counseling.

The guidance comes as global demand for drugs mimicking the hunger-curbing GLP-1 hormone has surged since 2021, when regulators began approving Wegovy (brand name for semaglutide) for weight loss. US spending on GLP-1 agonists reached \$71.7B in 2023, an over 500% increase from 2018, when the drugs were primarily used to treat diabetes. A monthlong course in the US can cost upward of \$1K, and the WHO estimates GLP-1 therapies will be inaccessible to over 90% of the more than 2 billion people projected to be affected by obesity in 2030.

The WHO's guidance calls for expanded access through measures such as tiered pricing and urges strong oversight to curb the spread of counterfeit drugs.

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## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Two female gymnasts file lawsuit alleging USA Gymnastics and Olympic sports watchdog failed to address sexual abuse by coach.

Antitrust trial against NASCAR begins, with fate of NBA star Michael Jordan's team at stake.

"Zootopia 2" earns \$556M internationally over Thanksgiving holiday, marking the highest-ever global opening for an animated film and the highest global opening for any film in 2025.

NFL announces Charlie Puth, Brandi Carlile, and Coco Jones as headliners for Super Bowl LX pregame show Feb. 8.

## Science & Technology

China's DeepSeek debuts two new AI models challenging Google's Gemini and OpenAI's ChatGPT.

Engineers create artificial tendons that allow robots to pinch with 30 times more force and three times faster than before, potentially enabling advances in surgical tools and autonomous exploratory machines.

New DNA analysis suggests humans first traveled to Australia and New Guinea about 60,000 years ago, roughly 9,000 to 13,000 years earlier than previous genetic evidence indicated.

## Business & Markets

US stock markets close lower (S&P 500 -0.5%, Dow -0.9%, Nasdaq -0.4%) as December kicks off.

Bitcoin falls in largest daily drop since March.

Nvidia takes \$2B stake in chip-software designer Synopsys as part of expanded multiyear computing power partnership.

Eli Lilly cuts price for weight-loss drug Zepbound on direct-to-consumer site.

Starbucks to pay over \$35M to more than 15,000 New York City workers, along with over \$3M in civil penalties, to settle allegations it violated labor laws.

## Politics & World Affairs

Tennessee voters head to the polls in special election to replace Rep. Mark Green (R, TN-7), who announced his resignation earlier this year.

Former Trump attorney Alina Habba disqualified as New Jersey's top federal prosecutor, appeals court rules.

Son of Mexican drug lord Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán pleads guilty to two drug-related charges, months after his brother enters similar plea deal.

Transportation Security Administration announces \$45 fee for travelers without a federally compliant driver's license or identification card, known as a REAL ID, beginning in February.

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## Groton City Council Meeting Agenda

December 2, 2025 – 7:00pm

City Hall – 120 N Main Street

(IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CALL IN TO THIS MEETING, PLEASE MAKE PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS TO DO SO BY CALLING CITY HALL 605-397-8422)

1. Approval of Agenda
2. Public Comments - pursuant to SDCL 1-25-1  
(Public Comments will offer the opportunity for anyone not listed on the agenda to speak to the council. Speaking time will be limited to 3 minutes. No action will be taken on questions or items not on the agenda.)
3. Department Reports
4. Open Sealed Bids for Hoist
5. Review Sealed Bids for City Roof Repair Project and Award
6. Approval of Kolker Second Subdivision Plat
7. First Reading of Ordinance No. 794 – Supplemental Appropriations
8. Northeast Council of Governments (NECOG) Joint Cooperative Agreement for 2026
9. Minutes
10. Bills
11. Reminder: Holiday Lighting Contest – December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2025 - \$100, \$75, & \$50 Utility Bill Credits to Be Given Away
12. Reminder: 2026 Dog Licenses are Due by December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2025
13. Reminder: Christmas Tour of Trees at Wage Memorial Library on December 5<sup>th</sup> from 3:30pm to 5:30pm
14. Announcement: City Offices Closed on December 24<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, and 26<sup>th</sup>, 2025, for Christmas
15. Executive session personnel & legal 1-25-2 (1) & (3)
16. First Reading of Ordinance No. 793 – 2026 Salaries
17. Hire Skating Rink Employees and Establish Wage
18. Adjournment

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BROWN COUNTY COMMISSION AGENDA  
GENERAL MEETING  
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2025, 8:45 A.M.  
COMMISSIONER'S CHAMBERS  
COURTHOUSE ANNEX - 25 MARKET STREET, ABERDEEN SD

1. Call To Order - Pledge of Allegiance
2. Approval of the Agenda
3. Opportunity for Public Comment
  - ❖ *Public comment will be limited to 10 minutes or at Boards Discretion. Presentations will be limited to 3 minutes.*
4. Second Reading/Possible Adoption
  - a. Amended Ordinance #302 – Wind Energy Systems (WES)
  - b. Ord. #312 – Rezone for Tim & Judy Siedschlag/Gerald & Kathy Goldade
  - c. Ord. #313 – Rezone for Sub Thirty Ventures, LLC – Brett Deibert/Brock Ball
  - d. Ord. #314 – Rezone for Michael Carrels
  - e. Ord. #315 – Rezone for Vision Quest Real Estate, LLC/Brad Meehan
  - f. Ord. #316 – Rezone for Sea Atwood
  - g. Ord. #317 – Rezone for Paul Larson
5. Dirk Rogers, Highway Superintendent
  - a. R-O-W for Northern Electric
  - b. Approve & Authorize Publication for Brown County Hwy. 14 Improvement Bids
  - c. Department Update
6. Approve and Authorize Chairman to sign MOU with SDSU for 4-H Advisor
7. Consent Calendar
  - a. Approval of General Meeting Minutes for November 25, 2025
  - b. Claims/Payroll
  - c. HR Report
  - d. Auditor's Report of Accounts for October 2025
  - e. Travel Request
  - f. Set Hearing Date & Authorize Advertising for Temporary Alcohol Permit for Aberdeen Area Chamber of Commerce
8. Other Business
9. Executive Session (if requested per SDCL 1-25-2)
10. Adjourn

You can join the Brown County Commission Meeting via **your computer, tablet, or smartphone** at <https://meet.goto.com/BrCoCommission>

**You can also dial in using your phone.** United States: [+1 \(872\) 240-3311](tel:+18722403311) - Access Code: **601-168-909** #

Get the app now and be ready when your first meeting starts: <https://meet.goto.com/install>

Official Recordings of Commission Meetings along with the Minutes can be found at [Commission Meetings | Brown County](#)

**Work Session Following the Meeting**

What can \$20 get you?



for  
**Senior Citizens**

or anyone using physical therapy  
a gym membership at

15 N Main - Ste. 101

*Open 24/7*

**GDI Living Fitness**

Call/Text Paul at 605/397-7460

Call/Text Tina at 605/397-7285

for details



**Annual Membership Rates**

Student is \$29.82 per month or \$255.60 per year  
Single is \$35.15 per month or \$319.50 per year  
2-Person is \$55.45 per month or \$575.10 per year  
Family is \$67.10 per month or \$702.26 per year

**Month-to-Month Rates**

Student is \$35.15 per month  
Single is \$40.48 per month  
2-Person is \$59.78 per month  
Family is \$72.43 per month

**While many other rates have gone up, ours has not.  
Same rates for several years!**

## Names Released in 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: Nicholas Wayne Foltz, 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: Thomas John Barlese, 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.

Preliminary crash information indicates Nicholas Wayne Foltz, 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, Thomas John Barlese, was partially ejected during the crash and was pronounced deceased at the scene. Foltz sustained serious, non-life-threatening injuries.

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.

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

Groton, SD

**Sat., Dec. 6**

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

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



**Silent  
Auction  
Basket Items**

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

Proceeds raised for maintenance  
of course and clubhouse!

Brittany Hubbard was the Mystery Snowman. Emily Kappes was the lucky winner of \$100 in Groton Chamber Bucks. Three people guessed Brittany and the names were put in a bag with Emily's name drawn as the winner.

(Photo lifted from GDILIVE.COM video)



## South Dakota Community Foundation Awards \$1.2 Million to Area Nonprofits

SOUTH DAKOTA –Fourteen South Dakota nonprofits will receive grants totaling nearly \$1.2 million from the South Dakota Community Foundation’s Beyond Idea Grant (BIG) program. Offered in partnership with the Bush Foundation, the BIG program supports community-based problem-solving efforts in South Dakota. This announcement showcases recipients from the 2025 grant selection:

- **Boys & Girls Club of Rosebud – \$75,000**
  - o Boys & Girls Club of Rosebud will test a Youth-Led Social Enterprise Incubator. Youth will identify business ideas and opportunities, learn core business planning skills, enhance core skills like math, writing and goal setting, and ultimately launch pilot projects and services through real world sales events.
- **Catholic Social Services –\$100,000**
  - o Catholic Social Services will test a home-sharing program between elderly homeowners and adult renters and volunteer support for seniors through the creation of St. Anne’s Aging Services.
- **Children’s Care Hospital & School dba LifeScape – \$100,000**
  - o LifeScape will test a “SelfCare” Initiative aimed to improve employee safety while maintaining quality care by proactively addressing and mitigating risk associated with maladaptive behaviors.
- **Emily’s Hope – \$100,000**
  - o Emily’s Hope will create a statewide awareness campaign designed to educate South Dakota students and parents about the dangers of counterfeit pills laced with fentanyl.
- **Inter-Lakes Community Action Partnership – \$100,000**
  - o Inter-Lakes Community Action Partnership will build a state-of-the-art commercial kitchen on ICAP-owned property as a part of a mixed-use affordable housing development. The new facility will significantly enhance the frozen meal initiative and 60s plus dining program.
- **Marshall County Healthcare Center – \$50,000**
  - o Marshall County Healthcare Center will develop a mobile care clinic program providing family practice care close to home to underserved patients of Marshall County.
- **Rapid City Club for Boys – \$60,000**
  - o The Rapid City Club for Boys has identified a need to overcome risk factors that affect the boys ability to succeed in their education by partnering with the Rapid City School District to bring teachers and other professionals to the Club.
- **Sioux Falls Area Community Foundation, as a fiscal sponsor for Promising Futures Fund – \$100,000**
  - o Promising Futures Fund is launching a pilot College & Career Readiness Program to help underserved students navigate their path to success after high school graduation.
- **South Dakota Bar Foundation – \$63,222.50**
  - o South Dakota Bar Foundation will develop and test a virtual platform offering mentorship, training, and resources for attorneys working in rural areas and solo practices. The Bar Foundation will also help build a statewide pipeline that supports students from high school through professional practice in legal and justice careers.

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- **South Dakota News Watch – \$100,000**
  - South Dakota News Watch will publish stories monthly highlighting community driven solutions that could help ease the housing shortage and improve communication about available options. These stories will be collected in a permanent, regularly updated feature on their website, bringing together effective ideas already being developed across South Dakota.
- **South Dakota State University – \$32,991**
  - South Dakota State University will expand the South Dakota Rural Libraries Hotspot Lending Program, by spreading their idea to other communities in the state, which allows residents to “check out the internet” through their local libraries.
- **The Compass Center – Sioux Falls – \$100,000**
  - The Compass Center will test the first Trauma Recovery Center in South Dakota. This Center will bring together a comprehensive network of services under one roof to increase access to care, streamline referral systems, and establish an expert center for victims of violence.
- **Underdog Foundation – \$100,000**
  - Underdog Foundation will test a food truck operation to deliver meals directly to families in tribal communities, removing barriers to food access.
- **Western South Dakota Community Action – \$100,000**
  - To address gaps in service coordination and the employment challenges faced by parolees, Western South Dakota Community Action will strengthen integration among service providers to improve coordinated case management for parolees and their families. Additionally, they will deliver short-term, coached work experiences designed to target and reduce the primary factors that lead to job failures.

“Each of the nonprofits are finding innovation ways to fill critical needs in their communities and across South Dakota,” said Ginger Niemann, SDCF Senior Program Officer. “We are proud to support these organizations as they continue to serve the needs of South Dakota.”

SDCF has awarded nearly \$4.8 million from the Beyond Idea Grant program since 2022. Interested organizations can visit [SDCommunityFoundation.org/BIG](https://SDCommunityFoundation.org/BIG) to review the grant guidelines and application instructions. SDCF will offer the BIG program again in 2026, with more details to be announced. To qualify, a nonprofit must be IRS Publication 78 verified or have a fiscal sponsor.

## About SDCF

SDCF is a public non-profit organization established in 1987. SDCF, with offices in Pierre, Rapid City, Sioux Falls and Aberdeen administers 1,300 funds benefiting hundreds of charitable organizations annually. The Foundation distributed nearly \$40 million in grants in 2024 which made a tremendous difference in communities statewide. This would not have been possible without the generosity of our donors. If you have a specific cause you would like to support or would prefer to give for the general good of our state, please visit <https://sdcommunityfoundation.org/giving> to learn more or call 1-800-888-1842.

## About the Bush Foundation

The Bush Foundation invests in great ideas and the people who power them. Established in 1953 by 3M Executive Archibald Bush and his wife Edyth, the Foundation encourages individuals and organizations to think bigger and think differently about what is possible in communities across Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and the 23 Native nations that share the same geographic area.



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### State budget chief urges close look at schools with excess cash as property tax complaints continue

**Legislative budget committee disagrees with board about financial penalties for districts**

**BY: JOSHUA HAIAR AND MAKENZIE HUBER**

South Dakota's top state budget official is urging a close look at cash balances in some school districts as the governor and lawmakers consider ideas for property tax relief during the legislative session that begins next month.

Jim Terwilliger is the commissioner of the Bureau of Finance and Management and a member of the School Finance Accountability Board. He said the board should not condone excess school cash balances at a time when homeowners are complaining about high property taxes.

"When you start seeing a \$600,000 excess balance, it begs the question, what are you doing?" Terwilliger said during a Nov. 12 board meeting.

The topic arose when leaders from six public school districts appeared before the board. The districts were required to appear because their reserves during the 2025 fiscal year exceeded limits in state law.

Reserves are calculated by dividing each district's lowest monthly cash balance by its total general fund spending. The maximum allowable reserves are 40% for schools with enrollment of 200 or less, 30% for those with enrollment between 200 and 600, and 25% for those with enrollment of 600 or more.

When districts exceed the limits, the state board can recommend a full or partial waiver, a financial penalty or a financial review of the district by the state Department of Education. The recommendations go to the Legislature's Joint Appropriations Committee.

Earlier this month, Terwilliger asked the accountability board to take its duty seriously.

"I don't want this board to be looked at as more of a rubber stamp of waivers," he said.

The board ultimately recommended denial of one waiver and a financial review of that district, while recommending three full waivers and another two partial waivers with financial penalties.

The legislative committee on Monday approved the denied waiver and financial review; approved two of the full waivers; suggested making one of the full waivers contingent on a financial review; and suggested waiving the two financial penalties. The committee's proposed changes now go back to the board.



**South Dakota Bureau of Finance and Management Commissioner Jim Terwilliger speaks to the state Senate Committee on Appropriations on Jan. 18, 2024, at the South Dakota Capitol in Pierre.** (Photo by Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

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## School funding, property taxes discussed

Under the state's school funding formula, each district's funding need is calculated based on factors including enrollment, target teacher pay, benefits and overhead. Local funding sources known as the "local effort," including property taxes, are applied toward that need first, and state funding (which comes primarily from the state sales tax) fills any remaining gap.

If a district's local effort fulfills its need, the district receives no general state aid. That situation applied to four of the six districts that exceeded their allowable cash balances during the 2025 fiscal year: Agar-Blunt-Onida, Hoven, Hill City and Lead-Deadwood.

It's reasonable, Terwilliger said earlier this month, to ask whether property taxpayers in those four districts are overburdened.

Local effort during the 2025 fiscal year exceeded the calculated need by about \$1.1 million in Agar-Blunt-Onida, about \$588,000 in Hill City, about \$676,000 in Hoven, and about \$4.3 million in Lead-Deadwood.

Because those school districts don't receive state aid, the board was not able to financially penalize them.

Rep. Liz May, R-Kyle, worried at Monday's meeting that a lack of financial penalties for those school districts will mean they won't be held accountable.

"That doesn't help the people back home that are paying the taxes," May said.

Along with May, other lawmakers echoed Terwilliger's concern at the Monday meeting, asking about factors affecting property taxes, including school spending and saving.

## Financial reviews for Hoven, Agar-Blunt-Onida

Officials from Agar-Blunt-Onida told the board last month that a decision to close Blunt Elementary at the end of the 2023-24 school year reduced expenses and drove up cash balances, while an increase in rural electric generation tax revenue also pushed cash balances higher than expected. The additional cash will help launch expanded career and technical education and possibly junior kindergarten or preschool in the coming years, and district officials said they're prepared to lower the general fund property tax levy if revenue remains strong.

The School Finance Accountability Board recommended a full waiver for Agar-Blunt-Onida. The Legislature's Joint Appropriations Committee rejected the recommendation, suggesting the board recommend a financial review of the school district.

Lawmakers suggested the review partly because the school district has appeared before the accountability board four times in five years.

A financial accountability review allows the state Department of Education to monitor the district more closely, Director of Finance and Management Cody Stoeser told lawmakers on Monday. The district and department create an in-depth correction plan to spend the excess funds and meet the state requirements. If school districts don't comply, then they risk losing their accreditation, which can impact federal funding or sports programming.

"We can't go ahead and tell them how to spend their money," Stoeser said. "We just go in there and make sure they're going to comply with the requirement."

The board will meet within 30 days to consider the legislative committee's action.

Lawmakers approved the state board's denial of the Hoven School District's waiver request and the board's recommendation that the state Education Department complete a financial review of the district. Hoven has appeared before the board four times in five years as well.

Officials from Hoven said their higher cash balance reflected the realities of operating a small district that does not receive general state aid. They said the district needs a larger reserve to weather swings in property valuations and enrollment, because it lacks a state backstop if revenues fall short.

## Waivers approved

Hill City officials said they became newly eligible for a federal grant and received two years' worth of

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funding in a single fiscal year.

Lead-Deadwood officials said they had an unfilled teaching position during the school year that resulted in less expenses and higher cash balances. They also said their food service fund is not self-sufficient, so they supplement it with general funds, and they will adjust the timing of that transfer to the beginning of the year rather than the end to better manage cash balances. Additionally, monthly state funding for the Box Elder Job Corps influenced cash balances, even though the district merely acts as a pass-through for the funding.

The state board recommended a full waiver for Hill City and Lead-Deadwood, which the legislative committee approved.

## **Lawmakers disagree with financial penalties**

The two districts that exceeded allowable cash balances while receiving general state aid were Frederick Area and Miller.

Leaders from Frederick Area said their overage was a timing issue caused by delayed startup costs for an agricultural career and technical education program and higher-than-expected interest earnings.

The accountability board recommended a partial waiver for Frederick Area and a fiscal penalty of 10% of the excess amount, which would result in a reduction of \$9,265 in general state aid for the 2026 fiscal year.

