

Groton Daily Independent

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Saturday, Dec. 13

Boys and Girls Wrestling at Rapid City Invitational, 8 a.m.

Northwestern Middle School Girls Basketball

Sunday, Dec. 14

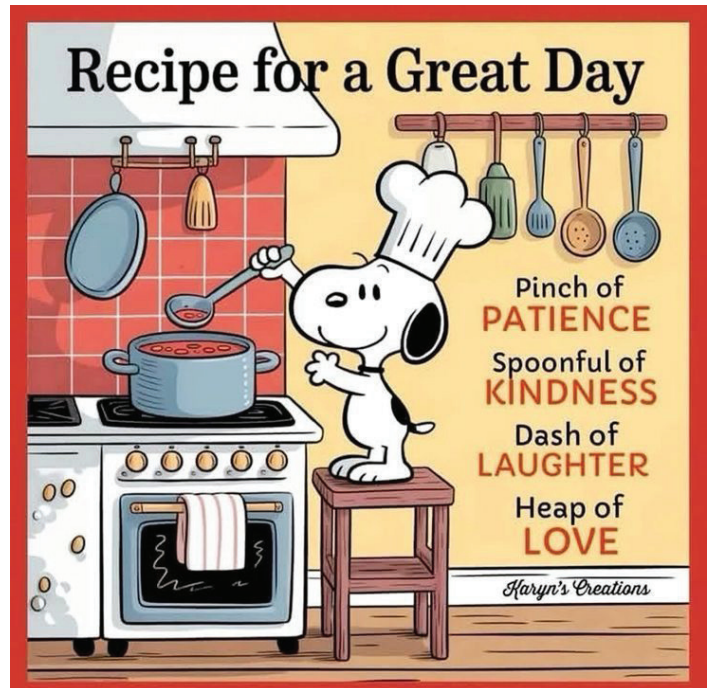
Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with Sunday School Program, 10:30 a.m.; Choir, 6 p.m.

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

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

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

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



Groton CM&A: Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.; worship, 10:30 a.m.; Christmas program at 5 p.m. with supper to follow.

7th Grade Soccer, 1 p.m.

4th Grade BB Practice, 2 p.m.

5th Grade Girls Basketball, 4 p.m.

Dance Team Practice, 5 p.m.

6th Grade Boys Basketball, 6 p.m.

7th Grade Boys BB, 6 p.m.

Monday, Dec. 15

Senior Menu: Cowboy/Calico casserole, fruit, dinner roll.

School Breakfast: Egg bake.

School Lunch: Chef salad.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Christian Literature Circle, 7:30 p.m.

Groton Senior Citizens meet at Community Center with potluck at noon.

Webster JH wrestling, 4:30 p.m.

1st Grade Boys Basketball Practice, 4:30 p.m.

Madison JV/MS Boys and Girls Wrestling Jambo-ree, 5 p.m.

5th Grade BBB, 6 p.m.

Groton Daily Independent
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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.

Trump Ballroom Challenged

The National Trust for Historic Preservation sued President Donald Trump yesterday, seeking to halt his White House ballroom project until it receives congressional approval and undergoes independent reviews.

The nonprofit alleges Trump exceeded his constitutional authority and skipped federally mandated reviews when he ordered the demolition of the East Wing in October to make space for a ballroom (see photos). At roughly 90,000 square feet, the planned ballroom would be nearly double the size of the White House's primary residence and accommodate nearly 1,000 people. Trump has criticized the East Wing's roughly 200-person seating capacity as too small, forcing some events to be hosted in outdoor tents. Although Trump has stated the estimated \$300M project will be privately funded, that does not necessarily exempt it from federal laws and procedures.

The last major White House renovation was completed in 1952 under President Harry Truman. Costing roughly \$60M in today's dollars, it involved a near-total gutting and rebuilding of the White House's interior.

Historic floods batter Washington state.

Washington is under a state of emergency, with evacuation orders in place for tens of thousands of residents after atmospheric rivers dumped over 15 inches of rain in recent days. Several rivers have surged to record heights, and many bridges and roads have been washed out without a timeline for reopening. Some people have been rescued by helicopter. Another storm system is expected to bring more rain Sunday.

House Democrats release new photos from Epstein estate.

Lawmakers released 19 photos from a trove of more than 95,000 images recently obtained from the estate of late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. The images feature President Donald Trump, former President Bill Clinton, and Microsoft cofounder Bill Gates, among other high-profile figures. Meanwhile, the Justice Department faces a Dec. 19 deadline to unseal Epstein-related files under a law passed in November.

Fired University of Michigan head football coach charged.

Sherrone Moore, 39, was charged yesterday with home invasion, stalking, and breaking and entering days after he was fired as the University of Michigan's head football coach over an inappropriate relationship with a fellow staffer. The charges stem from an alleged incident at that staffer's apartment hours after his dismissal. Moore was granted a \$25K bond and is set to appear in court again on Jan. 22.

Thai parliament dissolved over controversial constitutional changes.

Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul dissolved the House of Representatives following approval from the king, triggering a 45- to 60-day countdown to new elections. The move follows a dispute over expanding elected lawmakers' powers. Anutin will lead a caretaker government until the elections and said the dissolution won't affect Thailand's military operations in its escalating border dispute with Cambodia.

Reddit challenges Australia's under-16 social media ban.

Online forum Reddit filed a lawsuit alleging the world-first law—implemented Wednesday—prevents teens from engaging in age-appropriate community experiences and imposes an intrusive, insecure age-verification process on all users. The Australian government declined to comment on the suit as of this writing.

Iran reportedly arrests Nobel Peace Prize laureate Narges Mohammadi.

Iranian forces arrested the human rights activist and others at a memorial service for a human rights lawyer, according to her supporters. Rights groups have called for a probe into the lawyer's death, with some suggesting it may have been a state murder. Mohammadi, 53, was in prison when she received the 2023 Nobel Prize for fighting women's oppression and had been on temporary leave since last December.

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Crypto mogul Do Kwon sentenced to 15 years in prison.

Do Kwon, the cofounder of Singapore-based Terraform Labs, pleaded guilty in US federal court to fraud charges after an international search. The charges stem from a \$40B crash that occurred in 2022 after two digital currencies he designed—TerraUSD and Luna—plunged in value. Prosecutors had recommended a 12-year sentence, and Kwon faced a maximum 25-year sentence.

Humankind(ness)

Today, we're sharing a story from reader Regina M. in New Jersey.

"My sister and I went to see the Rockefeller Center tree lighting. With all the crowds and blockades, it was difficult to gain entry to the area. We briefly started speaking with the young couple next to us, brainstorming ways we could get in the area. They quickly made a reservation to a bar/restaurant within the parameters of the tree and added us—two strangers—to the reservation. We all got in! It was a magical night. We shared a drink with them later to thank them."

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Please contact City Hall as soon as possible if you no longer have a dog(s) that were previously licensed!

Questions call (605) 397-8422

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**ELDA STANGE'S
102nd BIRTHDAY**
is on **Sunday, Dec. 14, 2025.**
Please join us in helping her celebrate her
special day by sending her a card at:
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Band Experience:
The Holiday Show**

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www.AberdeenCommunityConcerts.org



Enrich Groton SoDak – 2025 Year in Review

Enrich Groton SoDak Inc. had a meaningful and busy year in 2025, made possible by the incredible support of our volunteers, donors, and community partners. Here are a few highlights:

Supporting Seniors: Volunteers partnered with Feeding SD to help seniors sign up for Senior Nutrition Boxes, then received the boxes and distributed them throughout the community.

Student Learning: GHS FACS classes visited Common Cents to practice real-world resource management.

Community Giving: We participated in local events, donated to the FEZtival of Trees, and decorated a Giving Tree at City Hall/Wage Memorial Library to collect gifts for families.

Holiday Help: Volunteers organized food deliveries for Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas.

Empowering Youth & New Residents: We awarded a scholarship, shared Kindness Kash and Back-to-School Cash, and welcomed new residents with Welcome Cash to use at Common Cents.

Advocacy & Fundraising: We recognized Hunger Action Day/Month and sold reusable bags to support our mission.

Essential Supplies: School supply and winter gear drives helped ensure families had what they needed.

Looking ahead to 2026, we're excited to continue expanding our efforts, building partnerships, and enriching the Groton SD Community. With your ongoing support, we'll keep making a positive difference!

Operation: Prairie Thunder Goes on the Road

Seventh and Eighth Operations in Belle Fourche, Huron, and Yankton

Pierre, S.D.- The eighth set of saturation patrols in Operation: Prairie Thunder concluded Friday, Dec. 5. The patrols were conducted in Belle Fourche, Huron, and Yankton. This was the second operation in those communities, following patrols conducted there November 12th through the 14th.

"Operation: Prairie Thunder continues to do great work to keep South Dakota strong, safe, and free. Our saturation patrols are getting drugs off the streets and putting criminals behind bars – first in Sioux Falls, and now we're protecting even more communities," said Governor Larry Rhoden.

This multi-community approach reflects the operation's broader goal to strengthen safety across the entire state. By conducting patrols in different regions and tailoring efforts to each community's needs, Operation: Prairie Thunder works to detect and deter crime and address unsafe behavior on the roads wherever it occurs.

The focused saturation patrols bring together the Highway Patrol and city, county, and federal law enforcement partners, ensuring that agencies from across South Dakota can share resources and support one another's community-based public safety efforts.

Results for operations seven and eight, and a cumulative total from all eight operations, are attached.