Miller officials said their overage was tied to their recovery from a fire, infrastructure upgrades, staffing vacancies and revenue sources that were difficult to forecast. They said insurance proceeds and more efficient equipment lowered utility and maintenance costs, which in turn reduced expenses and pushed cash balances higher.

The accountability board recommended a partial waiver for Miller and a fiscal penalty of 10% of the excess amount, which would result in a reduction of \$7,474 in general state aid for the 2026 fiscal year.

Lawmakers voted to reject the penalties for both districts, in part because this year was their first appearance before the board in the last five years. The actions go back to the board, which will have 30 days to consider them.

School Finance Accountability Board Chairman Eric Stroeder told lawmakers that board members made the 10% penalty recommendations because they "want the board to mean something."

"At some point," Stroeder said, "it has to be done just to enforce the law."

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

*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.*

## Beef boosters: Young people needed to keep cattle industry vibrant

Price of entry among factors driving down producer numbers, Rotary Club learns

BY: JOHN HULT

SIOUX FALLS — In 2024, Aberdeen's DemKota beef processing plant bought cattle from 400 producers.

This year, they bought from 300.

"That wasn't because we chose to," CEO Adam Bode told the Sioux Falls Downtown Rotary Club on Monday.

It's because the producers aren't there any longer. Raising or feeding cattle is "a great business and an even better lifestyle," said Bode, but it's one fewer and fewer people — particularly young people — can afford to get into. He said the average age of a South Dakota cattle producer is 63.

In South Dakota, the Governor's Office of Economic Development facilitates loans to beginning farmers and ranchers,

but only for a handful of people each year. Since 2019, the office's board approved a total of \$4.6 million in bonds for 13 applicants statewide, an average of about \$354,000 per award.

Bode sees plenty of opportunity in cattle, but others need to see the same.

"To the bankers in the room: Loan that money to that young producer," Bode said. "It is a high capital business to get started. That's the biggest hurdle to get new players in it, and we desperately need them."



**Adam Bode, left, CEO of the DemKota beef processing facility in Aberdeen, speaks during a Sioux Falls Downtown Rotary event on Dec. 1, 2025, at the Military Heritage Alliance in Sioux Falls. At right is Ryan Eichler of the South Dakota Cattlemen's Foundation.** (Photo by John Hult/South Dakota Searchlight)

### Volatility embedded in business

Dave Geraets, who has 2,500 head of cattle and grows row crops outside of Colton, said the cattle side of the business is wildly volatile. Diversified operations can help producers weather price fluctuations — particularly when corn prices are high, Geraets said — but adding cropland only makes it harder to start from scratch.

"No matter if it's land or cattle, all of it is expensive," said Geraets, who hopes to see his kids stay involved in the business.

This year, the wild price swings for cattle have been historic. A low inventory pushed prices to an all-time high in August.

The prices didn't last. Citing a desire to lower beef prices for consumers, President Donald Trump announced his intention to push for the importation of more beef from Argentina this fall by increasing the number of tariff-free metric tons each year from 20,000 to 80,000.

"We retracted that market by 25% in two weeks," said Ryan Eichler, founder and board president for the South Dakota Cattlemen's Foundation. "Imagine the stock market retracting 25% in two weeks."

Craig Bieber, vice president of the South Dakota Cattlemen's Association, told South Dakota Searchlight last month that the Argentina move was "a gut punch." U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds, R-South Dakota, met with

the Trump team last month to discuss the concerns of ranchers.

Trump would later ask his departments of Justice and Agriculture to launch an investigation into "hyper-consolidation" of the beef packing industry. The investigation would look into the "big four" packers – JBS, Cargill, Tyson and National Beef – "for potential collusion, price fixing and price manipulation."

### **Capital access hinders smaller operations**

Bode, the DemKota CEO, said his company slaughters about 300,000 cattle a year, and tries to stand out by processing higher-end cuts of meat. When asked by Rotarian and former Gov. Dennis Daugaard what it would take to process more, Bode said capital investment.

Much like a young farmer, he said, the price of entry for a processor is high enough to make financing difficult.

"We have an internal joke in our industry: If you ever want to make a couple million bucks in beef processing, just start with a couple billion," Bode said.

The large beef packers aren't immune to volatility, either, Bode told South Dakota Searchlight after the discussion. The same low inventory that pushed prices to record levels has made it harder for the Big Four packers to keep their processing plants up and running.

Last month, Tyson announced the closure of its Lexington, Nebraska plant, which has the capacity to process 5,000 cattle a day but had recently been processing around 3,600 a day.

The closure won't have an impact on DemKota, which is a smaller-scale operator, Bode said.

But it does show that the bigger players are having the same problem he is: too few producers raising too few cattle to meet high demand.

"There still aren't enough animals," he said. "Even with that giant plant, there'll be another plant closure. It's the first of several, really, in our opinion."

*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.*

## **States retreat from covering drugs for weight loss**

**Some health professionals say covering GLP-1 drugs will save money in the long term**

**BY: SHALINA CHATLANI**

Some states are rethinking their coverage of GLP-1 drugs for weight loss as budgets tighten and Medicaid programs brace for the cuts included in President Donald Trump's broad tax and spending law.

As of Oct. 1, 16 state Medicaid programs covered GLP-1s for obesity treatment, up from 13 last year, according to a survey of Medicaid directors by KFF, a health policy research group. But some states have announced they will discontinue coverage or restrict who can qualify for it.

Many doctors and patient advocates say the drugs will save money in the long run by reducing obesity-related diseases such as heart disease and diabetes. Many states, however, have concluded they just can't afford them.

North Carolina Medicaid ended coverage of GLP-1s for obesity last month, citing shortfalls in state funding. California, New Hampshire and South Carolina have said they will end coverage on Jan. 1. Starting next year, Michigan Medicaid will limit coverage to people who are "morbidly obese." Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Wisconsin also are considering new restrictions.

In last year's KFF survey, about half the states said they were interested in covering GLP-1s for weight loss, according to Elizabeth Williams, a senior policy manager at KFF who focuses on Medicaid. This year, most states are moving in the opposite direction.

"This likely reflects recent state budget challenges and the significant, significant costs associated with coverage," Williams said. "After a number of years of robust revenue growth right after the pandemic, states are starting to see slowing revenues, increasing spending demands and a lot of fiscal uncertainty

due in part to recent federal actions.”

In April, the Trump administration scrapped a Biden-era proposal that would have required state Medicaid programs to pay for some GLP-1s for obesity treatment. Earlier this month, Trump announced that his administration had reached agreements with the manufacturers of Wegovy and Zepbound to reduce the prices of the drugs for Medicaid, Medicare and consumers buying the drugs directly, But it's unclear whether the deals will reduce costs for states.

Health plans for state workers also are reassessing their coverage of the drugs for obesity. North Carolina, for example, ended GLP-1 obesity coverage for state workers last year, and West Virginia canceled a 1,000-person pilot program.

GLP-1 medications, which balance blood sugar levels, have long been prescribed to patients with Type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular conditions. All state Medicaid programs, which are funded jointly by the states and the federal government, cover GLP-1s for those uses.

But the drugs also curb hunger signals and can help people lose significant amounts of weight. Medications such as Ozempic, Wegovy and Zepbound have become wildly popular for that purpose.

Between 2019 and 2023, the number of outpatient Medicaid prescriptions for select GLP-1s to treat diabetes and obesity grew from 755,300 to 3.8 million, according to KFF. During the same period, Medicaid spending on those drugs increased from \$597.3 million to \$3.9 billion.

A study published last year in *The BMJ*, the journal of the British Medical Association, found that the number of patients without diabetes who started GLP-1 treatment in the United States increased from roughly 21,000 in 2019 to 174,000 in 2023, or more than 700%.

More than 2 in 5 U.S. adults have obesity, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The CDC defines obesity as having a body mass index — a calculated measure of body weight relative to height — of 30 or higher. Obesity costs the U.S. health care system almost \$173 billion per year, according to the agency.

Recently, the manufacturers of some GLP-1s have lowered their prices, selling them directly to consumers for \$500 or less per month. But many patients cannot afford to pay that much out of pocket.



**Boxes of the diabetes drug Ozempic rest on a pharmacy counter in Los Angeles. Drugs like Ozempic have grown in popularity to treat obesity, prompting more than a dozen states to pay for them. But with major budget pressures, several state Medicaid agencies are either stopping coverage altogether or restricting who can get access to the therapy.** (Photo illustration by Mario Tama/Getty Images)

### States in a tough financial position

In North Carolina, Dr. Jennifer McCauley, a weight management physician at UNC Health, said Medicaid coverage of GLP-1s was “incredibly helpful for our patients.”

“Now they’ve stopped coverage, so those people are now going back, regaining some of the weight, because they’re unable to obtain these medications, and also are suffering the health consequences of obesity,” McCauley told Stateline.

Some critics of expansive GLP-1 coverage say it isn’t cost effective, because many patients gain back the weight they lost when they stop treatment. But McCauley said the “downstream effects of obesity are even higher.”

“There are definitely vulnerable populations that probably would not be able to obtain weight loss without

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these medications.”

James Werner, a spokesperson at the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, blamed the coverage change on the state legislature’s failure to budget enough money for Medicaid.

In an email to Stateline, Werner said coverage of GLP1s for weight loss “would be reconsidered if Medicaid is fully funded.”

Some states are trying to maintain at least some coverage of the expensive drugs by tightening the eligibility requirements for a prescription, according to Colleen Becker, a project manager at the National Conference of State Legislatures, a policy research group.

“States are really looking at how to balance access and provide that access to patients, but they’re stewards of their budgets, and they need to be good stewards of it,” Becker said.

Michigan and Pennsylvania are among the states considering such options. Meanwhile, Connecticut has decided to maintain coverage of weight-loss drugs for state employees, but to require beneficiaries to try online weight-loss counseling before they can get a prescription.

## Some future possibilities

One state, North Dakota, has taken a different approach to GLP-1 coverage after legislation that would have required the state’s Medicaid program to cover the drug failed. Instead, North Dakota this year became the first state to mandate that insurers on the state’s Affordable Care Act marketplace cover the drugs for weight loss.

North Dakota Deputy Insurance Commissioner John Arnold said the insurance department calculated that the mandate wouldn’t cause insurance premiums to rise significantly.

“It’s not that anybody can walk into the doctor’s office and say, ‘Hey, I want to have this covered,’” Arnold said. “It is really for those who have a medical need for the drugs, then it would be covered.”

The insurance department had to ask the legislature for permission to make the change, according to North Dakota Republican House Speaker Robin Weisz. He said insurance carriers were concerned that it was going to be “open season for everybody who could lose 20 or 30 pounds.”

He said it will take time to see whether the policy raises insurance premiums.

“If the carriers can come in a couple years and say, ‘Wow, here’s what we’ve spent on these ... we’ll take a hard look at it,’” Weisz said. “But, it’s way too early to tell at this point.”

Arnold says other states may have the flexibility to consider mandating ACA insurers to cover the drugs.

“Our biggest concern was reducing those comorbidities and the long-term impact that that has on the cost of insurance in general, because more comorbidities means more claims,” Arnold said, referring to diseases and conditions associated with obesity.

*Stateline reporter Shalina Chatlani can be reached at [schatlani@stateline.org](mailto:schatlani@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.*

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

## White House intensifies push for mass deportation after National Guard shooting

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA AND ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump has accelerated his drive to curb legal immigration, after a native of Afghanistan who had been granted asylum was accused in a shooting in the nation's capital that left one member of the West Virginia National Guard dead and another in critical condition.

"In the wake of last week's atrocity, it is more important than ever to finish carrying out the president's mass deportation operation," White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said during Monday's press briefing. "They must go back to their home countries."

The Trump administration at the beginning of the president's second term launched an unprecedented crackdown on all forms of immigration. The deadly shooting on the eve of the Thanksgiving holiday, in a commercial area of the District of Columbia just blocks from the White House, has intensified the push.

The Department of Homeland Security in a social media post after the Wednesday attack called for immigrants to "remigrate," which is a far-right concept in Europe that calls for the ethnic removal of non-white minority populations through mass migration.

"There is more work to be done," Leavitt said, "because President Trump believes that he has a sacred obligation to reverse the calamity of mass unchecked migration into our country."

The suspect in the guard shooting is a 29-year-old Afghan national who entered the country during the Biden administration through a special immigrant visa program for Afghan allies after the chaotic U.S. withdrawal from the country in 2021.

Authorities identified him as Rahmanullah Lakanwal, who worked for a CIA counterterrorism operation in Afghanistan, according to the New York Times. He was granted asylum under the Trump administration earlier this year.

The U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia plans to charge Lakanwal with first-degree murder after one of the National Guard soldiers, U.S. Army Spc. Sarah Beckstrom, 20, died as a result of her injuries.

Still hospitalized is U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Andrew Wolfe, 24. Trump has indicated he intends to honor both Beckstrom and Wolfe at the White House.

District officials said the shooting of guard members was "targeted," but the motive remains under investigation.



**A makeshift memorial of flowers and American flags honoring the late West Virginia National Guard member Sarah Beckstrom stands outside the Farragut West Metro station on Dec. 1, 2025 in Washington, D.C.** (Photo by Heather Diehl/Getty Images)

(Photo by Heather Diehl/Getty Images)

### Pauses on asylum

Leavitt said the Trump administration will continue "to limit migration, both illegal and legal," after the shooting.

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Separately on Wednesday, the administration ended Temporary Protected Status for more than 330,000 nationals from Haiti, opening them up for deportations by February.

Within hours of Wednesday's shooting, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services halted all immigration requests from Afghanistan nationals. On Thursday, USCIS head Joseph Edlow announced that by direction of Trump the agency would reexamine every green card application from "every country of concern," which are the 19 countries on the president's travel ban list.

And by Friday, Secretary of State Marco Rubio directed all U.S. embassies to suspend all visa approvals for individuals with passports from Afghanistan.

Over the weekend, Trump told reporters that those pauses on asylum could last "a long time," although it's unclear what authority the executive branch has to suspend a law created by Congress through the 1980 Refugee Act.

This is not the first time Trump has tried to end asylum this year, as there is a legal challenge to the president barring asylum seekers from making asylum claims at U.S. ports of entry.

## Venezuelan boat strikes

During Monday's press conference, Leavitt also defended the Trump administration's continued deadly strikes on boats off the coast of Venezuela allegedly containing drugs. The attacks have been occurring since September.

The president and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth have stated, without evidence, that the boats' operators are narco-terrorists and that the strikes are legal, since they have taken place in international waters. Roughly 80 people have been killed in nearly two dozen attacks since September.

Leavitt disputed any questions of wrongdoing by the administration during a Sept. 2 strike, when two survivors clinging to boat wreckage were allegedly killed by a follow-on strike, as first reported by The Washington Post Friday.

"President Trump and Secretary Hegseth have made it clear that presidentially designated narco-terrorist groups are subject to lethal targeting in accordance with the laws of war," Leavitt said, adding that Hegseth authorized a military commander to conduct the operation.

However, the attacks have raised concern among members of Congress, and following the Post story, the U.S. Senate and House Armed Services committees moved to open bipartisan inquiries into the military strikes, with a focus on the alleged follow-on attack that killed two survivors.

## How the National Guard wound up in the district

Trump initially mobilized 800 National Guard troops to the nation's capital in August after claiming a "crime emergency" in the district, despite a documented three-decade low in crime.

Many were instructed they would be carrying service weapons, The Wall Street Journal reported on Aug. 17. The White House effort was accompanied by a heightened U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement presence in the district.

The mobilization then became tied up in court for months.

A federal district judge in the District of Columbia found the administration's deployment of more than 2,000 guard troops in the city illegal but stayed her Nov. 20 decision for three weeks to give the administration time to appeal and remove the guard members from the district's streets.

The guard troops had been expected to remain in the district through the end of February.

The administration filed an emergency motion in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia for a stay to be issued on the order by Thursday. The administration filed the emergency motion the same day as the attack on the two National Guard members.

Trump ordered an additional 500 guard members to the district following the shooting.

The Joint Task Force District of Columbia has been overseeing guard operations in the district, including units from the district, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Ohio, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee and West Virginia.

*Ariana covers the nation's capital for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include immigration, congressional policy and legal challenges with a focus on how those policies impact the lives of immigrants and migrants coming to the U.S.*

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

## Congress to probe U.S. strikes on boats in Caribbean

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate and House Armed Services committees will open bipartisan inquiries into U.S. military strikes on suspected drug-running boats in the Caribbean Sea, with a focus on an alleged follow-on attack that The Washington Post reported killed two survivors of the initial operation.

Senate Armed Services Committee Chair Roger Wicker, R-Miss., and ranking member Jack Reed, D-R.I., issued a joint statement Friday promising “vigorous oversight” of the killings.

“The Committee is aware of recent news reports — and the Department of Defense’s initial response — regarding alleged follow-on strikes on suspected narcotics vessels in the SOUTHCOM (Southern Command) area of responsibility. The Committee

has directed inquiries to the Department, and we will be conducting vigorous oversight to determine the facts related to these circumstances,” Wicker and Reed said.

Similarly, House Armed Services Committee Chair Mike Rogers, R-Ala., and ranking member Adam Smith, D-Wash., said in a joint statement Saturday that the panel “is committed to providing rigorous oversight of the Department of Defense’s military operations in the Caribbean.”

“We take seriously the reports of follow-on strikes on boats alleged to be ferrying narcotics in the SOUTHCOM region and are taking bipartisan action to gather a full accounting of the operation in question,” according to the statement.

The inquiries mark a rare bipartisan check on President Donald Trump’s administration since his second term began in January. With the exception of voting to release the federal case files on convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, which Trump eventually endorsed, Republicans have largely left Trump’s decisions and policies unchallenged.



**U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth testifies before the House Appropriations Committee’s Defense Subcommittee on June 10, 2025.** (Photo by Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images)

### Follow-on attack reported

Lawmakers’ attention was retrained on the already legally questionable U.S. operations targeting alleged narcotics boats after an investigative report published Friday by The Washington Post revealed Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth gave verbal orders to kill everyone during a Sept. 2 operation — the first of

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several U.S. boat strikes in the Caribbean Sea that have killed roughly 80.

According to the report, two survivors clung to burning wreckage after an initial hit. Adm. Frank M. "Mitch" Bradley, who was commanding the attack from Fort Bragg in North Carolina, ordered a second, or follow-on, strike to fulfill Hegseth's order and kill the remaining survivors. States Newsroom has not independently confirmed the details.

Hegseth called the report "fabricated, inflammatory, and derogatory," in a post on social media Friday. Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., told CBS News' "Face the Nation with Margaret Brennan" on Sunday the follow-on strike could rise "to the level of a war crime if it's true."

"If that reporting is true, it's a clear violation of the DoD's own laws of war, as well as international laws about the way you treat people who are in that circumstance," Kaine said.

A working group of former military lawyers issued a statement Friday urging Congress to investigate the Sept. 2 strike.