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

Groton Area rallies late to edge Hamlin, 55–50



Greg Kjellsen returns to coach the boys team. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

GROTON — In a game that demanded patience, defensive grit and late execution, the Groton Area boys basketball team answered the challenge Friday night, rallying in the fourth quarter to defeat Hamlin 55–50 in Northeast Conference action.

“Everybody said Hamlin lost all these guys, but we knew they had kids coming back,” said Groton head coach Greg Kjellsen. “It’s next man up. They had guys step up, and we had to earn it.”

Hamlin jumped out to a 3–2 lead before the Tigers responded, and the opening quarter turned into a back-and-forth battle. After four lead changes, Hamlin took control late in the period, stretching the margin to 16–10 and carrying a 19–13 lead into the second quarter. The Chargers pushed the ad-



Gage Sippel gets the dunk late in the first half. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

vantage to eight points early in the second before Groton began to claw back.

The Tigers steadily closed the gap, tying the game at 29 before heading into halftime trailing just 32–29.

Kjellsen said effort was never the concern, even as the offense struggled to find rhythm.

“I told the kids before the game, win or lose, if you walk out knowing you gave 100 percent, that’s all we ask,” he said. “I didn’t want to lose, but I was proud of the effort. Offensively, though, we didn’t value the basketball.”

The third quarter remained tight, with neither team able to gain separation. Groton briefly reclaimed the lead at 36–35 before Hamlin answered to regain the advantage. The Chargers held a slim 44–42 lead entering the final period.

Hamlin scored first in the fourth to make it 46–42, but that would be its last lead of the night. Groton responded with a decisive nine-point run, fueled by defensive pressure and timely stops, to take control at 53–46 and ultimately secure the five-point win.



Ryder Johnson calls a time-out as Easton Weber and Jaden Olsen grapple for the ball. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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"We tried some different things press-wise, and I think we wore them down a little bit," Kjellsen said. "That's hard to do against a good, well-coached team."

Kjellsen credited the Tigers' defensive foundation to the work done before his return to the program.

"Our defense is way ahead of our offense, and that's a tribute to Coach Dolan," he said. "He had those kids playing such good defense. We're trying to mimic that and keep building on it. Offense takes time — we're starting at square one there — but defensively, those kids understand how to compete."

Groton shot efficiently inside, converting 13-of-22 two-point attempts, while knocking down seven three-pointers. Gage Sippel led the Tigers with 18 points, going 8-of-9 on two-point shots.

"I told Ryder and Keegan back when they were in eighth grade, you guys are always going to get your points," Kjellsen said. "But I said number 30 — Gage — is going to be the key to this team down the road. I've told him all summer and all fall he has to be involved, and he came up big tonight. We need that from him every game."

Ryder Johnson added 13 points, while Karson Zak finished with 11 points, six rebounds, three assists and two steals as Groton leaned on its experienced core in crunch time.

"When it came down to crunch time, we relied on the guys who've been there and done it," Kjellsen said. "They gutted it out defensively."

Hamlin was led by Boden Stevenson with 17 points. Jackson Wadsworth scored 15 points, all four of his three-pointers coming in the first half before Groton's defense limited his looks late. Owen Taschner added nine points, Jack Stormo scored seven and Aiden Abraham finished with two.

Friday's win was also a meaningful milestone for Kjellsen, who earned his first victory over Hamlin head coach Todd Neuendorf.

"He does such a great job with those kids," Kjellsen said. "It's nice to get one. These games are fun. Winning by 30 is nice, but it's not fun. Coming from behind, getting stops against a good team — that's fun."

Kjellsen's return to the Groton bench adds another chapter to a long history in the community. He served as Groton's head boys basketball coach for 29 years and later coached seventh and eighth grade for several more seasons, spanning more than three decades on the sideline.

"They work hard, they push each other, and they're fun to coach," Kjellsen said. "We'll keep getting better."

Groton also swept the undercard, defeating Hamlin 40-20 in the junior varsity game and winning the C-game 44-24.

Game Statistics

Groton Area:

Gage Sippel 18 points, 2 rebounds; Ryder Johnson 13 points, 5 rebounds, 2 assists, 1 block; Karson Zak 11 points, 6 rebounds, 3 assists, 2 steals; Ethan Weber 6 points, 2 rebounds, 1 assist, 1 steal; Keegen Tracy 5 points, 2 rebounds, 3 assists, 2 steals; Becker Bosma 2 points, 7 rebounds, 4 assists, 3 steals; Jayden Schwan 1 assist.



Ryder Johnson tries to put up this shot over Hamlin's Boden Stevenson. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



Keegen Tracy breaks through the defense attempt this shot.

(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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Team: 13-of-22 two-point FG (59%), 7-of-19 three-point FG (37%), 8-of-17 FT (47%); 24 rebounds, 14 assists, 8 steals, 1 block, 14 turnovers, 17 team fouls.

Hamlin:

Boden Stevenson 17 points; Jackson Wadsworth 15 points; Owen Taschner 9 points; Jack Stormo 7 points; Aiden Abraham 2 points.

Team: 18-of-48 FG (38%), 4-of-10 FT (40%); 13 turnovers, 14 team fouls.

Groton returns to action Tuesday with a Northeast Conference doubleheader at Sisseton.

The games were broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM. The varsity game was sponsored by Agtegra, Avantara, Bary Keith at Harr Motors, Bierman Farm Service, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Full Circle Ag, Groton Ag Partners, Groton Chamber, Groton Ford, Groton Legion, Heartland Energy, John Sieh Agency, Jungle Lanes and Lounge and The MeatHouse. Shane Clark did the commentary of the varsity game and Paul Kosel for the junior varsity game. Jeslyn Kosel ran the camera. The junior varsity game was sponsored by Jerry and Becky Johnson.



Gage Sippel and Boden Stevenson battle for the opening tip with both players getting their hand on the ball, but Sippel controlled the tip. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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Hamlin pulls away from Groton Area in season opener

GROTON — The Groton Area varsity girls basketball team opened its season Friday night at home with a 46-21 loss to Hamlin in a Northeast Conference contest, as the Chargers used defensive pressure and a strong second half to pull away.

Hamlin jumped out to a 7-0 lead early before Groton Area settled in, trailing 10-7 at the end of the first quarter. The Chargers continued to control the pace in the second quarter and carried a 22-15 lead into halftime.

Despite generating some quality looks offensively, Groton struggled to find consistency. Head coach Matt Locke said the performance did not reflect the team he has seen leading into the season.

"That wasn't us. That wasn't what we have been anyway," Locke said. "I hope that's not a sign of what's to come."

Hamlin seized control after the break, outscoring the Tigers 12-2 in the third quarter to build a 34-17 advantage. The Chargers continued to extend the margin in the fourth on their way to the 46-21 win.

Locke pointed to missed opportunities and stretches where Groton failed to generate offense as key factors in the loss.

"We got some open shots at different times, just couldn't get some of them to fall," Locke said. "Then we had streaks where we couldn't get open to get any shots off."

Groton finished 1-of-12 shooting from three-point range and was limited offensively as Hamlin's defense applied steady pressure. Locke also noted the Tigers' defensive performance fell short of expectations.

"We didn't get anything done, and then we didn't play defense either," he said.

Groton Area totaled 25 rebounds, six assists, six steals, and two blocks, while committing 17 turnovers and 12 fouls.

Jaedyn Penning led the Tigers with 12 points, seven rebounds, and a steal. Rylee Dunker added three points, six rebounds, an assist, and a steal. Jerica Locke finished with two points, three rebounds, two assists, and a block, while McKenna Tietz had two points, three rebounds, and two assists. Mia Crank recorded two points, two rebounds, and a steal, and Taryn Traphagen contributed two points, two rebounds, one assist, two steals, and a block. Kella Tracy and Sydney Locke each added a rebound and a steal.

Hamlin was led by Issie Stephenson with 18 points. Addison Neuendorf scored 12 points, Paxton Neuendorf added seven, Sarita Stephenson finished with four, Adeline Jensen had three, and Ava Taschner scored two. The Chargers shot 14-of-47 from the field for 29 percent and went 9-of-13 from the free-throw line.

Despite the loss, Locke said the Tigers will respond quickly. "Back to work tomorrow morning at 8:30," he said.

Junior varsity

Hamlin also edged Groton Area 31-30 in the junior varsity contest, a game decided in the final seconds.



Jerica Locke dribbles the ball around Hamlin's Paxton Neuendorf. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



Jaedyn Penning dribbles past Hamlin's Sarita Stephenson. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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Mia Crank dribbles around Hamlin's Jade Thue. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

The Chargers jumped out to an 11-0 lead and held an 11-3 advantage after the first quarter. Groton answered with eight straight points in the second quarter to tie the game at 13, but Hamlin took a 16-15 lead into halftime.

Groton regained the lead in the third quarter at 17-16 and pushed the margin to 23-18 before the period ended tied at 24. Hamlin tied the game at 26 and later took a 29-26 lead. The contest was tied at 30 when Hamlin's Paige Stormo was fouled with 16.7 seconds remaining and made one of two free throws to secure the win.

Tevan Hansen led Groton Area with 10 points. Kella Tracy scored six, Ashlyn Warrington added four, Teagan Hanten had three, and Kinsley Rowen finished with two. Stormo led Hamlin with 16 points.

Groton Area will travel to Sisseton on Tuesday for a Northeast



McKenna Tietz (4) sets the screen for Rylee Dunker. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

Conference doubleheader.

The games were broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM. The varsity game was sponsored by Agtegra, Avantara, Bary Keith at Harr Motors, Bierman Farm Service, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Full Circle Ag, Groton Ag Partners, Groton Chamber, Groton Ford, Groton Legion, Heartland Energy, John Sieh Agency, Jungle Lanes and Lounge and The MeatHouse. Shane Clark did the commentary of the varsity game and Paul Kosel for the junior varsity game. Jeslyn Kosel ran the camera. The junior varsity game was sponsored by Beauty Brew Boutique.



Taryn Traphagen makes her move. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

'Prairie Thunder' campaign targets Huron, Belle Fourche and Yankton

State troopers put 75 people in jail across two sets of saturation patrols

BY: JOHN HULT

A state-funded campaign that's put dozens of extra state troopers on city streets this fall put 75 people in jail during patrols in Huron, Belle Fourche and Yankton, the South Dakota Highway Patrol said Friday.

Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden announced the "Operation Prairie Thunder" in July as a two-pronged initiative that he said would improve public safety.

One piece of the operation involved the expansion of cooperation with federal immigration officials, in part by signing additional agreements between U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the state's Highway Patrol and Department of Corrections. South Dakota National Guard troops were also assigned to process ICE paperwork in Sioux Falls and Rapid City.

The other prong of Rhoden's campaign was framed as an effort to target drug trafficking in the Sioux Falls area, a move welcomed by city officials during a July press conference, but that put pressure on the Minnehaha County Jail and the county public defender's office through a crush of arrests. The first operation forced the jail to transport ICE detainees to other facilities to make space for suspected drug offenders.

The state patrol also misstated its arrest numbers in its initial reporting on its work in Sioux Falls, conflating arrests with citations, referring to the latter as arrests even when the person cited was never transported to jail. The patrol pledged to separate the figures in future reports on the operation.

Troopers have conducted six saturation patrols in Sioux Falls since Rhoden's July announcement.

In a press release Friday, the Highway Patrol announced that it concluded another set of saturation patrols in Huron, Yankton and Belle Fourche on Dec. 5.

Troopers jailed 75 people in total across the two operations, according to the release — 42 on drug



Gov. Larry Rhoden speaks to reporters from a podium on July 28, 2025, at the Public Safety Administration Building in Sioux Falls. Also visible are, from left, Dan Satterlee, director of the state Division of Criminal Investigation, and Sam Olson, Minneapolis field office director for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

(John Hult/South Dakota Searchlight)

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charges and 33 on non-drug charges — and 19 people were charged with drug offenses but not detained. The patrol interviewed 25 people on behalf of ICE, the release said, 21 of whom were held for the federal agency.

Huron patrols generate concern

In a statement, Rhoden said the saturation patrols “are getting drugs off the streets and putting criminals behind bars – first in Sioux Falls, and now we’re protecting even more communities.”

The state did not announce in advance plans to shift its focus from Sioux Falls to other cities.

In Huron, among South Dakota’s most diverse cities on a per-capita basis, the November patrols raised concerns for the city’s Hispanic community, according to Republican state Rep. Kevin Van Diepen, who’s also a former police chief.

He said many residents believed that ICE — not state law enforcement — was behind the saturation patrols in the city of 14,000.

“There were a lot of (social media) posts telling people to stay home,” Van Diepen said of the November patrols. “If they stop somebody and they get arrested on drugs, people are going to assume that it’s ICE.”

ICE representatives have not responded to inquires from South Dakota Searchlight on operations in Huron.

Mayor Mark Robish told Searchlight “there were no ICE agents in town.”

“It was all Highway Patrol,” the mayor said.

Spokespeople for the Rhoden administration and highway patrol did not immediately respond to questions about when and why it moved the patrols out of Sioux Falls, if there are plans to target other communities, and what the total cost for the patrols has been so far.

The city of Brookings, meanwhile, posted a news release on the city website warning residents that Operation Prairie Thunder would arrive in that city on Dec. 17.

“The City of Brookings will not be participating in these operations,” the release said.

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.

COMMENTARY

The ‘vanishing Indian’ myth, and other distortions of Native American life

Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve examines the people and locations that shaped her in new memoir, ‘Special Places, Sacred Circles’

by VIRGINIA DRIVING HAWK SNEVE

The following excerpt is reprinted with permission from the new memoir “Special Places, Sacred Circles,” published by the South Dakota Historical Society Press and written by author and Rosebud Sioux Tribe member Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve.

While living in Iowa we visited South Dakota in the summers — usually during the Rosebud Fair, often at Sun Dance time. We stopped to see Grandma Flora, then went to Pine Ridge to see Uncle Harvey. Paul was fascinated with Uncle, who worked in the maintenance department at the Pine Ridge School where Agnes taught fourth grade. Uncle was an artist and a craftsman. His framed watercolors hung in the house, and he had a special room where he displayed traditional American Indian items. He let Paul hold a bow made from yew and strung with gut, and he showed him a stone axe and a buffalo horn spoon, all made in traditional fashion. When we left, he gave Paul a photo of himself in a wig with braids hanging over a breastplate. Paul proudly hung it in his room.

Unbeknownst to me, Paul told his pals that Uncle hunted buffalo and was a warrior. Once, when Uncle

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and Aunt came to visit us in Iowa, Paul eagerly anticipated their arrival and waited on the edge of our driveway with several of his buddies. When they arrived, Uncle drove up in an air-conditioned automobile wearing a sports shirt, slacks, and shoes. Later, the mother of one of the boys told me that they were furious with Paul. Uncle was not an Indian, and he looked just like any other guy.

Unconsciously, I had my children's views in mind when I began writing. I wanted to be accurate about tribal history and values and dispel stereotypes still found in children's literature by presenting accurate, real people in a readable, entertaining style. Still, today, I have concerns about how my great grandchildren view American Indians.

As a published author, I often visited elementary school classrooms, read from my books, and answered questions — some of which were innocently and ignorantly racist.

"When the Indians were alive," a blond third grader asked me, "why did they always scalp the whites?" His question was the first after I had spent thirty minutes talking about the American Indians I write of in my books. I patiently explained that Indians did not always scalp, and white people also perpetrated this vicious act. The boy exchanged a smirking glance, but other hands were in the air.

"Are you an Indian?"

"Yes" I responded. "I am a member of the Rosebud Sioux tribe."

"Do you live in a tipi?"

"No, I live in a house like you do."

"You're no Indian, then, 'cause real Indians live in tipis."

A shy girl with long braids raised her hand. "I'm an Indian and I don't live in a tipi."

The boy was stunned. "No, you're not!"

"Yes, I am. My grandma is from Pine Ridge."

The boy grinned and looked at his pals. "Hey, she's an Indian. Let's put her in the cupboard!"

The girl began to cry while the boys giggled and made as if to grab her.

The teacher calmed the class and explained that the book they had read was a made-up story and no one would put a live person in a cupboard.

After this incident and similar others in which students displayed ignorance of who and what modern-day Indians were like, I did some research to see if other Native authors had similar experiences.

Eastern Abenaki author Joseph Bruchac reported, "I cannot tell you how often I have gone into schools and children have said, 'Are Indians still alive? I thought they died a long time ago.'"

Gayle Ross, a Cherokee, also visited schools and reported, "I had a five-year-old Kansas City child tell me that I couldn't be an Indian, that Indians were extinct, just like the dinosaurs."

My mother, Rose Posey, who was living in California at the time, visited a Sunday school class to explain the Medicine Wheel. She was asked, "Are there still Indians around?" The students did not know that there were native California tribes.

Apart from the vanishing Indian myth, there is more distortion of Indians in children's literature when Indian characters are only minimally developed, because they are stereotypes ignorantly presenting a racist view of Indians or showing readers a bland nonperson. The late Michael Dorris was concerned



From left, back row: James Driving Hawk, Robert Driving Hawk and Flora Driving Hawk; from left, front row; Edward and Virginia Driving Hawk. (Courtesy of Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve)

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about the images his children were getting of American Indians in the stories they read, in which Indians appeared not as human beings but as silly, whooping, one-dimensional cartoons. "I" is not for Indian; it is often for Ignorance. Michael Lacapa, the Apache/Hopi/Tewa artist, storyteller, and author said, "There was a time when I thought I wasn't an Indian because I didn't wear a headdress like the Indians in my schoolbooks wore."

Another stereotype is most apparent at Thanksgiving, when disposable paper plates and napkins are illustrated with cute happy Indians with smiling turkeys. Is this a comment on American Indians as being disposable?

When I visited schools, I explained that modern Indians dress like everyone else and speak English. That our tribal regalia, the buckskin, feathers, and beads are not everyday garb, nor costumes, but reserved for special events. We are proud of the beautiful, colorful clothing so important to our traditions, but it is only a part of being Indian. The part they cannot see — our beliefs, customs, and values — make us Indians, even though we no longer wear buckskin nor live in tipis.

Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve is the author of numerous books for children and adults. She was born and raised on the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota and is a member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe. She taught English throughout the state and at the Flandreau Indian School, and is the recipient of the Native American Prose Award and the Spirit of Crazy Horse Award. She was the first South Dakotan to receive the National Humanities Medal.

Wounded Knee Massacre site protection bill passes Congress

BY: SETH TUPPER

The U.S. Senate sent President Donald Trump a bill Thursday that would protect a portion of the Wounded Knee Massacre site on the Pine Ridge Reservation.