"Since orders to kill survivors of an attack at sea are 'patently illegal,' anyone who issues or follows such orders can and should be prosecuted for war crimes, murder, or both," according to the statement published by Just Security, a journal focused on national security published by the New York University School of Law Reiss Center on Law and Security.

A bipartisan effort, led by Kaine, to stop Trump's deadly strikes in the Caribbean narrowly failed in the Senate in early November.

## White House confirms second strike

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt was met with numerous questions about the Post report at Monday's press briefing.

A reporter asked Leavitt, "Does the administration deny that that second strike happened, or did it happen and the administration denies that Secretary Hegseth gave the order?"

"The latter is true, and I have a statement to read for you here," Leavitt said, adding that Trump and Hegseth have authority to conduct lethal attacks on designated narco-terrorist groups.

"With respect to the strikes in question on Sept. 2, Secretary Hegseth authorized Admiral Bradley to conduct these kinetic strikes," she said. "Admiral Bradley worked well within his authority and the law directing the engagement to ensure the boat was destroyed and the threat to the United States of America was eliminated."

Leavitt's statement was not entirely consistent with Hegseth's denial on Friday, in which he called the reporting "fabricated."

## Trump echoes Hegseth denial

Trump told reporters aboard Air Force One on Sunday he "wouldn't have wanted that" when asked about the alleged follow-on strike that killed the two survivors.

"The first strike was very lethal. It was fine, and if there were two people around — but Pete (Hegseth) said that didn't happen," Trump told reporters.

"Pete said he did not order the death of those two men," Trump continued in a back-and-forth with the press.

Trump also said Saturday he was closing the airspace above Venezuela, but told a reporter who asked Sunday if the move previewed a U.S. airstrike of the country not to "read anything into it."

"To all Airlines, Pilots, Drug Dealers, and Human Traffickers, please consider THE AIRSPACE ABOVE AND SURROUNDING VENEZUELA TO BE CLOSED IN ITS ENTIRETY," he wrote on his own social media platform just before 8 a.m. Eastern Saturday.

Trump confirmed reports he spoke to Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro late last month but would not reveal details of the conversation.

The U.S. has been amassing Navy vessels and troops off the coast of Venezuela for months, including the recent addition in mid-November of the Navy's most advanced aircraft carrier, the USS Gerald Ford.

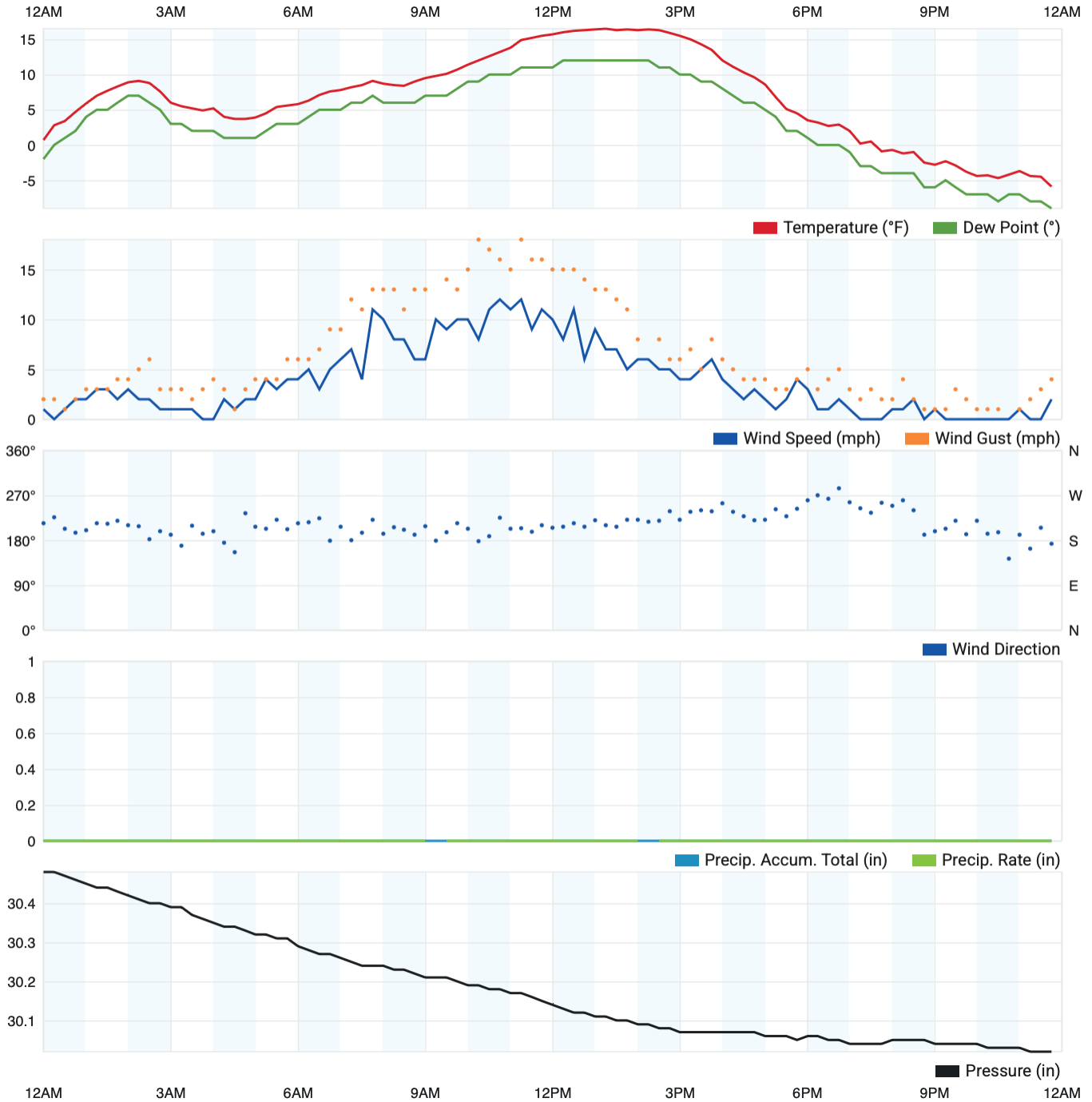
*Ashley Murray covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.*

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

December 1, 2025



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Today



High: 30 °F

Patchy Fog  
then Slight  
Chance Snow

Tonight



Low: 0 °F

Slight Chance  
Wintry Mix  
then Mostly  
Cloudy

Wednesday



High: 11 °F

Mostly Sunny

Wednesday  
Night



Low: -15 °F

Mostly Clear

Thursday



High: 27 °F

Partly Sunny



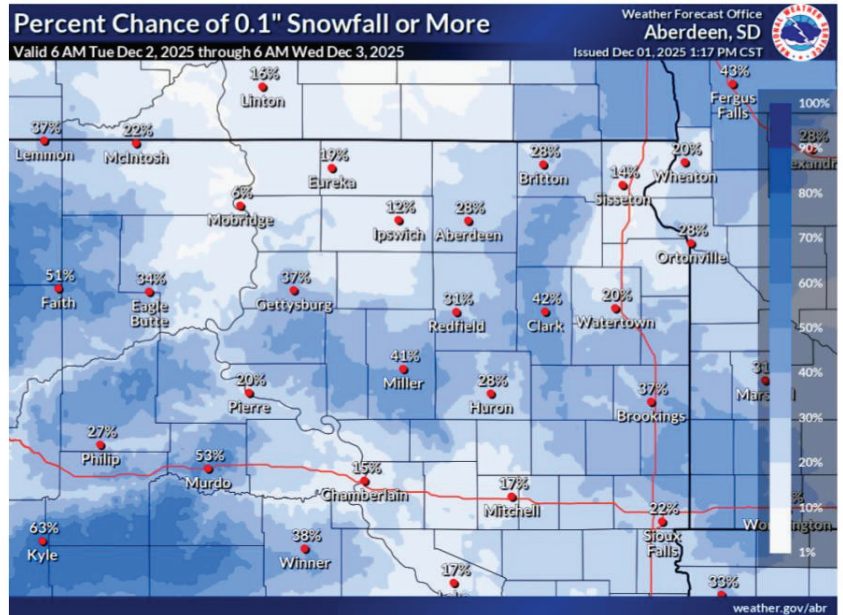
## Snowfall Potential for Tuesday

December 1, 2025  
2:16 PM

Increasing Chances for Precipitation Tuesday/Tuesday Night

### Key Messages

- Probability of measurable snowfall generally 20-40% across much of the region.
- Tuesday into Tuesday evening.
- Rain/snow mix, or a wintry mix possible (20-40%) across central SD.
- Cold front moving south Tuesday night brings much colder air (teens for highs) on Wednesday.



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

A system moving across the region Tuesday into Tuesday night will bring a chance for light snow, with accumulations generally under an inch. A cold front dropping south through the area Tuesday night will bring colder air for Wednesday, with lows dropping into the single digits below and teens below zero Wednesday night.

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## Thursday Morning Wind Chills

December 1, 2025

2:16 PM

Early Morning Wind Chills may drop as low as -25° at times.

- ★ Another blast of cold air is expected overnight Wednesday into Thursday (See **Red Box** in chart to the right).
- ★ Overnight temperatures are expected to be below 0° across the area, *with temperatures reaching as low as -15° in the James River Valley.*
- ★ **The combination of 15-25 mph gusts and cold temperatures will create wind chills as low as -25°**
  - At these wind chills, **frostbite can occur in as little as 30 minutes.** Be sure to bundle up for the morning commute! **Bring your pets inside!**

Minimum Wind Chill Forecast (°F)

	12/2 Tue				12/3 Wed				12/4 Thu		
	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm
Aberdeen	-16	-14	7	14	-4	-11	-11	-24	-26	-21	-1
Britton	-16	-13	3	11	-6	-13	-14	-24	-25	-20	-3
Chamberlain	0	4	23	23	9	4	2	-8	-9	-4	20
Clark	-13	-9	5	15	-3	-12	-15	-23	-24	-19	-5
Eagle Butte	-1	6	22	13	-6	-12	-6	-12	-13	-8	17
Eureka	-13	-8	13	11	-9	-15	-14	-23	-23	-13	5
Gettysburg	-8	-4	17	16	-4	-10	-8	-19	-20	-12	10
McIntosh	-8	4	22	10	-9	-14	-10	-18	-18	-8	14
Milbank	-8	-8	12	16	-2	-8	-11	-18	-18	-15	0
Miller	-6	-2	18	20	0	-7	-7	-17	-18	-12	11
Mobridge	-4	1	22	13	-4	-10	-7	-13	-13	-8	14
Murdo	1	6	25	20	5	-2	0	-10	-11	-2	22
Pierre	6	6	28	23	7	0	2	-6	-6	-1	23
Redfield	-14	-11	12	18	-1	-7	-9	-22	-25	-19	4
Sisseton	-10	-8	13	12	-6	-10	-13	-21	-22	-15	2
Watertown	-10	-9	9	13	-3	-10	-14	-20	-21	-19	-3
Webster	-12	-9	7	16	-5	-11	-14	-22	-22	-19	-3
Wheaton	-10	-9	6	11	-5	-11	-12	-22	-22	-17	-3

Created: 1 pm CST Mon 12/1/2025 | Values are minimums over the period beginning at the time shown.



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

Another blast of cold air is expected overnight Wednesday into Thursday. The combination of 15-25 mile per hour gusts and the colder air will bring wind chills as low as -25° to northern South Dakota. At these temperatures, frostbite can occur in as little as 30 minutes.



## Don't Forget Your Pets

Bring them indoors

Make sure they have a warm dry place with plenty of food and water



weather.gov/winter

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 16 °F at 1:07 PM

Low Temp: -5 °F at 9:53 PM

Wind: 19 mph at 10:07 AM

Precip: 0.00

## Today's Info

Record High: 56 in 2012

Record Low: -20 in 1896

Average High: 34

Average Low: 13

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.04

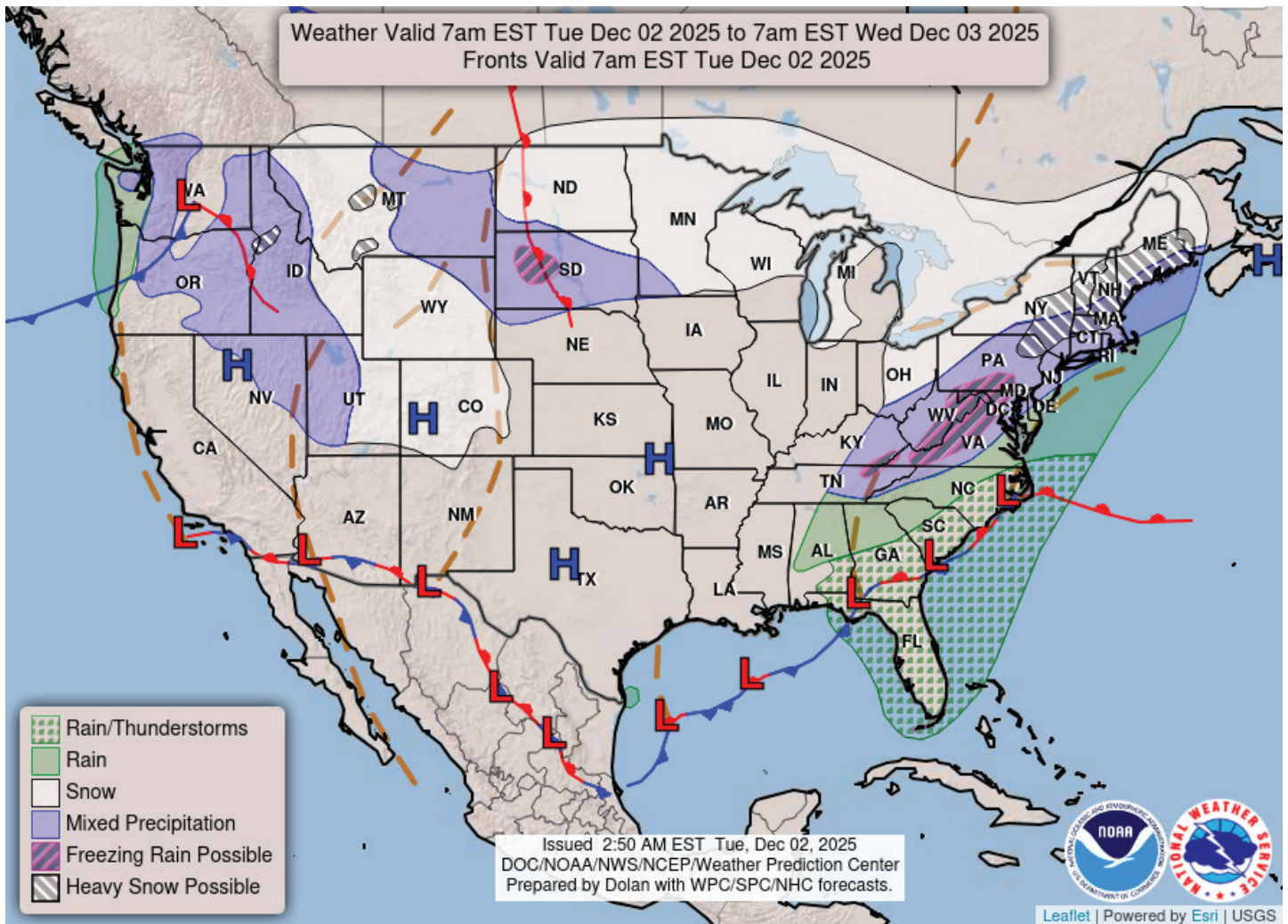
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 21.25

Precip Year to Date: 24.81

Sunset Tonight: 4:50 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:54 am



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## Today in Weather History

December 2, 1978: A low-pressure system moved northeast from Kansas, causing snow to fall over southern Minnesota south of a line from Alexandria to Duluth on the 2nd and 3rd, with the heaviest snow falling from west-central and southwest Minnesota to west-central Wisconsin. Snow depths of six inches or more fell in southwestern Minnesota, with 10 inches or more at Marshall, MN. Winds averaged near 20 mph, and temperatures ranged from 5 to 15 degrees above zero while the snow fell, but the snow did not cause extensive problems for the area. Wheaton had 2 inches, Artichoke Lake and Browns Valley had 3 inches.

December 2, 1984: Snow fell in the central and northeast parts of South Dakota from the late afternoon of the 1st to the morning of the 2nd, with amounts ranging from 3 to 10 inches. The most substantial amounts were in the northeast part of the state, with Day County reporting 8 to 10 inches. Five inches of snow fell at Clear Lake; six inches fell at Waubay, Clark, Miller, and 12 miles southwest of Harrold with 7 inches at Redfield.

1896 - An early season snow and ice storm struck the southeastern U.S. It produced 11 inches of snow at Charlotte NC, and six inches at Atlanta GA. (David Ludlum)

1896: Early season snow and ice storm struck the southeastern U.S. Eleven inches of snow fell at Charlotte, NC, and 6 inches at Atlanta, GA.

1925 - A late season hurricane caused extensive damage across the Florida peninsula, then moved off the Georgia coast crossing Cape Hatteras as a tropical storm. The storm produced whole gales along the Middle Atlantic and Southern New England coast. Winds gusted to 60 mph at Block Island RI, and reached 64 mph at Atlantic City NJ. (David Ludlum)

1950: A rare tornado event occurred when a storm system produces three tornadoes in Illinois and one in Arkansas. The three tornadoes in Illinois are relatively rare in December, with only three days with tornadoes from 1835 to 1950. The other years are 1876 and 1949.

1959: Between November 19 and December 2, an estimated 20 inches of rain fell near Frejus on the French Riviera. The rain caused the Malpasset Dam to collapse, which sent a 130-foot high wall of water into the towns of Malpasset and Bozon. The wall of water 10 feet tall reached Frejus, flooding the western half of the city. The dam breach killed 423 people and caused \$68 million in damages.

1950 - A rare tornado event occurred when a storm system produces three tornadoes in Illinois and one in Arkansas. The three tornadoes in Illinois are relatively rare in December, with only three days with tornadoes from 1835 to 1950. The other years are 1876 and 1949.

1968 - The "Sacramento," a 250-foot fishing barge and former ferry between San Francisco and Oakland, succumb to a winter storm off Redondo Beach.

1970 - A tornado, 400 yards in width, touched down about one mile below the summit of Timpanogos Divide. Trees up to 18 inches in diameter were snapped, and some of the 38 inch snow cover was carried 1000 feet above the ground as the tornado traveled one mile. (The Weather Channel)

1982 - A tornado destroyed a home four miles south of Eastwood MO. The owners were not injured in that tornado, but ironically one was killed Christmas Eve when another tornado hit the replacement mobile home on the same site. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A powerful storm over the Gulf of Alaska continued to produced high winds and heavy rain along the northern and central Pacific coast. Winds gusted to 80 mph south of Port Orford OR, Stevens Pass WA was blanketed with sixteen inches of snow, and Blue Canyon CA was soaked with 1.63 inches of rain. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Squalls in the Great Lakes Region produced ten inches of snow at Union City, PA. Gale force winds gusted to 55 mph at Buffalo NY. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Squalls produced heavy snow in the Great Lakes Region. Totals in Upper Michigan ranged up to 20 inches at Ironwood. Heavy snow and high winds caused 150 auto accidents in Michigan, resulting in sixteen deaths and 22 injuries. Strong northwesterly winds gusted to 73 mph at Johnstown PA, and Lowville PA received 20 inches of snow in 36 hours. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

## The Cost of Discipleship

**Those who deny themselves to follow Jesus discover the greatest adventure in life.**

Matthew 10:24-42: 24 "The student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master. 25 It is enough for students to be like their teachers, and servants like their masters. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household!

26 "So do not be afraid of them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. 27 What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. 28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. 29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care.[a] 30 And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

32 "Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. 33 But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.

34 "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I have come to turn

"a man against his father,  
a daughter against her mother,  
a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—

36 a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.'[b]

37 "Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. 38 Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

40 "Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. 41 Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. 42 And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward."

Salvation is a free gift of God. It comes to us through faith in Jesus, whose sacrifice fully paid for our forgiveness and reconciliation with God. There's not a single thing we can add to bring salvation about; our role is simply to believe. But from that moment on, each of us must make a choice: Will we follow Jesus or just coast along, doing what we want? If we limit our Christianity to merely sitting in a pew, we'll miss the greatest adventure of our life.

Jesus never painted a rosy picture when He called people to follow Him (Matthew 24:9). He stated quite plainly that becoming His follower would require self-denial, sacrifice, and suffering. Following Jesus means that He directs our life. We give up our rights to do whatever we want and instead submit to His will, even when it is difficult or doesn't align with our preferences. If you don't realize how good, loving, and wise our God is, walking in His will may seem scary or even foolish.

But those who deny themselves to follow Jesus discover they lose nothing and gain everything. Even when His disciples are in a season of pain and suffering, the Lord knows how to give them inner peace and a joy that transcends circumstances. Are you looking to Jesus or yourself for direction? Your lifestyle, words, and attitudes reveal who truly rules your life.

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

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## Upcoming Groton Events

- 11/15/2025 Legion Post #39 Turkey Party 6:30pm
- 11/27/2025 Community Thanksgiving 11:30am-1:30pm Community Center (Thanksgiving)
- 11/30/2025 Snow Queen Contest, 4 p.m.
- 12/06/2025 Olive Grove Holiday Party and Silent Live Auction Fundraiser

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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:  
11.28.25

6 7 13 39 48 4

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$90,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 24 Mins 33 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.01.25

5 27 37 43 47 5

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$8,370,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 39 Mins 33 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.01.25

10 16 18 30 43 18

TOP PRIZE:  
**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 54 Mins 32 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
11.29.25

11 13 20 21 28

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$105,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 54 Mins 32 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.01.25

14 25 38 47 55 19

TOP PRIZE:  
**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 23 Mins 32 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:  
12.01.25

5 18 26 47 59 1

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$775,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 23 Mins 32 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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

### South Dakota legislators plan bills to help Piedmont residents in fight over limestone mine

By **BART PFANKUCH/South Dakota News Watch South Dakota News Watch**

Three lawmakers who represent Piedmont, South Dakota, hope to change weak state mining laws that allowed a proposed limestone mine to be sited without notification or input by any local officials or residents.

The plan by Simon Contractors to begin mining limestone on 300 acres within the city of Piedmont and in the surrounding Black Hills came as a shock to locals, who only learned of the mine project through an October notice in a local newspaper.

Piedmont is located along Interstate 90 about midway between Rapid City and Sturgis.

Simon, a French-owned, Wyoming-based mining and materials company, said it has acquired state approval and private landowner agreements to allow limestone mining on 10 parcels of land in and around Piedmont. The mine is expected to start running in August and operate through 2043, according to Simon.

Simon followed lax state mining laws that allow mining of sand, gravel and limestone without a formal permitting, notification and public input process required of more invasive hard rock mining operations. The lack of zoning ordinances in Meade County also enabled the mining company to develop its plans without county input.

Opposition to the mine has crystalized quickly in Meade County, where residents have held meetings and created a Facebook page that had 700,000 page views in its first month. More than 700 people have signed up for regular emails about the project.

"We have rights, even if they tell us we don't have rights," said Chris Greenberg, who recently retired to Piedmont. "I can't come into your yard and dump a load of garbage, but yet they can come in and tear up the land, and bring dust and noise and blasting?"

The three Republican lawmakers from Meade County — Rep. Kathy Rice, Rep. Terri Jorgenson and Sen. John Carley — have teamed up in an effort to support Piedmont residents and to prevent similar mining operations from popping up suddenly in other communities around the state.

"There's a lot of mining to be done and the question is, 'Does it have to be done right next to houses,



**Two chairs set aside for representatives of Simon Contractors, which is planning a limestone mine in Piedmont, S.D., sit empty after company representatives declined to attend a Nov. 20, 2025, community meeting about the mine held at Elk Creek Resort.** (Photo: Bart Pfankuch / South Dakota News Watch)

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and does it need to be put in after the homes are already there?" Carley said. "If you moved into a community and there's already a mine or industrial or commercial operation, you get to make that conscious decision. (But) this is a very different situation because there's already a community established, and (the mine) is in a very visible, dust-oriented area."

So far, the lawmakers said they hope to file bills in the 2026 legislative session that would increase public notification requirements, require environmental impact statements for sand and gravel mines and tighten up state regulations that allow some mining operations to proceed without a permitting process.



**About 250 people attended at a community meeting held in Piedmont, S.D., on Nov. 20, 2025 regarding a disputed limestone mine proposal.** (Photo: Bart Pfankuch / South Dakota News Watch)

## Seeking environmental impact data

Rice told News Watch that she is investigating two options to help Piedmont residents now and to strengthen sand, gravel and limestone mining laws in the future.

Rice said she realized that any laws passed in the 2026 legislation will likely be enacted too late to help Piedmont residents who are opposed to the limestone mine.

Yet Rice said she's looking into whether a state law could be passed to require an environmental impact statement for gravel mines just as the state requires them for more extensive gold or silver mining.

"We need to know how it's going to impact our water and our air and the communities that are there," she said. "We can't just tear apart a hill and not know what it's going to do to the community that's there."

Rice said she isn't sure yet whether she will file a bill but plans to contact the Legislative Research Council to determine how such a bill could be drafted.

"They (mining companies) can afford an impact study," Rice said. "There's millions of dollars in minerals in the Black Hills, so it shouldn't just be a \$100 license fee for the whole state and you can do as many mines as you want."

Rice said she also intends to contact the landowners who have agreed to allow Simon to mine for limestone on their land and perhaps persuade them to change their minds.

"Simon has the license but does not have lease agreements," Rice said. "So I wonder, what would make them stop from signing the agreements?"

## Packed house at public meeting

The latest discussion of how to respond to the limestone mining plans came during a crowded public meeting held Nov. 20 at the Elk Creek Resort in Piedmont that drew about 250 residents.

Carley, who hosted the meeting at the resort he manages, said he intends to file legislation that would require greater public notification of proposed sand, gravel and limestone mines.

Under current state law, more invasive hard rock mines, including for silver and gold, require a full state permitting process that includes environmental studies, public notification and public hearing processes as well as approval by the state Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

The proposed limestone mine in Piedmont fell under state sand and gravel mining laws that allow a mine

company to obtain a state license that enables them to mine anywhere in the state where they own land or have landowner permission. That law does not require prior notification of neighbors or local governments and does not require a public hearing or state or county permit.

Carley said he is researching a bill that would require notification of proposed mining operations to all property owners within a certain distance of the mine.

The Simon Contractors limestone mine also was not subject to county zoning ordinances that could have restricted where it was built. Meade County voters have rejected prior ballot measures to enact zoning ordinances.

Some residents suggested the county might need to revisit the possibility of creating zoning guidelines that could provide protections or distance setbacks for communities or individual landowners.

Carley said the Meade County legislative delegation also plans to seek regulatory changes within the DANR that would further protect homeowners.

During an hourlong discussion on Nov. 20, attendees brought up a number of questions and concerns regarding the mine and the process of approval. Among them:

1. Will property values fall and will it be harder for mine neighbors to get property insurance?
2. How much noise will mining operations create?
3. How will air quality be affected by dust and will drinking water wells be contaminated?
4. Are mining operations expanding in the Black Hills and in the Northern Hills in particular?
5. Why does Simon have a relatively small surety bond requirement for mine reclamation?
6. Can watershed protection rules be used to block this mine or other proposed mines?

Two chairs were set aside at the front of the room to accommodate Simon Contractors representatives who were invited, but both seats were left empty throughout the meeting because they didn't show up. Simon did not return a call from News Watch seeking comment.

Some neighbors have hired Yankton attorney Nick Moser, who represented dozens of East River landowners in their mostly successful battle to stop the Summit Carbon Solutions carbon pipeline from being built on their land.

### **Attorney pushes grassroots pressure**

Moser praised the residents for attending the meeting and urged them to continue to reach out to state and local officials to take action to prevent the mine from opening.

"Keep the pressure on and make your voices heard," he said. "Be engaged, talk to your elected officials and encourage them to make reasonable policy that (prevents) things like the mine that is being proposed right in your backyard, (because) that's not reasonable and that's not what you want."

Carley said he is hearing from concerned residents frequently but noted that most are not opposed to



**Republican state Sen. John Carley of Meade County addresses the crowd at a community meeting held in Piedmont, S.D., on Nov. 20, 2025, regarding a disputed limestone mine proposal.** (Photo: Bart Pfankuch / South Dakota News Watch)

mining in general but want greater controls that protect neighbors and communities.

"Many of the calls go this way, 'You know, I'm not against mining, mining is an important industry in South Dakota that is doing well in this state,'" Carley said. "I'm against the mining when it's in my backyard or when it's going to cause noise or dust or watershed problems. That's what I've heard the community is concerned with."

This story was originally published by South Dakota News Watch and distributed through a partnership with The Associated Press.

## Who's really cooking in America's restaurants

Laura Sampson undefined

One of the big food distributors in the United States supplies food to just about everywhere people eat. From small-town hospitals to school cafeterias, to restaurants big and small, 730,000 global locations. So if you've ever ordered jalapeno poppers somewhere new and thought, "These taste familiar ..." you're probably right.

Those fries or chicken strips you enjoy in small-town South Dakota? They may be the same recipe as someone eats in San Diego. This is more than a probability; it's a fact. The big distributors have restaurants everywhere.

Not really a signature dish

Flipping through a food distributor website is eye-opening to say the least. That signature chicken gnocchi soup, crispy pork chops or cheesecake at your favorite restaurant might not be made there at all. In many cases, it comes from the same national food distributors that supply thousands of restaurants across the country with the same product.

Most American restaurants, from family-owned diners to midrange chains, rely on the same few companies to keep their kitchens running. From fresh produce, ready-to-serve soup in bags, frozen meals, sauces, baked goods, quick service items and desserts.

Efficiency is the name of the game

The food distribution system is designed for efficiency and profit. Restaurants can order from huge catalogs full of ready-to-serve soups, pre-cooked meats, frozen appetizers and heat-and-serve sides. Choosing these products reduces kitchen labor because the bulk of the cooking has already been done somewhere else.

And that somewhere else isn't always a place with strong labor protections or fair wages. Mass production often happens in facilities where ingredients, time and labor are stretched as far as possible to keep prices down. The pressure to cut costs doesn't stop at the kitchen door; it runs all the way back through the supply chain.

Smaller restaurants turn to food distributors

Independent restaurants often depend on these suppliers just as much as the national chains. Buying bulk ingredients and prepared foods allows smaller establishments to compete on price and menu variety.

Some establishments add a personal touch, such as fresh garnishes, a drizzle of sauce or a house-made side to make the dish feel unique, but by and large, their choices. Others embrace the convenience completely, trading scratch cooking for speed, reliability and the same choices people order over and over again.

However, not every small restaurant can order from the major distributors. Some local spots lack the storage space, delivery minimums or volume needed to buy through the big distributors. Instead, they turn to warehouse stores like Costco, Sam's Club or Restaurant Depot for supplies.

Consistency is king

For diners, the sameness can be both comforting and surprising. Familiar flavors keep people coming back; there's security in knowing what your fries, your sandwich or your breakfast plate will taste like. But it can be eye-opening to realize that the special of the day might be the same special served in countless other places, pulled from the same supplier, finished in different kitchens.

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Not every restaurant works this way

This system doesn't mean every restaurant is opening boxes and reheating. Plenty of kitchens still peel, chop, simmer and create food from scratch every day. Chefs protecting traditional recipes, family diners making their own sauces, bakeries proofing dough overnight, food trucks crafting sauces in small batches and, yes, Michelin-starred restaurants pushing for excellence. Those places exist, and they matter.

If eating truly made-in-house food is important to you, seek them out and support them. Restaurants respond to their customers. When diners value real cooking, the industry takes notice.

Ask the right questions

Consumers need to ask questions about where the food actually comes from. Even phrases like house-made or freshly prepared may sound like they're made onsite, but that can just describe how dishes are finished. Ask servers to clarify if you want to know what is made 100% in-house from start to finish; the answers may surprise you.

A few signs to look for when you're in a restaurant that makes its own food might be smaller menus. The thought is that they serve fewer options because they are actually making the items in-house.

Conversely, the bigger and more varied the menu, the more likely they are to use premade food that is heat-and-serve ready. The dishes may look and taste similar to what you've had elsewhere. The food may come out fast, portions are predictable and the flavors are steady from visit to visit.

You know what isn't made by big corporations?

Your grandmother's recipe for pecan pie, your mom's favorite bread recipe or your father-in-law's secret family barbecue sauce. Those treasured recipes can never be replicated in a factory.

When and if you get the chance to join the family in the kitchen, take that chance; you won't be sorry. Carry that real food knowledge with you, that's real cooking, and it's worth holding onto.

In the end

Knowing where your food comes from gives you the power to choose what matters to you. Some nights, convenience is exactly what we need. There's still real value in the places and people who are cooking for real, whether that's a tiny diner making biscuits before sunrise or a family kitchen passing down a recipe by memory. Those meals carry connection, care and identity in a way no distributor ever could.

Laura Sampson of Little House Big Alaska is on a mission to teach modern family-oriented home cooks how to make old-fashioned foods new again. She shares her passion for home cooking, backyard gardening and homesteading on her website and blog.

## Northeast prepares for first major snowstorm of season

By PATRICK WHITTLE Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — The Northeast was getting ready Tuesday for its first major snowstorm of the season, just as the Midwest began to escape snow and ice that snarled travel after the Thanksgiving holiday.

Some parts of northern New England were expecting up to 10 inches (25.4 centimeters) of snow. A windy, potentially icy storm was headed to the region and could soak some parts of the area's six states while piling snow in others, forecasters said.

The National Weather Service issued winter storm warnings and winter weather advisories in states including Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, Maine, Connecticut and New York ahead of the snow's arrival.

The winter blast is set to arrive days after more than 8 inches (20.32 centimeters) of snow fell at Chicago O'Hare International Airport over the weekend, setting a record for the highest single calendar day snowfall in November at the airport, according to the weather service. The previous record was set in 1951.

Snow in the Great Lakes region was tapering off, but the new storm was heading to the mid-Atlantic and Northeast, with up to a foot (30 centimeters) of snow by Tuesday, said National Weather Service meteorologist Andrew Orrison.

"It's going to be the first snowfall of the season for many of these areas, and it's going to be rather significant," Orrison said.

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Winter weather on tap in Northeast next

The National Weather Service issued a warning for coastal Maine from Tuesday morning until Wednesday morning, stating that residents "should delay all travel if possible" due to snow. The state is one of many that is in for its first wallop of snow of December, forecasters said.

In New Hampshire, the Department of Transportation on Sunday invited residents to submit names for its second annual name-a-plow competition.

"Welcome to The Department of the Seven Snowplows, our winter twist on a classic tale. Hawthorne had gables. We have orange snowplows just waiting for the perfect name," the department said on social media.

Last winner's top name was Ctrl-Salt-Delete. This season's winners will be announced in January.

Pennsylvania prepares for snow

With plowable snow expected to coat large parts of Pennsylvania, crews began to treat lanes along the 565-mile (909-kilometer) Pennsylvania Turnpike system on Monday, said the agency's press secretary, Marissa Orbanek. Vehicle restrictions on many interstates in the eastern half of Pennsylvania, including on the turnpike system's Northeast Extension, from the Lehigh Valley to Clarks Summit, will be imposed at 5 a.m. Tuesday.

More than 600 equipment operators and safety workers are available to help clear the turnpike's 2,900 miles (4,667 kilometers) of lanes, Orbanek said. The turnpike's winter staffing schedule began in mid-November, and 23 maintenance sheds are staffed around the clock.

"We really prepare for snow all year long," Orbanek said.

Travelers recovering in Midwest

In Chicago, Don Herrian was among the crowds of travelers at O'Hare on Sunday, hoping to make it back home after Thanksgiving as hundreds of flights were delayed and canceled following a winter storm in the Great Lakes region.

The 76-year-old retiree from Ardmore, Oklahoma, had visited his daughter and her family in Indianapolis. He said his first flight was three hours late, and his connecting flight to Oklahoma City from Chicago was already running another two hours behind.

"It is what it is," Herrian said. "It's congested, but that's expected due to the snow, the delays and the holidays."

Roads leading to O'Hare were packed Sunday with slow-moving vehicles, even after the roads had been cleared of snow. Planes were being de-iced at several airports across the country on Sunday, including at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport and Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport, according to the Federal Aviation Administration.

## Abortion opponents coming before the Supreme Court in challenge to state investigation

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A faith-based pregnancy center will come before the Supreme Court on Tuesday to challenge an investigation into whether it misled people to discourage abortions.

The facilities often known as "crisis pregnancy centers" have been on the rise in the U.S., especially since the Supreme Court's conservative majority overturned abortion as a nationwide right in 2022. Most Republican-controlled states have since started enforcing bans or restrictions on abortion, and some have steered tax dollars to the centers. They generally provide prenatal care and encourage women to carry pregnancies to term.

Many Democratic-aligned states have sought to protect abortion access and some have investigated whether pregnancy centers mislead women into thinking they offer abortions. In New Jersey, Democratic attorney general Matthew Platkin sent a subpoena to First Choice Women's Resource Centers for donor information.

First Choice pushed back, arguing the investigation was baseless and the demand for donor lists threat-

ened their First Amendment rights. They tried to challenge the subpoena in federal court, but a judge found the case wasn't yet far enough along. An appeals court agreed.

First Choice then turned to the Supreme Court. Executive director Aimee Huber said she hopes the high court will rule in their favor and send a message that protects facilities like hers. "I would hope that other attorneys general who have prosecuted or harmed or harassed other pregnancy centers, or are considering that, would back off as a result of our legal battle," she said.