U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota, sponsored the legislation in the House, where it passed in January. Sen. Mike Rounds sponsored the legislation in the Senate, where it passed Thursday, with Majority Leader John Thune as a cosponsor. Both are Republicans from South Dakota.

Johnson released a statement saying "the time is now here to properly memorialize the lost and preserve the land."

"I look forward to seeing the president sign this into law to ensure the land remains sacred for generations to come," Johnson said.

Rounds also issued a statement, saying the Wounded Knee Massacre was "a devastating low point in U.S.-Lakota relations" and "we will continue to tell the story of this dark day in our nation's history."

The legislation would place 40 acres at the massacre site in restricted-fee status, which means it could not be sold, taxed, gifted or leased without approval by Congress and the Oglala Sioux and Cheyenne



Plastic flowers and American flags are placed atop graves at the Wounded Knee Memorial and cemetery June 30, 2024, on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. (Photo by Makenzie

Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

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River Sioux tribes, which jointly purchased the land three years ago.

The leaders of both tribes praised the bill's passage in comments included in a news release from Johnson. "Today, we stand to acknowledge the atrocities committed against the Lakota people to continue to heal, to protect, to educate, and most importantly, to ensure that we never forget the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890," said Cheyenne River Tribe Chairman Ryman LeBeau.

Oglala Sioux Tribe President Frank Star Comes Out called the bill "an important act that will preserve the memory of the Wounded Knee Massacre and the legacy and sacrifice of our ancestors."

"Significantly," Star Comes Out said, "it also promotes tribal self-determination and allows us to protect our Wounded Knee site in perpetuity."

The bill's passage comes a little more than two months after U.S. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth announced his rejection of calls to rescind medals awarded to soldiers for their participation in the massacre.

Bills to revoke the medals have been introduced this congressional session in the House from Jill Tokuda, D-Hawaii, and in the Senate from Elizabeth Warren, D-Massachusetts. Neither bill has advanced out of its assigned committee, and South Dakota's members of Congress have not signed on as cosponsors.

The massacre occurred on Dec. 29, 1890. A large group of Lakota people traveling to the Pine Ridge Agency in southwestern South Dakota made camp near Wounded Knee Creek, where they were surrounded by hundreds of Army soldiers. A shot rang out during a struggle while the soldiers tried to disarm the camp, and the soldiers opened fire.

Fewer than 40 soldiers were killed (some by friendly fire, according to historians), while estimates of Lakota deaths ran from 200 to 300 or more, depending on the source, including men, women and children. After some of the bodies froze on the ground for several days, a military-led burial party placed them in a mass grave.

One hundred years later in 1990, Congress passed a resolution expressing "deep regret" for the massacre.

Seth is editor-in-chief of South Dakota Searchlight. He was previously a supervising senior producer for South Dakota Public Broadcasting and a newspaper journalist in Rapid City and Mitchell.

US House GOP preps health care bill for vote before new year

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — U.S. House Republicans released a health care bill Friday evening they hope will help curb rising costs, though the measure doesn't have the level of Democratic support needed to get through the Senate.

The 111-page bill will likely move to the House floor next week, where Speaker Mike Johnson will need nearly every one of his members to vote to pass the legislation, an uphill battle given the vastly different views among centrists and far-right members of the party on health care issues.

The Louisiana Republican said in a statement the bill offers "clear, responsible alternatives that will lower premium costs and increase access and health care options for all Americans."

Democrats have been pressing for a three-year extension of the enhanced tax credits for people who purchase their insurance through the Affordable Care Act marketplace.

So far, House and Senate Republican leadership hasn't gotten on board with any extension of those subsidies, arguing they have led to a sharp rise in the cost of health insurance.

GOP lawmakers have instead pursued their own legislation, but without at least some backing from Democrats, no bill will make it through the Senate's 60-vote procedural hurdles.

Senate Republicans tried to advance a bill earlier this week from Louisiana Sen. Bill Cassidy and Idaho Sen. Mike Crapo but fell short of the votes needed.

Democrats were also unsuccessful trying to move their bill to extend the ACA marketplace tax credits for three years.

The House Republican bill, sponsored by Iowa Republican Mariannette Miller-Meeks, is unlikely to break the logjam in Congress over the rising cost of health insurance and health care, potentially leaving the

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U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., talks with reporters during a press conference on Wednesday, Dec. 10, 2025. Also pictured are, from left, Republican Conference Chairwoman Lisa McClain of Michigan, Majority Whip Tom Emmer of Minnesota and Majority Leader Steve Scalise of Louisiana. (Photo by Jennifer

Shutt/States Newsroom)

ing whether to allow any amendments to be considered on the floor.

The full House will then debate the legislation later in the week before departing for the two-week holiday break.

Trump wants direct payments

President Donald Trump, speaking from the Oval Office shortly after the bill was released, reiterated his preference that the federal government send payments directly to Americans.

"We want to give the money to the people and let the people buy their own great health care, and they'll save a lot of money, and it'll be great," he said.

But Trump also appeared to signal he is going to stay out of negotiations in Congress, saying, "I leave it to them and hopefully they're going to put great legislation on this desk right here."

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

issue as one the parties can debate leading up to next year's midterm elections.

Targeting 'real drivers' of cost increases

Johnson rebuked Democrats in his statement for enacting the Affordable Care Act during President Barack Obama's first term, saying the law hasn't made health care cost less.

House Republicans' new legislation, Johnson said, will address "the real drivers of health care costs to provide affordable care, increase access and choice, and restore integrity to our nation's health care system for all Americans."

The bill would require Pharmacy Benefit Managers "to provide employers with detailed data on prescription drug spending, rebates, spread pricing, and formulary decisions—empowering plans and workers with the transparency they deserve," according to a summary in Johnson's release.

Starting in 2027, the legislation would appropriate funding for cost sharing reduction payments that the summary said would reduce health insurance premiums and stabilize the individual market.

The House Rules Committee is scheduled to prepare the bill for floor debate on Tuesday by consider-

States will keep pushing AI laws despite Trump's efforts to stop them

BY: MADYSON FITZGERALD

State lawmakers of both parties said they plan to keep passing laws regulating artificial intelligence despite President Donald Trump's efforts to stop them.

Trump signed an executive order Thursday evening that aims to override state artificial intelligence laws. He said his administration must work with Congress to develop a national AI policy, but that in the meantime, it will crack down on state laws.

The order comes after several other Trump administration efforts to rein in state AI laws and loosen restrictions for developers and technology companies.

But despite those moves, state lawmakers are continuing to pre-file legislation related to artificial intelligence in preparation for their 2026 legislative sessions. Opponents are also skeptical about — and likely to sue over — Trump's proposed national framework and his ability to restrict states from passing legislation.

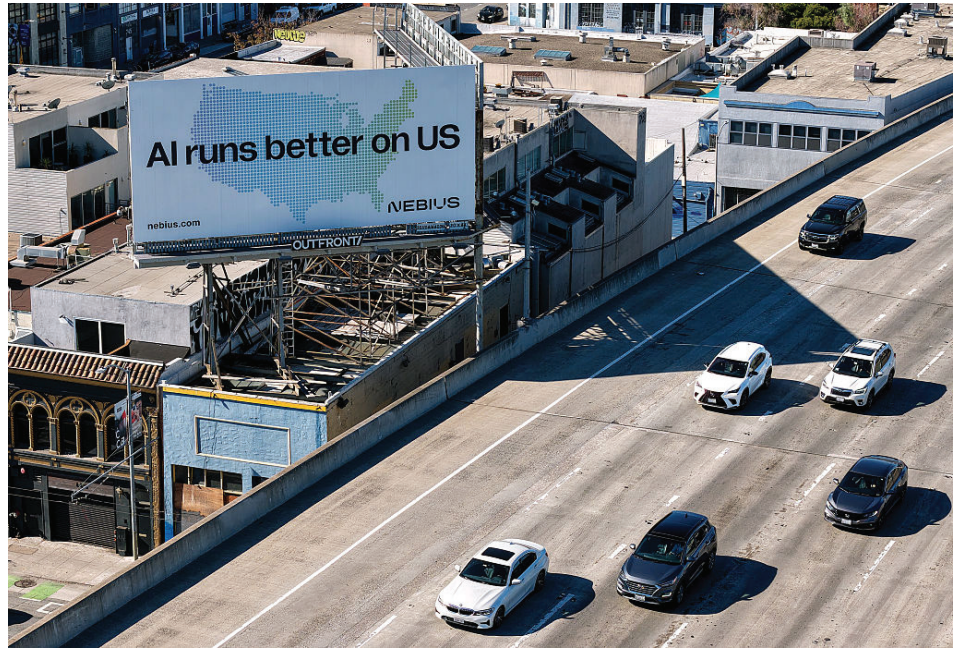
"I agree on not overregulating, but I don't believe the federal government has the right to take away my right to protect my constituents if there's an issue with AI," said South Carolina Republican state Rep. Brandon Guffey, who penned a letter to Congress opposing legislation that would curtail state AI laws.

The letter, signed by 280 state lawmakers from across the country, shows that state legislators from both parties want to retain their ability to craft their own AI legislation, said South Dakota Democratic state Sen. Liz Larson, who co-wrote the letter.

Earlier this year, South Dakota Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden signed the state's first artificial intelligence law, authored by Larson, prohibiting the use of a deepfake — a digitally altered photo or video that can make someone appear to be doing just about anything — to influence an election.

South Dakota and other states with more comprehensive AI laws, such as California and Colorado, would see their efforts overruled by Trump's order, Larson said.