New Jersey counters that First Choice is seeking special treatment. The group hasn't even had to hand over any records since the judge overseeing the case hasn't ordered it. "The Subpoena itself does not require Petitioner to do anything, and compliance is entirely voluntary," state attorneys wrote in court documents.

If the Supreme Court sides with First Choice, it would "open the federal courts to a flood of litigation challenging myriad state and local subpoenas," they argued.

First Choice said access to federal court is important in cases where government investigators are accused of misusing investigative power. The American Civil Liberties Union joined the case in support of First Choice's free speech argument.

Erin Hawley, an attorney for the conservative Christian legal group Alliance Defending Freedom, said subpoenas can hurt advocacy groups with unpopular points of view. "It is a broad non-ideological issue that really does transcend ideological boundaries," she said.

## Federal review finds 44% of US trucking schools don't comply with government rules

By JOSH FUNK AP Transportation Writer

Nearly 44% of the 16,000 truck driving programs listed nationwide by the government may be forced to close if they lose their students after a review by the federal Transportation Department found they may not be complying with minimum requirements.

The Transportation Department said Monday that it plans to revoke the certification of nearly 3,000 schools unless they can comply with training requirements in the next 30 days. The targeted schools must notify students that their certification is in jeopardy. Another 4,500 schools are being warned they may face similar action.

Schools that lose certification will no longer be able to issue the certificates showing a driver completed training that's required to get a license, so students are likely to abandon those schools. It's not clear how many of those schools have been actively teaching students.

Separately, the Department of Homeland Security is auditing trucking firms in California owned by immigrants to verify the status of their drivers and whether they are qualified to hold a commercial driver's license.

This crackdown on trucking schools and companies is the latest step in the government's effort to ensure that truck drivers are qualified and eligible to hold a commercial license. This began after a truck driver that Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy says was not authorized to be in the U.S. made an illegal U-turn and caused a crash in Florida that killed three people.

The action reins in "illegal and reckless practices that let poorly trained drivers get behind the wheel of semi-trucks and school buses," Duffy said.

Duffy has threatened to pull federal funding from California and Pennsylvania over the issue, and he proposed significant new restrictions on which immigrants can get a commercial driver's license but a court put those new rules on hold. On Monday, he threatened to withhold \$30.4 million from Minnesota if that state doesn't address shortcomings in its commercial driver's license program and revoke any licenses that never should have been issued either because they were valid beyond a driver's work permit or because the state never verified a driver's immigration status.

So far, every state Duffy has threatened has been a Democratic state, but he has said the department is auditing a number of other states, including Texas and South Dakota.

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Claire Lancaster, a spokesperson for Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, said: "We take safety on our roads seriously and the Minnesota Department of Public Safety has already worked to ensure we are in compliance with federal law."

Trucking schools fail to meet standards

It's not clear how action against these trucking schools could affect the existing shortage of drivers, but the executive director of the largest association of trucking schools, Andrew Poliakoff, said many of the schools being decertified were questionable "CDL mills" that would advertise being able to train drivers in just a few days.

In established training schools, students normally spend at least a month and get lessons both behind the wheel and in the classroom.

He said those questionable schools were really just "fleecing people out of money" without teaching them the skills they need to get hired or pass the test.

"Trucking is an outstanding career. And the people who are not familiar with the industry might see someone charging \$1,000 in \$2,000 for a long weekend or quick training. And they may think that that's desirable, but that's really not," said Poliakoff, who leads the Commercial Vehicle Training Association that includes 100 schools with 400 locations nationwide. None of those schools were decertified.

The Transportation Department said the 3,000 schools it is taking action against failed to meet training standards and didn't maintain accurate and complete records. The schools are also accused of falsifying or manipulating training data.

Some of them were inactive before this action.

Yogi Sanwal, the owner, said his company closed its truck driving school in 2022. It did so after it made some changes to comply with federal accreditation requirements, which then triggered a county government demand for upgrades like replacing sand and gravel with asphalt. The company didn't have the \$150,000 it would have needed to do that at the time so it closed the school. It had trained about 500 truckers in the four to five years the school was open, Sanwal said.

Trucking industry groups have praised the effort to tighten up licensing standards and ensure that drivers can meet basic English proficiency requirements the Trump administration began enforcing this summer. But groups that represent immigrant truck drivers say they believe many qualified drivers and companies are being targeted simply because of their citizenship status.

"Bad actors who exploit loopholes in our regulatory systems are putting everyone at risk. This is unacceptable," said Paul J. Enos, CEO of the Nevada Trucking Association. "We are focused on solutions and resolute on seeing them implemented."

Todd Spencer, President of the Owner Operator Independent Drivers Association, said the industry has long warned about the potential for problems if trucking schools are allowed to certify themselves.

"When training standards are weak, or in some instances totally non-existent, drivers are unprepared, and everyone on the road pays the price," Spencer said.

Immigrant drivers say they are being unfairly targeted

Truck drivers of the Sikh faith have been caught in the crossfire and faced harassment because the drivers in the Florida crash and another deadly crash in California this fall were both Sikhs. The North American Punjabi Truckers Association estimates that the Sikh workforce makes up about 40% of truck driving on the West Coast and about 20% nationwide. Advocacy groups estimate about 150,000 Sikh truck drivers work in the U.S.

The Department of Homeland Security didn't respond immediately to questions about the effort to verify the immigration status of truck drivers, but the UNITED SIKHS advocacy group said they have heard directly from Punjabi company owners about these aggressive audits of immigration records.

"Sikh and immigrant truckers with spotless records are being treated like suspects while they keep America's freight moving," the UNITED SIKHS group said. "When federal agencies frame lawful, licensed drivers as risks, it doesn't improve safety — it fuels xenophobia, harassment, and even violence on the road. Any policy built on fear instead of facts endangers families, civil rights, and the national supply chain."

California moved to revoke 17,000 commercial driver's licenses after federal officials raised concerns

that they had been issued improperly to immigrants or allowed to remain valid long after a driver's work permit expired.

## **A California family was about to cut the cake when gunfire erupted at a toddler's birthday party**

By SOPHIE AUSTIN and CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

STOCKTON, Calif. (AP) — Family members were getting ready to cut the cake at a toddler's birthday party when the gunfire started inside a banquet hall packed with relatives and friends over the weekend in California.

"I actually thought it was my balloons popping. It was gunshots," said Patrice Williams, the birthday girl's mother.

Her daughter, who turned 2, was uninjured. But Williams told The Associated Press on Monday that her sister, a cousin and three of her friends were shot in the burst of gunfire Saturday evening in Stockton.

Three children ages 8, 9 and 14 and a 21-year-old were killed in the hall where at least 100 people were gathered, San Joaquin County Sheriff Patrick Withrow said. Detectives believe the gunfire continued outside and there may have been multiple shooters.

Eleven people were wounded, and at least one is in critical condition, Withrow said. No one is in custody.

Sadness and remorse for the victims and their families

Williams said partygoers who had gathered around the cake dropped to the ground the moment the gunshots rang out.

"It was just unexpected. I don't know what happened, and I'm just so shocked and lost," Williams said.

She expressed remorse for the mothers who lost their children.

Williams said she didn't get a look at the shooter and has no idea who would commit violence at what was supposed to be a joyous event.

"They deserve to be in jail. They deserve to go to hell," Williams said. "I'm sorry, but I just ... it's not respectable. It's a kids' party."

Williams, surrounded by family members, teared up as she said parents who plan birthday parties for their kids should consider having them indoors because of the risk of violence.

Sheriff's office believes the shooting was targeted

The sheriff urged anyone with information to contact his office with tips, cellphone video or witness accounts.

"This is a time for our community to show that we will not put up with this type of behavior, when people will just walk in and kill children," Withrow said Sunday evening. "And so if you know anything about this, you have to come forward and tell us what you know. If not, you just become complacent and think this is acceptable behavior."

Sheriff's spokesperson Heather Brent has said investigators believe it was a "targeted incident." Officials did not elaborate on why authorities believe it was intentional or who might have been targeted. She said investigators would welcome any information, "even rumors."

'Who would come and do that to some kids?'

Stockton resident Carolyn Tahod, who didn't know the victims, showed up Monday to place bouquets of flowers at a makeshift memorial with candles lit in honor of those who died.

"I'm just the average person that has a big heart, and I have grandkids," she said. "I would be devastated if this were to happen in our family."

Roscoe Brown, who said the party was in honor of his brother's granddaughter, works for the city of Stockton's Office of Violence Prevention. Brown was in Arizona when he learned about the shooting and drove straight to the scene. He said a niece and nephew were shot, and he knows several other victims. He didn't have information about their conditions.

"Who would come and do that to some kids, you know?" Brown told AP after a Sunday afternoon vigil

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organized by faith leaders. "You can't shoot up a party. That's senseless. A kid's party, at that."

A 14-year-old boy named Amari Peterson, who played football and basketball and was making plans for college, was killed in the shooting, according to a GoFundMe account operated by his aunt, Aresha Mosley.

"The only mistake this sweet boy made was being in the wrong place at the wrong time," the account said. "He was simply being a kid at a kids' party."

Emmanuel Lopez told the Los Angeles Times his brother, 21-year-old Susano Archuleta, was shot in the neck and died at the scene. Lopez said his 9-year-old daughter was shot in the head but survived. He didn't share details about what led up to the shooting.

Rhodesia Ransom, a Democratic state assemblymember representing Stockton, said "we cannot normalize this tragedy."

"We cannot freeze in this moment or let it pass without doing the hard work to prevent this from happening again," she said in a statement.

Stockton records a lot of violent crime

Stockton is a city of 320,000 residents about 80 miles (130 kilometers) east of San Francisco. Stockton saw 3,680 violent crimes in 2024, at a rate more than double the statewide rate, according to city and state data. Violent crime includes homicide, rape, assault and robbery. The San Joaquin Valley, where Stockton is located, had the highest violent crime rate in the state in 2023, according to data from the Public Policy Institute of California.

Hours after the shooting, the Stockton Police Department arrested five people, including a juvenile, on weapons and gang-related charges. There was no indication that the arrests were connected to the killings at the banquet hall, the sheriff said.

It was the 17th U.S. mass killing of the year with at least four victim fatalities, according to a database maintained by The Associated Press and USA Today in partnership with Northeastern University.

Mayor Christina Fugazi told reporters that the 8-year-old victim attended a local school and had a parent who worked for the Stockton Unified School District. The mayor said counselors would be available this week at city schools.

She expressed anguish over the loss of victims so young.

"They should be writing their Christmas lists right now. Their parents should be out shopping for them for Christmas. And to think that their lives are over. I can't even begin to imagine what these families are going through. Breaks my heart," Fugazi said on Sunday.

## **White House says admiral ordered follow-up strike on alleged drug boat, insists attack was lawful**

By AAMER MADHANI and REGINA GARCIA CANO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House said Monday that a Navy admiral acted "within his authority and the law" when he ordered a second, follow-up strike on an alleged drug boat in the Caribbean Sea in a September U.S. military operation that has come under bipartisan scrutiny.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt offered the justification for the Sept. 2 strike as lawmakers announced there will be congressional review of the U.S. military strikes against vessels suspected of smuggling drugs in the Caribbean and the eastern Pacific Ocean. The lawmakers cited a published report that Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth issued a verbal order for a second strike that killed survivors on the boat.

Navy Vice Adm. Frank "Mitch" Bradley, who Leavitt said ordered the second strike, is expected to provide a classified briefing Thursday to lawmakers overseeing the military.

Leavitt in her comments to reporters did not dispute a Washington Post report that there were survivors after the initial strike. Her explanation came after President Donald Trump a day earlier said he "wouldn't have wanted that — not a second strike" when asked about the incident.

"Secretary Hegseth authorized Admiral Bradley to conduct these kinetic strikes," said Leavitt. "Admiral Bradley worked well within his authority and the law, directing the engagement to ensure the boat was destroyed and the threat to the United States of America was eliminated."

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Late Monday, Hegseth posted: "Admiral Mitch Bradley is an American hero, a true professional, and has my 100% support. I stand by him and the combat decisions he has made — on the September 2 mission and all others since."

A month after the strike, Bradley was promoted from commander of Joint Special Operations Command to commander of U.S. Special Operations Command.

Concern over the Trump administration's military strikes against the alleged drug-smuggling boats has been building in Congress, but details of this follow-on strike stunned many lawmakers from both parties and generated stark questions about the legality of the attacks and the overall strategy in the region, and particularly toward Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

The lawmakers said they did not know whether last week's Post report was true, and some Republicans were skeptical. Still, they said the reported attacking of survivors of an initial missile strike posed serious concerns and merited further scrutiny.

The White House weighed in after Trump on Sunday vigorously defended Hegseth.

"Pete said he did not order the death of those two men," Trump said. He added, "And I believe him."

Leavitt said Hegseth has spoken with members of Congress who may have expressed some concerns about the reports over the weekend.

Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, also spoke over the weekend with the two Republican and two Democratic lawmakers leading the Senate and House Armed Services committees. He reiterated "his trust and confidence in the experienced commanders at every echelon," Caine's office said in a statement.

The statement added that the call focused on "addressing the intent and legality of missions to disrupt illicit trafficking networks which threaten the security and stability of the Western Hemisphere."

Congress wants answers

Senate Majority Leader John Thune on Monday broadly defended the operations, echoing the Trump administration position that they're necessary to stem the flow of illegal narcotics into the United States.

Thune said the committees in Congress will look into what happened. "I don't think you want to draw any conclusions or deductions until you have all the facts," he said of the Sept. 2 strike. "We'll see where they lead."

After the Post's report, Hegseth said Friday on X that "fake news is delivering more fabricated, inflammatory, and derogatory reporting to discredit our incredible warriors fighting to protect the homeland."

"Our current operations in the Caribbean are lawful under both U.S. and international law, with all actions in compliance with the law of armed conflict — and approved by the best military and civilian lawyers, up and down the chain of command," Hegseth wrote.

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer called Hegseth a "national embarrassment" over his response to critics. Schumer demanded that Hegseth release the video of the strike and testify under oath about what happened.

Republican Sen. Roger Wicker of Mississippi, the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, pledged that his panel's investigation would be "done by the numbers."

"We'll find out the ground truth," he said, adding that the ramifications of the report were "serious charges."

Sen. Jack Reed, the top Democrat on the committee, who also called for the administration to release the video of the strike, said its inquiry would start "with briefings about what actually happened" from the officials involved.

"If they've done nothing wrong, then that video should exonerate them completely. Why don't they release it?" he asked.

In the House, Rep. Mike Rogers, the Republican chair of its Armed Services Committee, said he was "satisfied" following a conversation with Hegseth on the attack, but that he also wanted to hear from Bradley.

"We'll all have clarity on Thursday afternoon," Rogers said.

Venezuela's president reacts

Trump met later Monday with his national security team to discuss the ongoing operations and potential

next steps against Venezuela.

The U.S. administration says the strikes are aimed at drug cartels, some of which it claims are controlled by Maduro. Trump also is weighing whether to carry out strikes on the Venezuelan mainland.

Trump confirmed Sunday that he had recently spoken by phone with Maduro but declined to detail the conversation.

Speaking to supporters in Caracas on Monday, Maduro said U.S. pressure has "tested" the country but Venezuelans are ready "to defend it and lead it to the path of peace."

"We have lived through 22 weeks of aggression that can only be described as psychological terrorism," Maduro said.

The September strike was one in a series carried out by the U.S. military in the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean as Trump has ordered the buildup of a fleet of warships near Venezuela, including the largest U.S. aircraft carrier. More than 80 people have been killed in the strikes.

Venezuela's National Assembly has announced the launch of an investigation into the lethal strikes. Sunday's announcement by the Assembly's president, Jorge Rodríguez, was the first time that a Maduro government official explicitly acknowledged that Venezuelans have been killed in the monthslong U.S. military operation.

Rodríguez, Maduro's chief negotiator, said a group of lawmakers will come together to investigate "the serious events that led to the murder of Venezuelans in the waters of the Caribbean Sea."

## Shooting of National Guard members prompts flurry of US immigration restrictions

By REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Since last week's shooting of two National Guard members in the nation's capital by a suspect who is an Afghan national, the Trump administration announced a flurry of policies aimed at making it harder for some foreigners to enter or stay in the country.

The administration said it was pausing asylum decisions, reexamining green card applications for people from countries "of concern" and halting visas for Afghans who assisted the U.S. war effort.

Days before the shooting, a memo obtained by The Associated Press said the administration would review the cases of all refugees who entered the U.S. during the Biden administration.

The stepped up effort to restrict immigration has been harshly criticized by refugee advocates and those who work with Afghans, saying it amounts to collective punishment. Critics are also saying it is a waste of government resources to reopen cases that have already been processed.

The Trump administration says the new policies are necessary to ensure that those entering the country — or are already here — do not pose a security threat.

Here's a look at the major changes announced over roughly a week:

All asylum decisions suspended

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

Besides the post, no formal guidance has been put forward, so details remain scarce about the planned pause.

People seeking asylum must show to U.S. officials a threat of persecution if they were sent back to their home country, whether because of race, nationality or other grounds. If they're granted asylum, they're allowed to stay in the U.S. and eventually apply for a green card and then citizenship.

The Afghan suspect in the National Guard shooting was granted asylum earlier this year, according to advocate group #AfghanEvac.

The right to apply for asylum was already restricted by the Trump administration. In January, President Donald Trump issued an executive order essentially halting asylum for people who have come into the country through the southern border. Those cases generally go through immigration courts which are

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overseen by the Justice Department.

USCIS oversees the asylum process for foreigners the government isn't trying to remove via immigration courts. While Trump's January order didn't affect those cases, Edlow's social media post suggests they will now come under additional scrutiny. Edlow did not say how long the agency's pause on asylum decisions would last or what happens to people while those decisions are paused.

Caseloads have been rising for all types of asylum applications. USCIS said there are currently 1.4 million pending asylum cases at the agency. Just a few years ago, in 2022, it was 241,280, according to the Office of Homeland Security Statistics. Separately there are about 2.4 million pending asylum applications in front of the Justice Department's immigration courts.

A focus on countries 'of concern'

On Nov. 27, Edlow said his agency was conducting a "full scale, rigorous reexamination" of every green card for people he said come from "every country of concern."

"American safety is non negotiable," Edlow said.

The agency said in a press release that same day that it was issuing new guidance that could make it tougher for people from 19 countries the administration considers "high-risk," including Afghanistan, when they apply for immigration benefits such as applying for green cards or to stay in the U.S. longer.

The administration had already banned travel to the U.S. for citizens from 12 of those countries and restricted access for people from seven others.

No visas for Afghans

Other stricter measures are also directed at Afghans.

On Nov. 26, USCIS said it would be suspending all "immigration requests relating to Afghan nationals." That would affect Afghans already living in the U.S. who are applying for green cards or work permits or permission to bring family members to the U.S.

Separately, Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced late Friday on X that the State Department has temporarily stopped issuing visas for all people traveling on Afghan passports.