"To take away all of this work in a heartbeat and then prevent states from learning those lessons, without providing any alternative framework at the federal level, is just irresponsible," she said. "It takes power away from the states."



A billboard advertises an artificial intelligence company in San Francisco in September. California is among the states leading the way on AI regulations, but an executive order signed by President Donald Trump seeks to override state laws on the technology. (Photo by Justin Sullivan/Getty Images)

Trump's efforts

Thursday's executive order will establish an AI Litigation Task Force to bring court challenges against states with AI-related laws, with exceptions for a few issues such as child safety protections and data

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center infrastructure.

The order also directs the secretary of commerce to notify states that they could lose certain funds under the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program if their laws conflict with national AI policy priorities.

Trump said the order would help the United States beat China in dominating the burgeoning AI industry, adding that Chinese President Xi Jinping did not have similar restraints.

"This will not be successful unless they have one source of approval or disapproval," he said. "It's got to be one source. They can't go to 50 different sources."

In July, the Trump administration released the AI Action Plan, an initiative aimed at reducing regulatory barriers and accelerating the growth of AI infrastructure, including data centers. Trump also has revoked Biden-era AI safety and anti-discrimination policies.

The tech industry had lobbied for Trump's order.

"This executive order is an important step towards ensuring that smart, unified federal policy — not bureaucratic red tape — secures America's AI dominance for generations to come," said Amy Bos, vice president of government affairs for NetChoice, a technology trade association, in a statement to Stateline.

As the administration looks to address increasing threats to national defense and cybersecurity, a centralized, national approach to AI policy is best, said Paul Lekas, the executive vice president for global public policy and government affairs at the Software & Information Industry Association.

"The White House is very motivated to ensure that there aren't barriers to innovation and that we can continue to move forward," he said. "And the White House is concerned that there is state legislation that may be purporting to regulate interstate commerce. We would be creating a patchwork that would be very hard for innovation."

Congressional Republicans tried twice this year to pass moratoriums on state AI laws, but both efforts failed.

In the absence of a comprehensive federal artificial intelligence policy, state lawmakers have worked to regulate the rapid development of AI systems and protect consumers from potential harms.

Trump's executive order could cause concern among lawmakers who fear possible blowback from the administration for their efforts, said Travis Hall, the director for state engagement at the Center for Democracy & Technology, a nonprofit that advocates for digital rights and freedom of expression.

"I can't imagine that state legislators aren't going to continue to try to engage with these technologies in order to help protect and respond to the concerns of their constituents," Hall said. "However, there's no doubt that the intent of this executive order is to chill any actual oversight, accountability or regulation."

State rules

This year, 38 states adopted or enacted measures related to artificial intelligence, according to a National Conference of State Legislatures database. Numerous state lawmakers have also prefiled legislation for 2026.

But tensions have grown over the past few months as Trump has pushed for deregulation and states have continued to create guardrails.

In 2024, Colorado Democratic Gov. Jared Polis signed the nation's first comprehensive artificial intelligence framework into law. Under the law, developers of AI systems will be required to protect consumers from potential algorithmic discrimination.

But implementation of the law was postponed a few months until June 2026 after negotiations stalled during a special legislative session this summer aiming to ensure the law did not hinder technological innovation. And a spokesperson for Polis told Bloomberg in May that the governor supported a U.S. House GOP proposal that would impose a moratorium on state AI laws.

Trump's executive order, which mentions the Colorado law as an example of legislation the administration may challenge, has caused uncertainty among some state lawmakers focused on regulating AI. But Colorado state Rep. Brianna Titone and state Sen. Robert Rodriguez, Democratic sponsors of the law, said they will continue their work.

Unless Congress passes legislation to restrict states from passing AI laws, Trump's executive order can

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easily be challenged and overturned in court, she said.

"This is just a bunch of hot air," Titone said. "It doesn't hold any water and it doesn't have any teeth because the president doesn't have the authority to supersede state law. We will continue to do what we need to do for the people in our state, just like we always have, unless there is an actual preemption in federal law."

California and Illinois also have been at the forefront of artificial intelligence legislation over the past few years. In September, California Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom signed the nation's first law establishing a comprehensive legal framework for developers of the most advanced, large-scale artificial intelligence models, known as frontier artificial intelligence models. Those efforts are aimed at preventing AI models from causing catastrophic harm involving dozens of casualties or billion-dollar damages.

California officials have said they are considering a legal challenge over Trump's order, and other states and groups are likely to sue as well.

Republican officials and GOP-led states, including some Trump allies, also are pushing forward with AI regulations. Efforts to protect consumers from AI harms are being proposed in Missouri, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas and Utah.

Earlier this month, Florida Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis also unveiled a proposal for an AI Bill of Rights. The proposal aims to strengthen consumer protections related to AI and to address the growing impact data centers are having on local communities.

In South Carolina, Guffey said he plans to introduce a bill in January that would place rules on AI chatbots. Chatbots that use artificial intelligence are able to simulate conversations with users, but raise privacy and safety concerns.

Artificial intelligence is developing fast, Guffey noted. State lawmakers have been working on making sure the technology is safe to use — and they'll keep doing that to protect their constituents, he said.

"The problem is that it's not treated like a product — it's treated like a service," Guffey said. "If it was treated like a product, we have consumer protection laws where things could be recalled and adjusted and then put back out there once they're safe. But that is not the case with any of this technology."

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

Madyson Fitzgerald is a content producer and staff writer for Stateline.

Arrests nationwide have fallen to historic lows, report finds

BY: AMANDA WATFORD

Arrests in the United States have fallen to levels not seen in decades, according to a new report that reconstructs national arrest trends in the absence of federal data.

The Council on Criminal Justice, a nonpartisan think tank, on Thursday released the first comprehensive national analysis of arrests since federal authorities stopped publishing detailed arrest statistics in 2020.

Arrests plunged during the first year of the pandemic and have remained low, according to the analysis. The national arrest rate in 2024 was 30% below the 2019 level and 71% lower than the peak in 1994.

Drug arrests have fallen even faster, with adult and juvenile drug-offense arrest rates dropping to about half of what they were in 2019.

In 1980, juveniles made up nearly a fifth of arrests nationwide, but by 2018, their share had fallen to 7%. While adult arrest rates declined 7% between 2020 and 2024, juvenile rates rose 14% over the same period.

Gender patterns have shifted as well. With arrests of men falling more steeply over time, women now account for a larger portion of arrests. Adult women's share nearly doubled between 1980 and 2020, rising from 14% to about 27%. Girls' share of juvenile arrests grew from 18% to roughly 31%.

Between 2020 and 2024, arrest rates for Black and Asian juveniles surged 48% and 45%, respectively,

compared with an 11% increase among white youth. Rates for American Indian and Alaska Native juveniles fell 4%.

Among adults, arrest rates increased by 12% for Black people and 18% for Asian people, but declined by 10% for white adults and 17% for American Indian and Alaska Native adults.

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

Amanda Watford (formerly Hernández) covers criminal justice for Stateline. She has reported for both national and local outlets, including ABC News, USA Today and NBC4 Washington.



Federal and local law enforcement officers arrest a man in Washington, D.C., in August. The number of arrests nationwide fell sharply in 2020 and have stayed down since then, according to a new report from the nonpartisan think tank Council on Criminal Justice. (Photo by Andrew

Leyden/Getty Images)

An ever-larger share of ICE's arrested immigrants have no criminal record

BY: TIM HENDERSON

Immigration arrests under the Trump administration continued to increase through mid-October, reaching rates of more than 30,000 a month. But, rather than the convicted criminals the administration has said it's focused on, an ever-larger share of those arrests were for solely immigration violations.

In 45 states, immigration arrests more than doubled compared with the same period last year, during the Biden administration. The largest increases: There were 1,190 arrests in the District of Columbia compared with just seven last year under the Biden administration. Arrests were also more than five times higher in New Mexico, Idaho, Oregon and Virginia.

"The result stands in contrast to the administration's objective of arresting the 'worst of the worst,'" said Ariel Ruiz Soto, a senior policy analyst at the nonpartisan Migration Policy Institute. Heightened enforcement is likely increasing "collateral" arrests of people found during searches for convicted criminals, he said.

Comparisons between the Trump and Biden administrations were calculated by Stateline in an analysis of data released by the Deportation Data Project, a research initiative by the universities of California at Berkeley and Los Angeles. About 93% of arrests could be identified by state.

While more people were arrested this year, a lower percentage are convicted criminals.

The share of arrested immigrants who had been convicted of violent crimes has dropped from 9% in January to less than 5% in October. The share under Biden was consistently between 10% and 11% during the same period in 2024.

The same trend applies to people arrested solely on immigration violations: Immigration violations alone were behind 20% in April, then rose to 44% of arrests in October, according to Stateline's analysis.

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In some states and the District of Columbia, a majority of arrests were for immigration violations alone: the District of Columbia (80%), New York (61%), Virginia (57%), Illinois (53%), West Virginia (51%) and Maryland (50%).

States with high immigrant populations also saw the most arrests this year. The largest numeric increases were in Texas (up 29,403, triple last year's figure), Florida (up 14,693, a fourfold increase) and California (up 13,345, a fourfold increase).

The two states with the largest arrest rate increases have responded very differently to President Donald Trump's deportation mission.

"We're going to resist like all of the Democratic states," New Mexico Democratic Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham said in an interview with The Santa Fe New Mexican after last year's election, referring to mass deportation plans. She proposed legislation to ban U.S.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention facilities in the state. The legislation failed this year, but Lujan Grisham urged the state legislature to reconsider next year. The state has three privately run ICE detention centers with the capacity for 2,000 people.

Idaho's Republican governor, Brad Little, is helping ICE under a 287(g) agreement by transporting what his office calls "highly dangerous illegal alien criminals" from county jails to federal custody. The 53 men pictured on the governor's website have charges ranging from drug possession to sexual assault.

In a news release, the office says the program is intended to take people "after the completion of their sentences," though an October review by the Idaho Capital Sun found some were transported despite dismissed or still-pending charges.

Nationally, arrests have increased this year from around 17,000 in February, the first full month of President Donald Trump's current term, to more than 30,000 in September and October. The share of convicted criminals has dropped from 46% to 30%, though the number of convicted criminals arrested still has been higher each month than under President Joe Biden.

Some of the policies that have fed increased arrest numbers face new court battles. This month, a federal judge blocked the administration from making immigration arrests in the District of Columbia without warrants or probable cause.

In August, a federal court blocked the administration's expansion of expedited removal, which itself allows fast deportations without judicial review. The administration has appealed, arguing that immigrants who have been in the country for less than two years without legal authorization are not guaranteed due process.

Such fast deportations could be used on 2.5 million people, according to a Migration Policy Institute estimate published in September, including 1 million people released at the border with Mexico with court



There were 105 immigration arrests in October at a horse racetrack in Wilder, Idaho. Idaho saw one of the country's largest increases in immigration arrests this year through mid-October compared with the same period in the Biden administration. (Photo Courtesy of ACLU of Idaho)

dates and 1.5 million people with temporary protections such as humanitarian parole.

This fall, the share of arrested immigrants with criminal convictions continued to decrease just before and during the federal government shutdown, with only 3% of those arrested having convictions between Sept. 21 and Nov. 16, according to national information analyzed by Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC), a data research organization at Syracuse University.

"While ICE is detaining more and more individuals, targeting has shifted sharply to individuals without any criminal convictions," the TRAC report noted.

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

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

Lawsuit from Texas, Florida AGs takes another crack at limiting abortion pill access

BY: KELCIE MOSELEY-MORRIS

Attorneys for the states of Florida and Texas filed another lawsuit this week seeking to restrict access to a medication abortion drug and rescind the approval of its brand-name and generic versions dating back to 2000.

It's the latest in a series of actions taken by state Republican officials to limit how mifepristone, one of two drugs used to end a pregnancy before 10 weeks, can be dispensed. It's also the third lawsuit with similar claims — another is ongoing in Missouri after U.S. District Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk transferred it out of his court in Texas earlier this year, and Louisiana lodged its own suit against the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in October.

Kacsmaryk initially granted a challenge to mifepristone brought by conservative legal group Alliance Defending Freedom in 2023, but the U.S. Supreme Court struck down that ruling, determining the plaintiffs lacked standing to sue. After that, the attorneys general of Missouri, Kansas and Idaho refiled the case as new plaintiffs, but Kacsmaryk said he did not want to defy the Supreme Court. Instead of returning the case to square one by having the plaintiffs file a new lawsuit, Kacsmaryk wrote that it would make sense to transfer it to Missouri to avoid costs and delays, Missouri Independent reported.



The attorneys general of Florida and Texas are suing the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, challenging access to and federal approval of mifepristone, a drug used to terminate early pregnancies. It's the third ongoing lawsuit with similar claims filed by Republican state attorneys general more than two years after the U.S. Supreme Court threw out a ruling that would have limited nationwide access to the medication. (Photo by Anna Rose Layden/Getty Images)

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This week, Republican lawmakers have been demanding answers from the FDA about reports that a safety review of mifepristone won't be completed until after the 2026 midterm elections, and anti-abortion groups are calling for the FDA commissioner, Marty Makary, to be fired.

The lawsuit, filed in U.S. District Court in Texas' Wichita Falls division, relies on anti-abortion rhetoric to claim the drug is unsafe, and allege the Comstock Act of 1873 prohibits abortion pills from being sent through the mail. The attorneys say regulations applied during the COVID-19 pandemic that permitted the drug to be dispensed without an in-person visit are unsafe and undermine state rights to enforce their abortion laws.

"By causing a massive increase in the number of women obtaining (medication) abortions, the 2019 and 2025 Generic Approvals exacerbate the difficulty that plaintiffs face in regulating abortions performed within their borders," the complaint reads. "It was arbitrary, capricious, and an abuse of discretion to approve mifepristone without requiring an ultrasound and blood test."

Florida Attorney General James Uthmeier and Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton argue the court should declare the initial 2000 approval of one brand of the drug improper and nullify many of the FDA-approved regulations guiding use of the medication.

Texas has a near-total abortion ban, while Florida bans it at six weeks — before most people know they are pregnant.

Multiple studies conducted by the FDA and other independent organizations since mifepristone's initial approval in 2000 have concluded it is safe to use and is in fact safer than many drugs on the market. The reported number of serious complications is extremely small, but anti-abortion groups have contended without evidence that the data is flawed and vastly underestimates the number of complications.

"These lawsuits have nothing to do with the safety of this medication and everything to do with making it harder for people to get an abortion," said Julia Kaye, senior staff attorney with the American Civil Liberties Union's Reproductive Freedom Project, in a statement. "Politicians in Texas and Florida are asking for a nationwide ban on a safe and effective medication that millions of Americans have used since the FDA first approved it 25 years ago."

New data from the Society of Family Planning released this week showed more people continue to obtain abortion medication through telehealth — about 1 in 4 abortions nationwide. Many states that preserve reproductive rights enacted shield laws to protect providers and patients from related out-of-state investigations. Out of nearly 430,000 abortion procedures between January and June in 2025, more than 162,000 were medication abortions.

According to the organization's research, just 5% of patients were receiving medication via telehealth in 2022 after the Dobbs decision, and during the same time period of 2025, that number was 27%.

The lawsuit will be assigned to a judge and receive an initial hearing in the coming weeks.

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

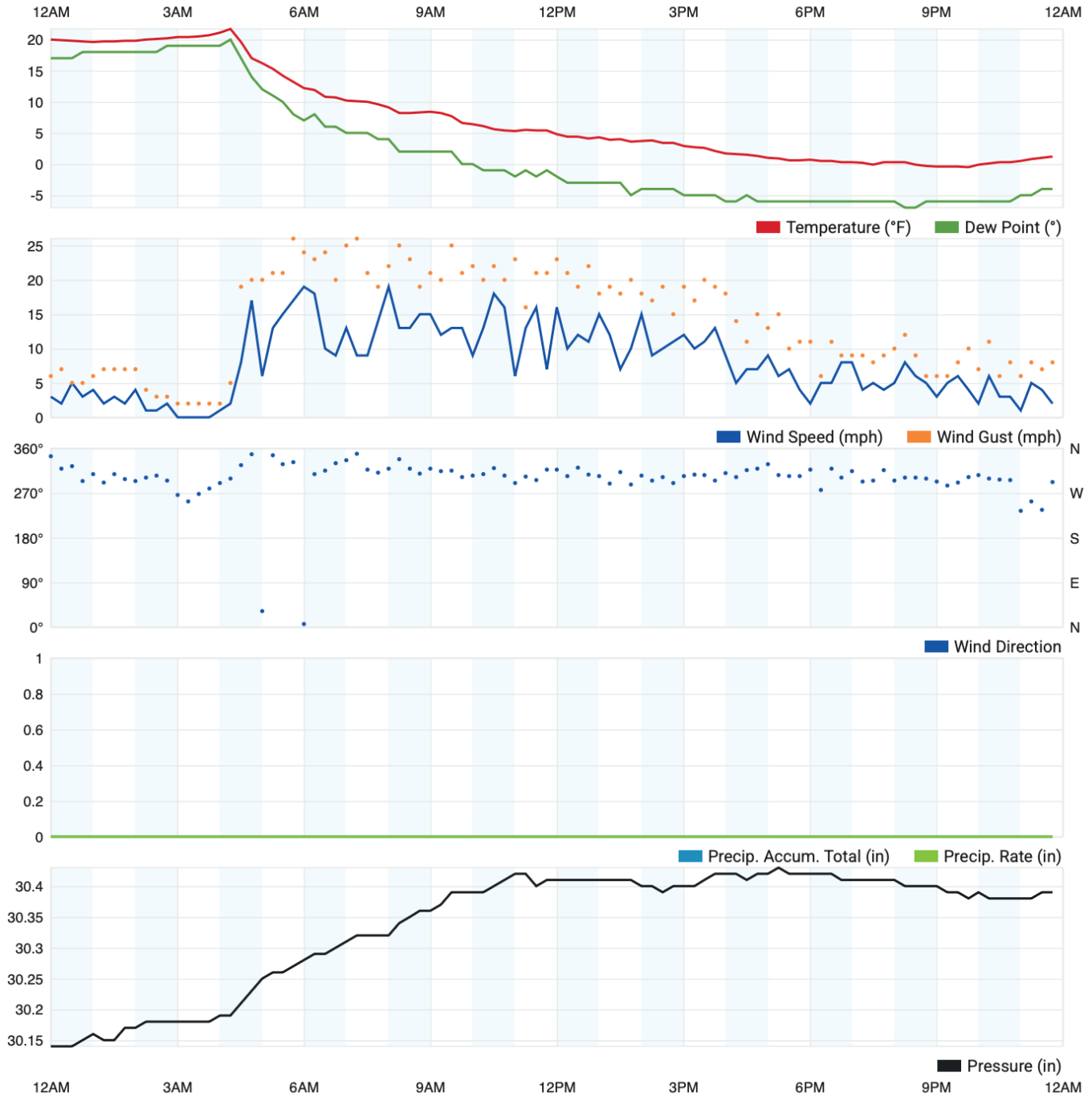
Kelcie Moseley-Morris is an award-winning journalist who has covered many topics across Idaho since 2011, including education, crime and courts, and campaign finance. She covered the implementation of Idaho's near-total abortion ban in 2022 and its effects, and her work has been cited in many court briefs, including the U.S. Supreme Court. She started covering reproductive health issues nationwide for States Newsroom in 2023. She has a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Idaho and a master's degree in public administration from Boise State University.