The Trump administration had already severely limited travel and immigration from Afghanistan. The one avenue that had remained open was the Special Immigrant Visa program. Created by Congress, it allowed Afghans who closely supported the U.S. war effort in Afghanistan and faced retribution because of their work to emigrate to America.

But the State Department's announcement means even that avenue is now closed.

According to #AfghanEvac, a group that advocates for Afghans coming to the U.S., about 180,000 Afghans were in the process of applying for the SIV program.

A review of refugees admitted under the Biden administration

Even before the shooting of two National Guard members, the Trump administration was planning a sweeping review of tens of thousands of immigrants who entered the U.S. during the Biden administration as part of the U.S. Refugee Assistance Program.

That program, first launched in 1980, oversees the process by which people fleeing persecution can come to the U.S. Refugees are distinct from people seeking asylum, although they meet the same criteria. Refugees have to apply and wait outside the U.S. to be admitted while asylum-seekers do so once they reach the U.S.

Trump suspended the refugee program the day he took office and only a trickle of refugees have been admitted since then, either white South Africans or people admitted as part of a lawsuit seeking to restart the refugee program.

Then on Nov. 21, Edlow said in a memo obtained by The Associated Press that the administration was going to review all refugees admitted to the U.S. during the Biden administration. That's nearly 200,000 refugees.

Advocates say refugees already undergo rigorous vetting.

Noem hints at updated travel ban

Late Monday, Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem suggested in a post on X that more changes

could be in the offing.

Noting that she had just met with Trump, Noem said she was recommending a "full travel ban" on countries she said were flooding the U.S. "with killers, leeches, and entitlement junkies."

Noem did not specifically name any countries and no timeline was given. The Department of Homeland Security said in an email Monday, "We will be announcing the list soon."

## **USA Gymnastics and Olympic sports watchdog failed to stop coach's sexual abuse, lawsuits allege**

By RYAN J. FOLEY and EDDIE PELLIS Associated Press

IOWA CITY, Iowa (AP) — Two gymnasts who say they were sexually abused at an elite academy in Iowa filed lawsuits Monday against the sport's oversight bodies, alleging they failed to stop Sean Gardner from preying on girls despite repeated complaints about the coach's behavior.

The lawsuits allege USA Gymnastics and the U.S. Center for SafeSport were told about "inappropriate and abusive behaviors" in December 2017, including that Gardner was hugging and kissing girls and engaging in other grooming behaviors while coaching at a Mississippi gym.

The organizations failed to properly investigate, revoke Gardner's coaching credentials, report him to law enforcement or take other actions to protect athletes, the lawsuits allege. They claim the inaction enabled Gardner to get a job at Chow's Gymnastics and Dance Institute in West Des Moines, Iowa, in 2018, where the gymnasts say they and other preteen and teenage girls were abused despite additional complaints about Gardner.

The institute was founded by prominent coach Liang "Chow" Qiao, who is known for producing Olympic champions and was also named as a defendant in the lawsuits.

Lawsuits are first filed since Gardner's arrest

The lawsuits, filed in Polk County, Iowa, are the first civil cases brought in an abuse scandal that came to light in a series of reports by The Associated Press after the FBI arrested Gardner in August. They allege USA Gymnastics and SafeSport, the watchdog created by Congress to investigate misconduct in Olympic sports in the aftermath of the Larry Nassar sexual abuse scandal, missed repeated opportunities to stop Gardner.

"It illustrates in my view that the culture of money and medals over child safety is still alive and well in USA Gymnastics and the Olympic system," said California attorney John Manly, who represented Nassar's victims and is part of the legal team that filed the Iowa cases. "What he did was profoundly evil and they let him do it."

SafeSport said Monday it had not been served with the lawsuit and typically does not comment on litigation. It noted that its 2022 temporary suspension of Gardner came "upon receiving the first report of sexual misconduct" against him and was published in its online database of disciplinary action. That was "the only reason Gardner was barred from coaching young athletes in the years until his arrest," it said.

Gardner's sanction escalated from "temporary suspension" to "ineligible" on Sept. 12 due to his arrest.

Responding to questions in August about the original AP reporting, the center said it had been notified by USA Gymnastics that a gym where Gardner worked had resolved a 2018 case involving the coach that didn't pertain to sexual misconduct. The center said coaches at Chow's were aware of subsequent allegations involving sexual misconduct but failed to report them.

USA Gymnastics spokesperson Jill Geer said Monday the organization appreciates "the seriousness of this case" but declined further comment.

Gardner faces federal child pornography charges for allegedly placing a hidden camera in a bathroom at a gymnastics studio in Purvis, Mississippi, between December 2017 and April 2018 to record his students. Investigators say he created videos showing close-up images of at least 10 minors naked or undressing, which they recovered from his computers last year while investigating reports of sexual abuse.

Gardner has pleaded not guilty and has been jailed pending trial, which is scheduled for next month.

His attorney didn't return a message seeking comment.

Plaintiffs in lawsuits are now college students

The lawsuits allege the plaintiffs were 11- and 12-year-old trainees at Chow's who dreamed of one day competing in the Olympics when they began training under Gardner in 2018. They say they were subjected to "physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, harassment and molestation" until they quit the gym years later.

The plaintiffs include Iowa State gymnast Finley Weldon, who reported claims of abuse by Gardner to police and later went public in an AP interview. The other is 19-year-old University of Iowa student Hailey Gear, who also wants to go public with her allegations, according to her attorney, Elizabeth Pudenz. They seek unspecified damages for their injuries and treatment expenses. Several other former gymnasts have reported abuse, and more lawsuits are expected.

The AP generally does not identify victims of sexual abuse unless they come forward publicly.

In addition to USA Gymnastics and SafeSport, the defendants named in the lawsuit are Qiao, the former Chinese gymnast who opened Chow's in 1998 and coached Olympic gold medalists Shawn Johnson and Gabby Douglas; Qiao's wife, Liwen Zhuan, a coach who helps run the gym; and their family corporations that own the business and the property on which it sits.

Lawsuits detail concerns over Gardner's 'grooming behavior'

The lawsuits allege all the defendants were negligent in how they responded to reports of Gardner's misconduct.

The parents of a gymnast filed reports with USA Gymnastics and SafeSport in December 2017 alleging Gardner required girls to give him long hugs after every training in Mississippi and that he kicked one girl out who refused, the lawsuits claim. He allegedly had an improper closed-door meeting with a girl whom he verbally abused, kissed gymnasts on their foreheads, drank alcohol excessively in front of them, made sexual jokes to girls and inappropriate comments on social media, and stalked one girl who he was instructed to stop contacting, the lawsuits claim.

Gardner's then-boss also reported to USA Gymnastics in January 2018 that Gardner had engaged in "grooming behaviors," but he was allowed to continue coaching.

The lawsuits allege SafeSport received another report from a parent at Chow's "concerning improper behaviors" by Gardner in September 2020 but failed to investigate.

The lawsuits allege Qiao and Zhuan failed to conduct an adequate background check before hiring Gardner and continued to employ him even after receiving complaints that he inappropriately touched girls while spotting them during exercises.

Qiao and Zhuan didn't return a message left at Chow's. The gym has said that Gardner passed a standard background check, and it fired Gardner after he was suspended by SafeSport in July 2022, even though "there had been no finding of misconduct at that time."

## Son of drug kingpin 'El Chapo' pleads guilty in US drug trafficking case in a plea deal

By CHRISTINE FERNANDO Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — One of the sons of notorious Mexican drug kingpin "El Chapo" pleaded guilty on Monday to U.S. drug trafficking charges, months after his brother entered a plea deal.

Known locally in Mexico as the "Chapitos" — or "little Chapos" — Joaquín Guzmán López and brother Ovidio Guzmán López are accused of running a faction of the Sinaloa cartel. Federal authorities in 2023 described the operation as a massive effort to send "staggering" quantities of fentanyl into the U.S.

Joaquín Guzmán López, 39, pleaded guilty to two counts of drug trafficking and continuing criminal enterprise after admitting his role in overseeing the transport of tens of thousands of kilograms (pounds) of drugs to the U.S., mostly through underground tunnels. With the plea deal, his attorney said, he is expected to avoid life in prison.

Security was tight at Chicago's federal court ahead of the hearing in which prosecutors detailed events leading up to Guzmán López's dramatic arrest with another longtime Sinaloa leader on U.S. soil in July 2024.

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Wearing an orange jumpsuit and matching shoes, Guzmán López spoke little in court Monday. At the outset of the hearing, U.S. District Judge Sharon Coleman asked him what he did for work.

"Drug trafficking," he said.

"Oh that's your job," Coleman said with a chuckle. "There you go."

If Guzmán López cooperates with the U.S. government, prosecutors said, they would reduce the life sentence attached to the charges. Regardless, he faces at least 10 years in prison, said Andrew Erskine, an attorney representing the federal government.

Guzmán López would have no opportunity to appeal the sentence as part of the plea deal.

His defense attorney, Jeffrey Lichtman, commended both U.S. and Mexican authorities.

"The government has been very fair with Joaquín thus far," he told reporters after the hearing. "I do appreciate the fact that the Mexican government didn't interfere."

Guzmán López and another longtime Sinaloa leader, Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada, were arrested in July 2024 in Texas after they landed in the U.S. on a private plane. Both men have previously pleaded not guilty to various drug trafficking, money laundering and firearms charges. Their surprising capture prompted a surge in violence in Mexico's northern state of Sinaloa as two factions of the Sinaloa cartel clashed.

As part of the plea deal, Joaquín Guzmán López admitted to helping oversee the production and smuggling of large quantities of cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine, marijuana and fentanyl into the United States, fueling a crisis that has contributed to tens of thousands of overdose deaths annually.

Guzmán López also admitted to kidnapping an unnamed individual purported to be Zambada. Erskine described the alleged kidnapping in court, saying Guzmán López had the glass from a floor-to-ceiling window removed. During a meeting in the room with the unnamed person, Guzmán López allegedly had others enter through the open window, seize the individual, put a bag over his head and take him to a plane. On board, he was zip tied and given sedatives before the plane landed at a New Mexico airport near the border with Texas.

Erskine said the alleged kidnapping was part of an attempt to show cooperation with the U.S. government, which did not sanction those actions. He said Guzmán López also would not receive cooperation credit because of that.

Zambada's attorney has previously claimed that his client was "forcibly kidnapped" by Guzmán López onto the flight to the U.S.

Lichtman said he would try to seek a lower sentence.

"I don't know how this ends up," Lichtman said. "If he gets a 10-year sentence, it's still a lot of time for anybody to spend in prison."

In court, observers were instructed to turn off electronic devices while authorities used police dogs to sniff bags and equipment in the lobby of the downtown courthouse.

In July, Ovidio Guzmán López became the first son of drug lord Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán to enter a plea deal. He pleaded guilty to drug trafficking, money laundering and firearms charges tied to his leadership role in the cartel. Legal experts called that plea deal a significant step for the U.S. government in their investigation and prosecution of Sinaloa cartel leaders.

Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán is serving a life sentence after being convicted in 2019 for his role as the former leader of the Sinaloa cartel, having smuggled mountains of cocaine and other drugs into the United States over 25 years. The brothers allegedly assumed their father's former role as leaders of the cartel.

## Luigi Mangione fights to exclude evidence from his trial in the killing of UnitedHealthcare's CEO

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Luigi Mangione watched stoically in court Monday as prosecutors played surveillance videos showing the killing of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson on a New York City sidewalk last year and Mangione's arrest five days later at a McDonald's in Pennsylvania.

The videos, including footage from the restaurant previously unseen by the press or the public, kicked

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off a hearing on Mangione's fight to bar evidence from his state murder trial, including the gun prosecutors say matches the one used in the Dec. 4, 2024, attack. Thompson was killed as he walked to a Manhattan hotel for his company's annual investor conference.

Mangione, 27, pressed a finger to his lips and a thumb to his chin as he watched footage of two police officers approaching him as he ate breakfast at the McDonald's in Altoona, Pennsylvania, about 230 miles (about 370 kilometers) west of Manhattan.

He gripped a pen in his right hand, making a fist at times, as prosecutors played a 911 call from a McDonald's manager relaying concerns from customers that Mangione looked like the suspect in Thompson's killing. The manager said she searched online for photos of the suspect and that as Mangione sat in the restaurant, she could only see his eyebrows because he was wearing a beanie and a medical face mask.

Before he was flown to New York City to face murder charges, Mangione was held under constant watch in an otherwise empty special housing unit at a Pennsylvania state prison.

A correctional officer testified that the prison wanted to keep Mangione away from other inmates and staff who might leak information about him to the media. The officer testified that the facility's superintendent told him that the prison "did not want an Epstein-style situation," referring to Jeffrey Epstein's suicide at a Manhattan federal jail in 2019.

Among the evidence Mangione's defense team wants excluded are the 9 mm handgun and a notebook in which prosecutors say he described his intent to "wack" a health insurance executive. Both were found in a backpack Mangione had with him when arrested.

Mangione, the Ivy League-educated scion of a wealthy Maryland family, has pleaded not guilty to state and federal murder charges. The state charges carry the possibility of life in prison, while federal prosecutors are seeking the death penalty. Neither trial has been scheduled. The next hearing in the federal case is scheduled for Jan. 9.

Defense wants to bar the gun and notebook from his trial

After getting state terrorism charges thrown out in September, Mangione's lawyers are zeroing in on what they say was unconstitutional police conduct that threatens his right to a fair trial.

They contend that the Manhattan district attorney's office should be prevented from showing the gun, notebook and other items to jurors because police didn't have a search warrant.

They also want to suppress some of Mangione's statements to police, such as when he allegedly said his name was Mark Rosario, because officers started asking questions before telling him he had a right to remain silent. Prosecutors say Mangione gave the same name while checking into a Manhattan hostel days before the killing.

The defense is also seeking to preclude statements Mangione made to law enforcement from the day of his arrest until he was moved to New York on Dec. 19. The correctional officer, Tomas Rivers, testified that Mangione talked to him about his travels to Asia, including witnessing a gang fight in Thailand, and discussed differences between private and nationalized health care.

At one point, Rivers said, Mangione asked him whether the news media was focused on him as a person or the crime that was committed. He also said Mangione told him he wanted to make a public statement.

Another correctional officer, Matthew Henry, said Mangione blurted out to him that at the time of his arrest, he had a backpack with foreign currency and a 3D-printed pistol. Mangione's lawyer, Marc Agnifilo, was incredulous at Henry's testimony that Mangione might have shared that information, unprompted.

Surveillance video showed a masked gunman shooting Thompson from behind.

Prosecutors say "delay," "deny" and "depose" were written on the ammunition, mimicking a phrase used to describe how insurers avoid paying claims.

Eliminating the gun and notebook would be critical wins for Mangione's defense and major setbacks for prosecutors, depriving them a possible murder weapon and evidence they say points to motive. Prosecutors have quoted extensively from Mangione's writings in court filings, including his alleged praise for the late "Unabomber" Theodore Kaczynski.

Among other things, prosecutors say, Mangione mused about rebelling against "the deadly, greed fueled

health insurance cartel" and wrote that killing an industry executive "conveys a greedy bastard that had it coming."

An officer searching the backpack found with Mangione was heard in body camera footage saying she was checking to make sure there "wasn't a bomb" in the bag. His lawyers argue that was an excuse "designed to cover up an illegal warrantless search of the backpack."

Laws concerning how police interact with potential suspects before reading them their rights or obtaining search warrants are complex and often disputed in criminal cases.

Federal prosecutors, fighting a similar defense effort in that case, have said in court filings that police were justified in searching the backpack to make sure there were no dangerous items, and that his statements to officers were voluntary and were made before he was under arrest.

Pivotal pretrial hearing could last more than a week

Court officials say the hearing could last more than a week, meaning it would extend through Thursday's anniversary of the killing. Defense lawyer Marc Agnifilo told a judge in an unrelated matter last week that Manhattan prosecutors had indicated they could call more than two dozen witnesses.

Mangione was allowed to wear normal clothing to court instead of a jail uniform. He entered the courtroom Monday in a gray suit and a button-down shirt with a checkered or tattersall pattern. Court officers removed his handcuffs to allow him to take notes.

NYPD Sgt. Chris McLaughlin testified about efforts to disseminate surveillance images of the suspect to news outlets and on social media in the hours and days after the shooting.

To illustrate the breadth of news coverage during the five-day search for the shooter, prosecutors played a surveillance video of the shooting, footage of police divers searching a pond in Central Park and Fox News clips that included images of the suspected shooter distributed by police.

A few dozen Mangione supporters watched the hearing from the back of the courtroom. One wore a green T-shirt that said: "Without a warrant, it's not a search, it's a violation." Another woman held a doll of the Luigi video game character and had a smaller figurine of him clipped to her purse.

## Doctor says Trump had preventative screening MRI on heart, abdomen with 'perfectly normal' results

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump's doctor says the president had MRI imaging on his heart and abdomen in October as part of a preventative screening for men his age, according to a memo from the physician released by the White House on Monday.

Sean Barbabella said in a statement that Trump's physical exam included "advanced imaging" that is "standard for an executive physical" in Trump's age group. Barbabella concluded that the cardiovascular and abdominal imaging was "perfectly normal."

"The purpose of this imaging is preventative: to identify issues early, confirm overall health, and ensure he maintains long-term vitality and function," the doctor wrote.

The White House released Barbabella's memo after Trump on Sunday said he would release the results of the scan. He and the White House have said the scan was "part of his routine physical examination" but had declined until Monday to detail why Trump had an MRI during his physical in October at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center or on what part of his body.

"I think that's quite a bit of detail," White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said Monday when announcing the memo's release.

The Republican president said Sunday during an exchange with reporters as he traveled back to Washington from Florida that the results of the MRI were "perfect."

"If you want to have it released, I'll release it," Trump said.

Trump added Sunday that he has "no idea" on what part of his body he got the MRI.

"It was just an MRI," he said. "What part of the body? It wasn't the brain because I took a cognitive test and I aced it."

Doctors typically order an MRI to help with diagnosing symptoms or to monitor an ongoing health problem.

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So-called "preventive" cardiac and abdominal MRIs are not part of routine screening recommendations. What Trump's doctor called an "executive physical" generally refers to adding extra, non-routine tests including MRIs to pricey and lengthy exams, not covered by insurance, that are marketed to wealthy people.

## Shoppers scoured for deals online on Cyber Monday and delivered strong sales for retailers

By WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS and ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — Shoppers scoured for deals online on Cyber Monday, delivering strong sales for retailers and capping a five-day spending spree that kicked off on Thanksgiving.

Adobe Analytics reported that as of 6:30 p.m. EST on Monday, U.S. consumers had already spent \$9.1 billion online for Cyber Monday, up 4.5% from the same day a year ago.

Adobe expects that when the final tally is in, consumers will spend between \$13.9 billion and \$14.2 billion for the day, making Cyber Monday the biggest online shopping day of the year— and setting records for that day.