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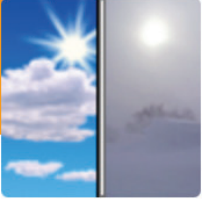


Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

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Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday
	 			
High: 3 °F ↓↓	Low: -17 °F	High: 19 °F	Low: 11 °F	High: 33 °F
Slight Chance Snow then Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny then Patchy Blowing Snow and Breezy	Partly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny

Wind Chills Today & Sunday December 13, 2025 3:26 AM

Key Messages

- Core of coldest air overhead today/tonight
- Winds increase during the day Sunday
 - Slightly warming temperatures -- but --
 - Wind chills remain low
- Temperatures warming above normal Monday through Wednesday

	Sat				Sun				Minimum				
	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am					
Aberdeen	-13	-15	-21	-19	-16	-29	-30	-26	-17	-5	2	0	-30
Britton	-19	-19	-24	-27	-17	-30	-30	-25	-15	-5	0	-2	-30
Chamberlain	-6	-5	-8	-8	-11	-15	-17	-14	6	17	16	17	-17
Clark	-21	-20	-23	-25	-27	-28	-29	-25	-19	-9	-2	-2	-29
Eagle Butte	-15	-12	-14	-17	-23	-23	-20	-18	-1	12	12	10	-23
Eureka	-19	-20	-24	-23	-27	-29	-26	-24	-14	-1	5	2	-29
Gettysburg	-15	-15	-17	-19	-23	-26	-23	-19	-8	6	10	8	-26
McIntosh	-17	-13	-16	-21	-27	-26	-22	-18	-6	8	13	10	-27
Milbank	-18	-18	-21	-23	-24	-13	-22	-23	-14	-6	-1	-4	-24
Miller	-11	-13	-18	-18	-21	-22	-23	-19	-9	5	13	12	-23
Mobridge	-13	-11	-15	-6	-21	-21	-20	-16	-6	6	10	8	-21
Murdo	-10	-8	-11	-13	-16	-16	-13	-8	15	24	20	17	-16
Pierre	-6	-3	-5	-5	-12	-14	-14	-10	9	19	18	15	-14
Redfield	-13	-15	-20	-23	-27	-29	-30	-26	-17	-3	5	3	-30
Sisseton	-20	-20	-23	-25	-25	-25	-23	-13	-5	2	0	0	-25
Watertown	-18	-19	-23	-24	-26	-15	-26	-25	-17	-8	-2	-6	-26
Webster	-22	-21	-25	-27	-28	-30	-29	-26	-17	-6	0	0	-30
Wheaton	-24	-24	-28	-28	-29	-17	-27	-27	-20	-11	-5	-6	-29



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Cold air continues to settle into the region, and readings will warm very little today. Temperatures continue to fall tonight, with wind chills 10 to 30 degrees below zero. Warmer air moves in Sunday but winds will also be on the increase.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 22 °F at 4:10 AM

Low Temp: 0 °F at 8:51 PM

Wind: 29 mph at 6:17 AM

Precip: 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 54 in 1924

Record Low: -34 in 1917

Average High: 29

Average Low: 9

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.25

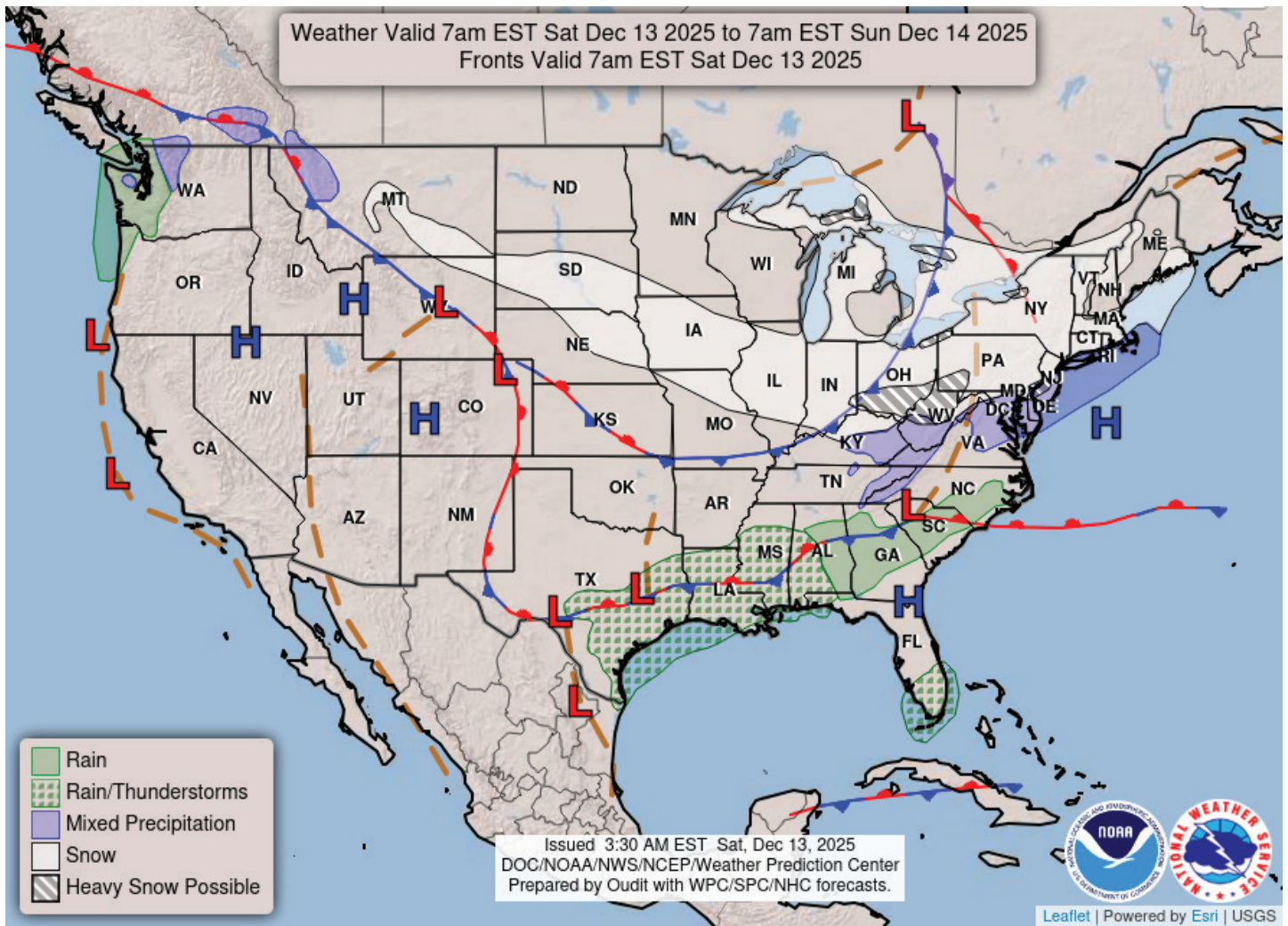
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.60

Average Precip to date: 21.46

Precip Year to Date: 25.41

Sunset Tonight: 4:49 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:05 am



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Today in Weather History

December 13, 2008: An intense low-pressure area moved out of the Rockies and across the Central Plains, bringing widespread snow, blizzard conditions, and extreme wind chills to central and northeast South Dakota and west central Minnesota into the early morning hours of the 15th. Snowfall amounts of 1 to as much as 12 inches, along with winds gusting to 50 mph, caused widespread near zero visibilities and dangerous travel conditions. Wind chills fell into the 35 below to 45 below zero range. Many vehicles became stuck or stranded along highways and Interstates 29 and 90. Interstate 90 was closed from the Wyoming line to Murdo from late on the 13th until the morning of the 14th. Interstate 29 was also closed for much of the 14th. The Onida, Agar, and Gettysburg Volunteer Fire Department found it difficult to respond to a structure fire south of Gettysburg. Due to whiteout conditions, the structure was lost to the fire when the fire departments arrived. Most area schools were closed on Monday due to the road conditions and the bitterly cold wind chills. Some of the heaviest snowfall amounts included: 6 inches at Watertown, Browns Valley, Sisseton, Waubay, and Castlewood; 7 inches at Ortonville, Webster, Clear Lake, Faulkton, and Aberdeen; 8 inches at Milbank, 9 inches at Britton and Wheaton; 10 inches at Clear Lake, and 12 inches at Roscoe. Mobridge received 2 inches, and Pierre received 4 inches of snowfall with this storm

1915 — A heavy snowstorm kicked off the snowiest winter in modern records for western New England. (The Weather Channel)