Online spending is expected to peak between 8 p.m. and 10 p.m. local time, with \$16 million to pass through online shopping carts every minute nationwide, Adobe said

Electronics and apparel are leading the charge for Cyber Monday, Adobe reported.

The sales results are in line with Adobe Analytics prediction of \$14.2 billion online Monday, or 6.3% more than in 2024.

U.S. consumers already spent \$11.8 billion online during Black Friday, \$6.4 billion on Thanksgiving Day and another \$11.8 billion over the weekend — exceeding Adobe's forecasts.

Adobe said Monday that it expects the five-day weekend to drive 17.2% of overall online sales this season, at \$43.7 billion, up 6.3% compared with the year-ago period.

Purchases made across Cyber Week — the five major shopping days between Thanksgiving and Cyber Monday — provides a strong indication of how much shoppers are willing to spend for the holidays.

"Cyber Week is off to a strong start," said Vivek Pandya, lead analyst at Adobe Digital Insights. "Discounts are set to remain elevated through Cyber Monday, which we expect will remain the biggest online shopping day of the season and year."

Software company Salesforce — which tracks digital spending from a range of retailers, including grocers — reported that Cyber Monday was off to a "strong start," with global online sales as of noon EST reaching \$17.3 billion, up 5.3% from last year. It said that the number of online orders was unchanged from a year ago.

Salesforce said U.S. online sales hit \$3.4 billion, or up 2.6%, on Cyber Monday during the same time frame. Online orders declined by 1% from a year ago.

With several hours of Cyber Monday shopping still ahead, Salesforce said it's expecting global online sales to grow 6% compared with the year-ago period to reach \$52.7 billion and for U.S. online sales to increase 4% compared with a year ago to \$13.3 billion.

The numbers are coming in slightly below Salesforce's original prediction for online sales to total \$13.4 billion in the U.S. and for global sales to reach \$53.7 billion on Cyber Monday.

While the amount of money going into online shopping carts is expected to reach new heights Monday, rising retail prices also may contribute to any record sales figures that materialize. Consumers may be buying fewer total items. Experts say tighter budgets are causing many to shop with more precision than in years past — such as focusing on a few "big ticket" purchases, for example, and spreading out what they buy over days of promotions in hopes of getting the most bang for their buck.

Businesses and households have watched anxiously for financial impacts from U.S. President Donald Trump's tariffs on foreign imports. Workers in both the public and private sectors are also struggling with anxieties over job security amid both corporate layoffs and the aftereffects of the 43-day government shutdown.

For the November-December holiday season overall, the National Retail Federation estimates that U.S.

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shoppers will spend more than \$1 trillion for the first time this year. But the rate of growth is slowing — with an anticipated increase of 3.7% to 4.2% year over year, compared with 4.3% during last year's holiday season.

At the same time, credit card debt and delinquencies on other short-term loans have been rising. More and more shoppers are turning to "buy now, pay later" plans, which allow them to delay payments on holiday decor, gifts and other items.

Overall, mobile devices have become the dominant shopping platform consumers are turning to for the holidays. Adobe expects smartphones, wearable tech and other handheld electronics to account for 58% of online spending this season.

Five years ago, a majority of online purchases were made on desktops.

Shopping services powered by artificial intelligence are also expected to play a role in what consumers choose to buy. For Black Friday, Salesforce estimated that AI assistants and digital agents contributed to \$14.2 billion of the total \$79 billion it said was spent online worldwide.

To many, Cyber Monday is billed as the "last call" to take advantage of the deepest discounts in the days following Thanksgiving. But its reach has grown over the years.

Cyber Monday is two decades old now, dating back to when the National Retail Federation first coined the term in 2005. Today, sales continue to bubble up throughout the week — riding on the hype that the industry has built to fuel consumer spending.

## Heavy snow predicted for Northeast as Midwest still struggles with Thanksgiving weather snarls

By PATRICK WHITTLE and ADAM SCHRECK Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — Black ice, snow showers and fog pestered post-holiday travelers in the Midwest on Monday while the Northeast geared up for its first major snowstorm of the season.

More than 8 inches (20.32 centimeters) of snow fell at Chicago O'Hare International Airport this weekend, setting a record for the highest single calendar day snowfall in November at the airport, according to the National Weather Service. The previous record was set in 1951.

About 300 flights into and out of O'Hare had been canceled by early Sunday evening, while about 1,600 had been delayed, according to the tracking site FlightAware. Dozens remained canceled or delayed there into Monday, and commuting conditions on roads were expected to remain dangerous in some areas well into Monday night.

In the Northeast, some parts of northern New England were expecting up to 10 inches (25.4 centimeters) of snow. A windy, potentially icy storm was headed to the region, and could soak some parts of the region's six states while piling snow in others, forecasters said.

The National Weather Service issued winter storm warnings and winter weather advisories in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, Maine, Connecticut and New York.

Pennsylvania prepares for snow

With plowable snow expected to coat large parts of Pennsylvania, crews began to treat lanes along the 565-mile (909-kilometer) Pennsylvania Turnpike system on Monday, said the agency's press secretary, Marissa Orbanek. Vehicle restrictions on many interstates in the eastern half of Pennsylvania, including on the turnpike system's Northeast Extension, from the Lehigh Valley to Clarks Summit, will be imposed at 5 a.m. Tuesday.

More than 600 equipment operators and safety workers are available to help clear the turnpike's 2,900 miles (4,667 kilometers) of lanes, Orbanek said. The turnpike's winter staffing schedule began in mid-November, and 23 maintenance sheds are staffed around the clock.

"We really prepare for snow all year long," Orbanek said.

Travel still slow in Midwest

In Chicago, Don Herrian was among the crowds of travelers at O'Hare on Sunday, hoping to make it

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back home after Thanksgiving as hundreds of flights were delayed and canceled following a winter storm in the Great Lakes region.

The 76-year-old retiree from Ardmore, Oklahoma, had visited his daughter and her family in Indianapolis. He said his first flight was three hours late, and his connecting flight to Oklahoma City from Chicago was already running another two hours behind.

"It is what it is," Herrian said. "It's congested, but that's expected due to the snow, the delays and the holidays."

Roads leading to O'Hare were packed Sunday with slow-moving vehicles even after the roads had been cleared of snow. Inside, delayed travelers crowded into gate seating areas, restaurants and sports bars to pass the time. Others grabbed spots on the floors of the terminals, snacking, knitting or scrolling their phones.

Planes were being de-iced at several airports across the country on Sunday, including at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport and Minneapolis–Saint Paul International Airport, according to the Federal Aviation Administration.

In Iowa, gusty winds on Sunday were blowing snow back onto roads, extending hazardous travel conditions, the National Weather Service said.

"We did have areas of Iowa and Illinois that saw over one foot of snow," said meteorologist Andrew Orrison.

Winter weather on tap in Northeast next

Orrison said snow in the Great Lakes region was tapering off, but the new storm was heading to the mid-Atlantic and Northeast, with up to a foot (30 centimeters) of snow by Tuesday.

"It's going to be the first snowfall of the season for many of these areas, and it's going to be rather significant," Orrison said. "The good news is that it does not look like the major cities at this point are going to be looking at any significant snowfall."

The National Weather Service issued a warning for coastal Maine from Tuesday morning until Wednesday morning, stating that residents "should delay all travel if possible" due to snow.

In New Hampshire, the Department of Transportation on Sunday invited residents to submit names for its second annual name-a-plow competition.

"Welcome to The Department of the Seven Snowplows, our winter twist on a classic tale. Hawthorne had gables. We have orange snowplows just waiting for the perfect name," the department said on social media.

Last winner's top name was Ctrl-Salt-Delete. This season's winners will be announced in January.

## Indiana Republicans could win 2 more US House seats under a new proposed map

By ISABELLA VOLMERT Associated Press

Republicans in the Indiana House of Representatives unveiled a new congressional map on Monday that aims to wipe out the state's two Democrat-held U.S. House districts, increasing pressure on GOP holdouts in the state Senate who have refused to heed President Donald Trump's redistricting demands.

Although they're confident they can pass redistricting in the state House, Republican lawmakers know that the fate of any proposal remains uncertain in the Senate, where their counterparts have held out for months despite threats from Trump to endorse primary opponents of defecting senators.

Republicans hold seven of Indiana's nine U.S. House seats. The president and national Republicans have urged lawmakers there to pursue a 9-0 GOP map ahead of the 2026 elections, when Democrats will need only a modest number of gains nationally to overcome Republicans' current House margin.

Indiana Senate leadership recently backed off its previous intentions not to meet at all, agreeing to convene next Monday. However, it's still unclear whether enough senators will support a new map.

House Republicans in Indiana published a draft of a map Monday morning still featuring nine congressional districts, but with new boundaries designed to oust the state's two Democratic U.S. House members.

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The city of Indianapolis, which reliably backs Democrats, would be split among four congressional districts. It's a major change to the current map where the city makes up the entirety of the 7th District.

"It's clear these orders are coming from Washington, and they clearly don't know the first thing about our community," longtime U.S. Rep. André Carson, a Democrat who represents Indianapolis, said in a statement.

Indiana's other current Democratic district is in the state's northwest corner near Chicago. The new map would instead group a large portion of Republican counties in northern Indiana with the cities of East Chicago and Gary to make a new 1st Congressional District.

The redistricting bill filed Monday will be heard in committee Tuesday morning, meaning it could see a final vote in the House on Friday, according to chamber rules.

Indiana lawmakers have been under mounting pressure from the White House to redistrict, like Republicans in Texas, Missouri, Ohio and North Carolina have done. To offset the GOP gains, Democrats in California and Virginia have moved to do the same.

But some Indiana Republicans have been far more resistant. Republicans in the state Senate rebelled against Republican Gov. Mike Braun in November and said they would not attend a special session he ordered on redistricting.

The chamber's top Republican, President Pro Tem Rodric Bray, at the time said the Senate did not have the votes. A spokesperson for Bray's office did not respond Friday when asked if that is still the case.

Meanwhile, Trump attacked Indiana senators on social media, particularly Bray. Lawmakers endured a spree of threats and swatting, in which hoax call attempted to bring law enforcement to the homes of senators who either said they do not support redistricting or have not taken a stance. At least one lawmaker in favor of redistricting and Braun were also threatened.

The Indiana Senate, where several lawmakers objected to leadership's refusal to hold a vote, then said members would reconvene Dec. 8.

"The issue of redrawing Indiana's congressional maps mid-cycle has received a lot of attention and is causing strife here in our state," Bray said in a statement Tuesday. He said the Senate will finally decide the matter this month.

Mid-cycle redistricting so far has resulted in nine more congressional seats that Republicans believe they can win and six more congressional seats that Democrats think they can win, putting the GOP up by three. However, redistricting is being litigated in several states, and there's no guarantee that the parties will win the seats they've redrawn.

## Michigan up to No. 3 in AP Top 25 men's basketball poll, Michigan State and Iowa State into top 10

By JOHN MARSHALL AP Basketball Writer

Michigan jumped to No. 3 in the Associated Press Top 25 men's basketball poll on Monday as rival Michigan State and Iowa State both climbed into the top 10.

No. 1 Purdue and No. 2 Arizona remained atop the rankings. The Boilermakers received 40 first-place votes from a 61-person media panel, Arizona got six and Michigan got 15 after its dominating run through the Players Era Championship.

Duke and UConn held their positions from last week to round out the top five. Louisville remained No. 6, followed by Michigan State, which moved up four spots and No. 8 Houston, which dropped five places after losing to then-No. 17 Tennessee at Players Era.

Michigan made a run to the Sweet 16 in coach Dusty May's first season a year ago and is looking like a title contender. The Wolverines opened the Las Vegas tournament with a 94-54 win over San Diego State, crushed then-No. 21 Auburn 102-72 and handed Gonzaga coach Mark Few his worst loss in 902 career games with a 101-61 win over the 12th-ranked Zags.

That's three wins by a combined 110 points and four straight wins by at least 20 points, the last two over ranked teams.

"Today was to put the world on notice that we're here to be the best team in the nation and we'll continue to do that," Michigan forward Yaxel Lendeborg said after the win over Gonzaga.

#### Rising

No. 17 Vanderbilt had the biggest jump of the week, moving up seven spots after winning the Battle 4 Atlantis title in the Bahamas.

No. 10 Iowa State climbed five places after winning three games at the Players Era championship.

No. 7 Michigan State moved up four places following lopsided wins over East Carolina and No. 16 North Carolina in the Fort Myers Tip-Off. No. 13 Tennessee also gained four spots after beating Houston and losing to Kansas, which moved back into the poll at No. 21.

#### Falling

No. 23 St. John's had the biggest drop among teams still in the poll, losing nine places after wrapping losses to Iowa State and Auburn around a win over Baylor at the Players Era.

Reigning national champion Florida fell five places to No. 15 after losing to TCU in the Rady Children's Invitational. No. 12 Alabama dropped four places after losing to Gonzaga in its opener of the Players Era.

#### In and out

No. 21 Kansas returned to the poll after dropping out last week with three wins at the Players Era.

No. 24 Southern California is ranked for the first time since the 2023-24 season following three wins in three days to take the Maui Invitational title.

UCLA fell out of the poll from No. 18 after losing to California 80-72 in the Empire Classic championship game.

North Carolina State dropped out of the poll from No. 23 and didn't receive a single vote following a 1-2 run through the Maui Invitational.

#### Conference watch

The Southeastern Conference had the most teams in the AP Top 25 for the second straight week with seven. The Big 12 matched the Big Ten with six ranked teams, the Atlantic Coast Conference had three, the Big East had two and the West Coast Conference one.

## Former Trump lawyer Alina Habba is disqualified as top New Jersey prosecutor, US appeals court rules

By MIKE CATALINI Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — President Donald Trump's former personal lawyer Alina Habba is disqualified from serving as New Jersey's top federal prosecutor despite his administration's maneuvers to keep her in the role, an appeals court said Monday.

A panel of judges from the 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals sitting in Philadelphia sided with a lower-court judge's ruling after hearing oral arguments at which Habba was present on Oct. 20.

"It is apparent that the current administration has been frustrated by some of the legal and political barriers to getting its appointees in place. Its efforts to elevate its preferred candidate for U.S. Attorney for the District of New Jersey, Alina Habba, to the role of Acting U.S. Attorney demonstrate the difficulties it has faced — yet the citizens of New Jersey and the loyal employees in the U.S. Attorney's Office deserve some clarity and stability," the court wrote in a 32-page opinion.

It concluded: "We will affirm the District Court's disqualification order."

The ruling comes amid the push by Trump's Republican administration to keep Habba as the acting U.S. attorney for New Jersey, a powerful post charged with enforcing federal criminal and civil law. It also comes after the judges questioned the government's moves to keep Habba in place after her interim appointment expired and without her getting Senate confirmation.

Habba said after that hearing in a statement posted to X that she was fighting on behalf of other candidates to be federal prosecutors who have been denied a chance for a Senate hearing.

The White House had no immediate comment on Habba and referred questions to the Justice Department. Messages were left Monday seeking comment from the U.S. attorney's office in New Jersey, Habba's

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personal staffer and the Justice Department.

The decision affirmed Habba is serving unlawfully, attorneys for the appellees said in an emailed statement.

"We will continue to challenge President Trump's unlawful appointments of purported U.S. Attorneys wherever appropriate," said attorneys Abbe Lowell, Gerry Krovatin and Norm Eisen in the statement.

Other appointments have been challenged, too

Habba is hardly the only Trump administration prosecutor whose appointment has been challenged by defense lawyers.

Last week, a federal judge dismissed criminal cases against former FBI Director James Comey and New York Attorney General Letitia James after concluding that the hastily installed prosecutor who filed the charges, Lindsey Halligan, was unlawfully appointed to the position of interim U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia. The Justice Department has said it intends to appeal the rulings.

The judges on the panel were two appointed by Republican President George W. Bush, D. Brooks Smith and D. Michael Fisher, as well as one named by Democratic President Barack Obama, Luis Felipe Restrepo.

It wasn't immediately clear how the ruling would affect prosecutions. Jacob Elberg, a Seton Hall Law School professor, said the decision would have "real implications."

"This is an office that has a lot of responsibility for protecting citizens from all types of criminal conduct as well as issues that are civil in nature, but real significant consequences," he said. "And this is a real challenge to that office's ability to do its work."

The judge said Habba was unlawfully serving

A lower-court judge, Matthew Brann, said in August that Habba's appointment was done with a "novel series of legal and personnel moves" and that she was unlawfully serving as U.S. attorney for New Jersey.

That order said Habba's actions since July could be invalidated, but the judge stayed the order pending appeal.

The government argued Habba is validly serving in the role under a federal statute allowing the first assistant attorney, a post she was appointed to by the Trump administration.

A similar dynamic is playing out in Nevada, where a federal judge disqualified the Trump administration's pick to be U.S. attorney there.

Who challenged Habba's tenure?

The Habba case comes after several people charged with federal crimes in New Jersey challenged the legality of her tenure. They sought to block the charges, arguing she didn't have the authority to prosecute their cases after her 120-day term as interim U.S. attorney expired.

Habba was Trump's attorney in criminal and civil proceedings before he was elected to a second term. She served as a White House adviser briefly before Trump named her as a federal prosecutor in March.

Shortly after her appointment, she said in an interview that she hoped to help "turn New Jersey red," a rare overt political expression from a prosecutor.

She then brought a trespassing charge, eventually dropped, against Democratic Newark, New Jersey, Mayor Ras Baraka stemming from his visit to a federal immigration detention center.

Habba later charged Democratic U.S. Rep. LaMonica McIver with assault stemming from the same incident, a rare federal criminal case against a sitting member of Congress other than for corruption. McIver denied the charges and pleaded not guilty. The case is pending.

Questions about whether Habba would continue in the job arose in July when her temporary appointment was ending and it became clear New Jersey's two Democratic U.S. senators, Cory Booker and Andy Kim, would not back her appointment.

Earlier this year as Habba's appointment was expiring, federal judges in New Jersey exercised their power under the law to replace her with a career prosecutor who had served as her second-in-command.

Attorney General Pam Bondi then fired the prosecutor installed by the judges and renamed Habba as acting U.S. attorney. The Justice Department said the judges acted prematurely and said Trump had the authority to appoint his preferred candidate to enforce federal laws in the state.

Brann's ruling said the president's appointments are still subject to the time limits and power-sharing rules laid out in federal law.

## Hong Kong fire probe reveals unsafe netting as public mourns and government stifles dissent

By CHAN HO-HIM and DAVID RISING Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — Hong Kong officials said Monday that their investigation into a deadly blaze that killed at least 151 has revealed some of the netting that covered scaffolding used in renovations was not up to fire-safety codes, as a wave of public sympathy and support was met by government moves to stifle criticism.

Wednesday's blaze, which took until Friday to fully extinguish, started on the lower-level netting covering bamboo scaffolding around one building in the high-rise Wang Fuk Court complex. It then swept inside as foam panels placed over windows caught fire and blew out the glass. Winds carried flames from building to building that all were covered in scaffolding and netting, until seven of eight were ablaze.

Initial tests of the netting showed it was up to code, but subsequently investigators collected 20 samples from all areas, including higher floors, and found seven failed safety standards, suggesting contractors skimmed to make greater profits, said Eric Chan, Hong Kong's Chief Secretary.

"They just wanted to make money at the expense of people's lives," he told reporters.

Donations for survivors of the fire had reached 900 million Hong Kong dollars (\$115 million) as of Monday, authorities said, as a steady stream of people placed flowers, cards and other tributes at a makeshift memorial near the burned out block of buildings.

"When something happens, we come out to help each other," said Loretta Loh, after paying her regards at the site. "I have a heavy heart."

Some 4,600 people lived in the Wang Fuk Court complex in the suburb of Tai Po.

Hong Kong police Disaster Victim Identification Unit staff had searched five of the burned buildings but only made partial progress through the remaining two, said Tsang Shuk-yin, head of the police casualty enquiry unit. Teams were assessing the safety of the other buildings, including the one that caught fire first and suffered the worst damage.

On Monday they recovered another eight bodies, including three that firefighters found earlier but could not retrieve. Dozens of people remain unaccounted for, but some are likely among the 39 bodies not yet identified, Tsang said.

"We will have to wait until we get through all seven blocks before we can make a final report," she said.

Private donations and 300 million Hong Kong dollars (\$38.5 million) in start-up capital from the government will be used to help victims rebuild their homes and provide long-term support, local officials said. The government has also given survivors cash subsidies to help with expenses, including funerals, and is working to find them housing.

By Monday, 683 residents had found places in local hotels and hostels, and another 1,144 moved into transitional housing units. Two emergency shelters remained open for others, authorities said.

Residents had complained for almost a year about the construction netting, Hong Kong's Labor Department said. It confirmed officials had carried out 16 inspections of the renovation project since July 2024 and had warned contractors multiple times in writing that they had to meet fire safety requirements. The latest inspection was just a week before the fire.

Hong Kong's anti-corruption authorities and police have arrested 14 people, including the directors and an engineering consultant of a construction company, according to Chris Tang, the secretary for security.

People increasingly have been questioning whether government officials should also be held responsible.

"People are angry and think that the HK (Hong Kong) government should be accountable," said Jean-Pierre Cabestan, a locally-based political scientist and senior research fellow at Paris's Asia Centre think tank.

But the leeway for dissent is limited in the former British colony, which came under Chinese control in 1997 and has moved to quiet public criticism on national security grounds.

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"There are rumors being spread by bad people giving fake news about the firefighters not employing the correct tactics to fight the fire, or victims being charged 8,000 Hong Kong dollars a night to stay in hotels - these are all false," Tang said.

"We will arrest these rumor mongers."

On Saturday, the Office for Safeguarding National Security blasted what it called "evil schemes" that had "the ulterior motives of using the disaster to create trouble and disrupt Hong Kong." It did not give specifics.

Also Saturday, a man who helped organize an online petition calling for government accountability was arrested on suspicion of sedition, local media including HK01 and Sing Tao Daily reported. Two others were arrested on Sunday, including a volunteer who offered help in Tai Po after the fire broke out, the same outlets reported.

Cabestan said Hong Kong officials were operating like authorities in mainland China, forestalling protests before they might develop.

Tang would not give specific details of the three arrests, but said that police "must take action" against those who try to "endanger national security," saying broadly that some people have been "taking advantage of the saddening moment ... and attempting to incite hatred against the government."

Dissent in the city has been muzzled since hundreds of thousands took to the streets in 2019 against government plans to allow extradition to mainland China. Hong Kong now virtually bans mass protests and bars opposition political figures from running in legislature elections.

## Land and security are the main sticking points as Russia and Ukraine mull Trump's peace proposal

By DASHA LITVINOVA and ISOBEL KOSHIW Associated Press

Diplomats face an uphill battle to reconcile Russian and Ukrainian "red lines" as a renewed U.S.-led push to end the war gathers steam, with Ukrainian officials attending talks in the U.S. over the weekend and Washington officials expected in Moscow early this week.

U.S. President Donald Trump's peace plan became public last month, sparking alarm that it was too favorable to Moscow. It was revised following talks in Geneva between the U.S. and Ukraine a week ago.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said the revised plan could be "workable." Russian President Vladimir Putin called it a possible "basis" for a future peace agreement. Trump said Sunday "there's a good chance we can make a deal."

Still, officials on both sides indicated a long road ahead as key sticking points — over whether Kyiv should cede land to Moscow and how to ensure Ukraine's future security — appear unresolved.

Here is where things stand and what to expect this week:

US holds talks with Kyiv then Moscow

Trump representatives met the Ukrainian officials over the weekend and plan to meet with the Russians in coming days.

Ukraine's national security council head Rustem Umerov, the head of Ukraine's armed forces Andrii Hnatov, presidential adviser Oleksandr Bevez and others met with U.S. officials for about four hours on Sunday. U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the session was productive but more work remains. Umerov praised the U.S. for its support but offered no details.

Zelenskyy's former chief of staff and former lead negotiator for Ukraine, Andrii Yermak, resigned Friday amid a corruption scandal and is no longer part of the negotiating team. It was only a week ago that Rubio met with Yermak in Geneva, resulting in a revised peace plan.

Trump said last week that he would send his envoy Steve Witkoff to Russia. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov confirmed Monday that Putin will meet Witkoff on Tuesday afternoon.

Trump suggested he could eventually meet with Putin and Zelenskyy, but not until there has been more progress.

Witkoff's role in the peace efforts came under scrutiny last week following a report that he coached Yuri Ushakov, Putin's foreign affairs adviser, on how Russia's leader should pitch Trump on the Ukraine peace

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plan. Both Moscow and Washington downplayed the significance of the revelations.

Where the two sides stand

Eager to please Trump, Kyiv and Moscow have ostensibly welcomed the peace plan and the push to end the war. But Russia has continued attacking Ukraine and reiterated its maximalist demands, indicating a deal is still a ways off.

Putin implied last week that he will fight as long as it takes to achieve his goals, saying that he will stop only when Ukrainian troops withdraw from all four Ukrainian regions that Russia illegally annexed in 2022 and still doesn't fully control. "If they don't withdraw, we'll achieve this by force. That's all," he said.

The plan, Putin said, "could form the basis for future agreements," but it is in no way final and requires "a serious discussion."

Zelenskyy has refrained from talking about individual points, opting instead to thank Trump profusely for his efforts and emphasizing the need for Europe – whose interests are more closely aligned with Ukraine's – to be involved. He also has stressed the importance of robust security guarantees for Ukraine.

The first version of the plan granted some core Russian demands that Ukraine considers nonstarters, such as ceding land to Moscow that it doesn't yet occupy and renouncing its bid to become a member of NATO.

Zelenskyy has said repeatedly that giving up territory is not an option. One of the Ukrainian negotiators, Bezv, told The Associated Press on Tuesday that Ukraine's president wanted to discuss the territory issue with Trump directly. Yermak then told The Atlantic in an interview on Thursday that Zelenskyy would not sign over the land.

Zelenskyy also maintains that NATO membership is the cheapest way to guarantee Ukraine's security, and NATO's 32 member countries said last year that Ukraine is on an "irreversible" path to membership. Since he took office, Trump has made it clear that NATO membership is off the table.

Moscow, in turn, has bristled at any suggestion of a Western peacekeeping force on the ground in Ukraine, and stressed that keeping Ukraine out of NATO and NATO out of Ukraine was one of the core goals of the war.

Putin seems to have time on his side

Zelenskyy, meanwhile, has been under pressure at home.

Yermak's resignation was a major blow for Zelenskyy, although neither the president nor Yermak have been accused of wrongdoing by investigators.

"Russia really wants Ukraine to make mistakes. There won't be mistakes on our side," Zelenskyy said. "Our work continues, our struggle continues. We don't have a right not to push it to the end."

An activist with Ukraine's nongovernmental Anti-Corruption Center, Valeriia Radchenko, said letting go of Yermak was the right decision and would open a "window of opportunity for reform."

Putin, meanwhile, seeks to project confidence, boasting of Russia's advances on the battlefield.

The Russian leader "feels more confident than ever about the battlefield situation and is convinced that he can wait until Kyiv finally accepts that it cannot win and must negotiate on Russia's well-known terms," Tatiana Stanovaya of the Carnegie Russia and Eurasia Center wrote on X. "If the Americans can help move things in that direction — fine. If not, he knows how to proceed anyway. That is the current Kremlin logic."

Europe's conundrum

NATO and the EU are holding several meetings this week focused on Ukraine.

Zelenskyy is holding talks with French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris on Monday. In Brussels, NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte is hosting Ukrainian Defense Minister Denys Shmyhal and EU defense and foreign ministers are gathering to discuss European military support for Ukraine and Europe's defense readiness.

On Wednesday, NATO foreign ministers will gather again in Brussels.

The main issue for the EU right now is what to do with the frozen Russian assets in Belgium that the Trump peace plan in its initial version sought to use for post-war investment in Ukraine.

Those funds are central to European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's strategy to ensure continued help for Ukraine while also maintaining pressure on Russia. But Belgium's prime minister is

holding out, worried about the legal implications of tapping the frozen assets for Ukraine, the impact that could have on the euro — and of Russian retaliation.

The diplomacy set in motion by Trump's peace plan "painfully exposed" Europe's weakness, Nigel Gould-Davies of the International Institute for Strategic Studies wrote in a recent commentary.

"Despite being the main source of Ukraine's economic and military support, it is marginal to the diplomacy of the war and has done little more than offer amendments to America's draft peace plan," Gould-Davies wrote.

## **Texas jumps to No. 2 behind UConn in women's AP Top 25 after beating South Carolina and UCLA**

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

Texas moved up to No. 2 behind UConn in The Associated Press Top 25 women's basketball poll on Monday after beating two top teams in a Thanksgiving tournament.

The Longhorns topped then-No. 2 South Carolina 66-64 a day after beating then-No. 3 UCLA 76-65 in Las Vegas. It was the first time in the past 25 years that a team has beaten two top three teams in such a short time frame.

Texas received 10 first-place votes from a 32-member national media panel. No. 1 UConn garnered the other 22. The Huskies routed Xavier 104-39 to open Big East play. South Carolina fell to third and UCLA was fourth.

LSU remained fifth. The Tigers, who haven't played a ranked opponent yet, have scored over 100 points in each of their first eight games to set an NCAA record. They broke the mark of six in a row set by the 1981-82 Louisiana Tech team that LSU coach Kim Mulkey played on.

Michigan, Maryland, TCU, Oklahoma and Iowa State rounded out the top 10. The Cyclones got a school-record 47-point effort from star post player Audi Crooks to beat Indiana on Sunday.

In and out

Ohio State debuted in this year's poll at No. 23 after edging West Virginia last week 83-81. The Buckeyes followed that up with a 98-point win over Niagara, the most points scored in school history and the biggest margin of victory ever for the Buckeyes. N.C. State fell out of the poll.

Conference supremacy

The Big Ten matched the Southeastern Conference this week with eight teams ranked after Ohio State entered the Top 25. The Big 12 is next with five and the Atlantic Coast Conference has three. The Big East has one.

Games of the week

It's ACC-SEC challenge week with a host of quality matchups between the two power conferences. On Thursday, No. 22 Louisville hosts No. 3 South Carolina; No. 11 North Carolina visits No. 2 Texas; and No. 13 Ole Miss plays No. 18 Notre Dame.

## **The Latest: Pope Leo celebrates Lebanon's interfaith coexistence as he visits holy sites**

By The Associated Press undefined

Pope Leo XIV arrived in Beirut on Sunday after a visit to Turkey that began last week. He challenged Lebanon's political leaders to be true peacemakers and put their differences aside as he sought to give the country's long-suffering people a message of hope and bolster a crucial Christian community in the Middle East.

Earlier in the day, Leo visited holy sites in Lebanon that draw Christian and Muslims, seeking to recognize the importance of the country's religious pluralism and to send a message to Christians not to abandon the region.

Leo arrived in Beirut on Sunday after a visit to Turkey that began on Nov. 27.

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A Muslim-majority country where about a third of the population is Christian, Lebanon always has been a priority for the Vatican as a bulwark for Christians throughout the region.

Despite the many crises that have battered the small nation, Christians in Lebanon continue to enjoy religious freedom and significant political influence. Since gaining independence from France in 1943, a power-sharing agreement has been in place in which Lebanon's president is a Maronite, the parliament speaker is a Shiite Muslim and the prime minister is a Sunni Muslim.

This makes Lebanon the only Arab country with a Christian head of state.

Leo visits the Tomb of St. Charbel Makhlouf and the Shrine of Our Lady of Lebanon on Monday, both north of the capital. The sites draw large numbers of Christian and Muslim visitors and pilgrims.

Here is the latest:

Warm welcome for the pope at seat of Maronite Catholic church

Thousands of jubilant young Lebanese people — dancing, bouncing, singing and cheering — have welcomed Pope Leo XIV at his final event of the day.

For hours these young people waited for Leo at the picturesque seat of the Maronite Catholic church in Bkerki. They went wild when he arrived, cheering as he looped around the hilltop piazza of the patriarchate in an open golf cart.

"This is an unforgettable moment," said Nawal Ghossein, a Maronite Catholic who welcomed the pope with a group from her church. "We are so proud because we are Christians. So proud!"

However, the event recalled some of Lebanon's tragedies: Young people presented Leo with pieces of charred wood from a house destroyed in the 2020 Beirut blast, and a stone from a church that was destroyed in the recent war between Hezbollah and Israel.

Shiite Muslim cleric appeals to pope to help end Israel's attacks

A top Lebanese Shiite Muslim cleric called on Pope Leo XIV to work on helping Lebanon by working to end Israel's attacks on the crisis-torn nation.

The comments by Ali al-Khatib, deputy head of the Supreme Islamic Shiite Council, came amid rising concerns in Lebanon of wider Israeli attacks a year after a U.S.-brokered ceasefire nominally ended the latest war between Israel and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah.

"We put Lebanon in your hands so that maybe the world will help us," al-Khatib said.

He added that the top of Lebanon's demands and hopes is to stop "the Israeli aggression and the repercussions its leaves on our people."

Since last year's ceasefire, Israel has carried out almost daily airstrikes that it says aim to stop Hezbollah from rebuilding and target Hezbollah members. Around 300 people have been killed in the past year, including 127 who the United Nations classified as civilians.

Sunni Muslim grand mufti wishes pope luck

The Sunni Muslim grand mufti in Lebanon welcomed Pope Leo XIV in the country, where people of different religions coexist.

Abdul-Latif Derian in a speech during an interfaith dialogue in Beirut Monday wished the pope the best of luck in "leading the Christian ship for the good of humanity."

Derian said that such efforts toward closer relations between different religions were mentioned in the 2019 Document of Human Fraternity that was signed by the late Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmad al-Tayeb.

"Lebanon is the land of this message," Derian said.

Greek Orthodox patriarch welcomes pope's visit to Lebanon

At an interfaith meeting in downtown Beirut, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch John X Yazigi welcomed Pope XIV in Lebanon Monday, describing the small nation as a "unique country that breaths through both its lungs, the Muslim and Christian."

Yazigi, who is from Syria, welcomed the pope "near Syria and near Palestine in this Middle East that you chose to be your first trip abroad, as if you are telling Christians of the east that they are in your mind."

Druze hope for unity in a divided time

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Ahead of an interreligious gathering with the pope in downtown Beirut, Sheikh Yahya Abdulkhalek, 40, of the Druze minority group said Leo's visit is an opportunity to bring Lebanon's sects together at a time where "we have been distant in a way."

The Druze are an 10th-century Islamic offshoot of Ismailism, a branch of Shiite Islam, predominantly in Lebanon, Syria, and Israel.

"As a unitarian Muslim (Druze), we always called to have this gathering and for unity among the sects," said Abdulkhalek.

Another attendee, Mia Farah, showed the gift bag she had received, containing copies of the Quran and the Bible.

When asked her religion, she said, "I am Lebanese."

Interfaith gathering waits for Leo in Martyrs' Square

Spiritual leaders and senior clerics of Lebanon's many Islamic and Christian sects gathered on a stage in Beirut's central Martyrs' Square waiting for Pope Leo XIV's arrival to hold an interfaith dialogue to promote peace and coexistence.

Among them were Sunni Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdel-Latif Derian and Druze spiritual leader Sheikh Sami Abi al-Muna. Vice President of the Supreme Islamic Shia Council Sheikh Ali al-Khatib represented the Shiite sect.

An interfaith choir and band of Lebanese children performed songs calling for peace and unity, with the word "peace" in Arabic and Latin written on the side of the stage.

Meeting with young people a highlight of Leo's visit

Pope Leo XIV is having lunch with Catholic patriarchs at the Vatican's apostolic residence before his key afternoon events in Lebanon. In the late afternoon Leo will head to Martyrs' Square in Beirut for one of the highlights of his visit: a gathering of Christian patriarchs and Muslim leaders to emphasize a message of interfaith peace and coexistence. His final event of the day was a meeting with the country's young people.

Preaching hope and love in a time of conflict

Pope Leo XIV urged Lebanon's priests and nuns to offer hope and love to their flocks in the face of injustices, oppression and conflict.

Leo offered a word of encouragement during a raucous encounter Monday with Lebanon's Catholic clergy and sisters at the Our Lady of Lebanon sanctuary in Harissa, north of Beirut.

The American pope heard testimonies from Lebanese priests about the difficulties and joys of being Christian in a region torn by conflict, "when surrounded by the sound of weapons and when the very necessities of daily life become a challenge."

He was interrupted by applause as he urged them to find hope and share love.

"Only in this way can we free ourselves of injustice and oppression, even when, as we have heard, we are betrayed by people and organizations that ruthlessly exploit the desperation of those who have no alternative," Leo said, speaking in French.

Leo receives warm welcome in Harissa

Pope Leo XIV received a raucous, cheering welcome from priests and nuns at the seat of the Maronite church in Lebanon.

Women in the crowd ululated and others shouted, "Viva il Papa," meaning "Long live the pope," as Leo arrived at the Our Lady of Lebanon Basilica in Harissa, a town north of Beirut.

They reached out to touch him and kissed his hand while he made his way to the front of the sanctuary.

Leo prays for peace at saint's tomb

Pope Leo XIV has prayed for peace at the tomb of a Lebanese saint revered by Christians and Muslims on the first full day of his visit to Lebanon.

Leo travelled Monday to the hilltop monastery of St. Maroun in Annaya to pray at the tomb of St. Charbel Makhoul.

Speaking in French, the American pope prayed for communion and unity in the church and peace for Lebanon and the region.

"Sisters and brothers, today we entrust to St. Charbel's intercession the needs of the church, Lebanon and the world," he said. "For the world, we ask for peace. We especially implore it for Lebanon and for