1962 — A severe Florida freeze occurred. Morning lows reached 35 degrees at Miami, 18 degrees at Tampa, and 12 degrees at Jacksonville. It was the coldest December weather of the 20th century and caused millions of dollars damage to crops and foliage. In Georgia, the morning low of 9 degrees below zero at Blairsville established a state record for the month of December. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 — A major winter storm produced high winds and heavy snow in the Southern Rockies and the Southern High Plains. Snowfall totals in New Mexico ranged up to 25 inches at Cedar Crest, with up to three feet of snow reported in the higher elevations. Winds of 75 mph, with gusts to 124 mph, were reported northeast of Albuquerque NM. El Paso TX was buried under 22.4 inches of snow, including a single storm record of 16.8 inches in 24 hours. The snowfall total surpassed their previous record for an entire winter season of 18.4 inches. Record cold was experienced the next three nights as readings dipped into the single numbers. High winds ushering unseasonably cold air into the southwestern U.S. gusted to 100 mph at Grapevine CA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — Low pressure off the Atlantic coast produced up to a foot of snow in eastern Nassau County and western Suffolk County of southeastern New York State. Mild weather prevailed across the western half of the country. Nine cities reported record high temperatures for the date, including Goodland KS with a reading of 74 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 — Strong northwesterly winds, ushering bitterly cold arctic air into the central U.S., produced squalls with heavy snow in the Great Lakes Region. Snowfall totals in Upper Michigan ranged up to 24 inches at Manistique. Nine cities in Arkansas and Texas reported record low temperatures for the date, including Calico Rock AR with a reading of 4 degrees above zero. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

December 13, 1997: A freak cold snap and snowstorm struck parts of northern Mexico, leaving 12 people dead and the area paralyzed. It snowed in the city of Guadalajara for the first time since 1881, leaving amazed residents to gawk at the white stuff and make snowmen. The temperature plunged to 5 degrees in Chihuahua.

2002 — A powerful Pacific storm system plowed into the western United States during the 13th-16th, producing high winds, heavy rains, significant mountain snowfall and causing 9 deaths (Associated Press). Rainfall amounts exceeding 10 inches occurred in parts of California, and wind gusts over 45 mph produced up to 1.9 million power outages during the period (Pacific Gas & Electric).

A Pattern for Prayer

If you are struggling in prayer, learn from our Savior.

Matthew 6:7-15: 7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

9 "This, then, is how you should pray:

"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

10 your kingdom come,
your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

11 Give us today our daily bread.

12 And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

13 And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.'

14 For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.
15 But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

In Matthew 6:7, Jesus cautioned against meaningless repetition while talking with the Father. Two verses later, He left a pattern to help us pray. And we'll find our prayer life transformed when we carefully examine Christ's words. The pattern includes:

Adoration of the Father (v. 9). God should be the focus of all our prayers. We should never forget what a privilege it is to bend our knees and speak to the Almighty in heaven.

Submission to His will (v. 10). Prayer should reflect a desire to align ourselves with God's goals and purposes.

Petition God for our needs (v. 11). We are dependent upon the Lord, and He wants us to come to Him with our requests.

Confession of sins (v. 12). When we repent and forgive others, we maintain fellowship with God. But if we hold grudges, that fellowship is broken.

Deliverance from evil (v. 13). Our enemy often challenges us, but Christ has already won the victory over him.

Jesus ended His prayer where He began—with praise to the Father for His kingdom, power, and glory (v. 13). Next time you say this prayer, concentrate on each verse. Following this pattern will result in a more effective prayer life because it will be God-centered.

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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
12.12.25

10 50 55 58 59 5

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$80,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
12.10.25

3 13 37 42 44 1

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$9,300,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 13 Mins 36 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
12.12.25

6 20 23 30 36 11

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 28 Mins 36 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
12.10.25

9 17 21 29 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$122,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 28 Mins 36 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
12.10.25

13 15 51 67 68 8

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 57 Mins 36 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
12.10.25

10 16 29 33 69 22

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$1,000,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 57 Mins 36 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

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News from the **AP** Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Roncalli 75, Redfield 48
Baltic 64, Beresford 51
Bridgewater-Emery 57, Corsica/Stickney 40
Britton-Hecla 56, Tiospa Zina 25
Centerville 60, Canistota 17
Colman-Egan 48, Arlington 37
De Smet 48, Deubrook 45
Ethan 52, Hanson 42
Flandreau 66, Chester 46
Great Plains Lutheran 88, Northland Lutheran, Wis. 28
Groton 55, Hamlin 50
Harrisburg 54, Yankton 46
Hill City 67, Kadoka 59
Huron 61, Tea 59
Irene-Wakonda 63, Bon Homme 48
McLaughlin 62, Herreid-Selby 57, OT
Rapid City Central 66, Aberdeen Central 38
Sioux Falls Christian 64, Lennox 38
Sioux Falls Lincoln 66, Sioux Falls Washington 59
Sioux Falls O’Gorman 48, Brandon Valley 41, OT
Sioux Falls Roosevelt 63, Sioux Falls Jefferson 58
Spearfish 67, Belle Fourche 34
Stanley County 69, Miller 47
T F Riggs High School 62, Rapid City Stevens 54
Timber Lake 56, Lemmon High School 28
Tri-Valley 46, Parkston 34
Valentine, Neb. 79, Todd County 51
Vermillion 67, Sioux Falls Lutheran 34
Viborg-Hurley 73, Freeman 64, 2OT
Warner 64, Northwestern 42
West Central 70, Dell Rapids 20
White River 66, Jones County 42
Wilmot 56, Waverly-South Shore 46

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

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Central 53, Rapid City Central 32
Beresford 66, Baltic 52
Brookings 43, Watertown 41, OT
Centerville 56, Canistota 23
Colman-Egan 72, Arlington 41
Crow Creek Tribal School 62, Flandreau Indian 57
Custer 46, Arvada-Clearmont, Wyo. 31
De Smet 53, Deubrook 23

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Dell Rapids St Mary's 52, Howard 37
Deuel 41, Florence-Henry 34
Elkton-Lake Benton 65, Estelline-Hendricks 47
Ethan 60, Hanson 29
Freeman 53, Viborg-Hurley 20
Gayville-Volin High School 48, Alcester-Hudson 33
Hamlin 46, Groton 21
Harrisburg 60, Yankton 38
Hill City 52, Kadoka 41
Irene-Wakonda 59, Bon Homme 23
Lemmon High School 70, Timber Lake 32
Lennox 48, Sioux Falls Christian 34
Miller 62, Stanley County 26
New Underwood 47, Edgemont 30
North Central 55, Sully Buttes 31
Parkston 46, Tri-Valley 29
Rapid City Stevens 59, T F Riggs High School 27
Sioux Falls Jefferson 59, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 48
Sioux Falls Washington 57, Sioux Falls Lincoln 12
Spearfish 50, Belle Fourche 33
Tea 64, Huron 46
Tiospa Zina 48, Britton-Hecla 44
Valentine, Neb. 44, Todd County 25
Warner 32, Northwestern 29
Waubay/Summit 52, Castlewood 50, OT
Wessington Springs 51, Wolsey-Wessington 39

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

Garry puts up 20, South Dakota State knocks off Dakota Wesleyan 94-62

By The Associated Press undefined

BROOKINGS, S.D. (AP) — Kalen Garry scored 20 points as South Dakota State beat Dakota Wesleyan 94-62 on Friday.

Garry also added five rebounds for the Jackrabbits (7-5). Joe Saylor scored 16 points and added seven rebounds and seven assists. Damon Wilkinson had 15 points and shot 7 of 10 from the field and 1 of 3 from the free-throw line.

Tyson Stevenson led the Tigers in scoring, finishing with 14 points and two steals. Easton Neuendorf added 10 points for Dakota Wesleyan. Andrew Younan had eight points.

New York is the 8th state found to have improperly issued commercial driver's licenses to immigrants

By JOSH FUNK AP Transportation Writer

New York is the eighth state found to routinely issue commercial driver's licenses to immigrants that are valid long after they are no longer legally authorized to be in the country, U.S. Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy said Friday, and he threatened to withhold \$73 million in highway funds unless the system is fixed and any flawed licenses are revoked.

New York was the fourth state run by a Democratic governor called out publicly by Duffy in his effort to

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make sure truck and bus drivers are qualified to either haul passengers or 80,000 pounds of cargo down the highway. He previously questioned similar practices in California, Pennsylvania and Minnesota.

But letters have gone out to other states as well without fanfare, or comments from Duffy, including Republican-run Texas and South Dakota.

In addition to finding licenses that remained valid longer than they should have, these federal audits have also discovered instances where the states may not have even checked a driver's immigration status before issuing a license. Investigators check a small sample of licenses in each state.

Duffy launched the review this summer, but it became more prominent after a truck driver who was not authorized to be in the U.S. made an illegal U-turn and caused a crash in Florida that killed three people in August. The rules on these licenses the Transportation Department is enforcing have been in place for years.

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration sent letters to Texas, South Dakota, Colorado, and Washington during the government shutdown in October.

Most of the states that have been the focus of the investigation so far have defended their practices and said they were following the federal rules. But Duffy has said the high percentage of problems in some states, combined with the defensive responses from officials, suggests a systematic problem, and he insisted Friday this effort is about safety — not politics.

"When more than half of the licenses reviewed were issued illegally, it isn't just a mistake — it is a dereliction of duty by state leadership," Duffy said about New York on Friday.

Investigators also found that nearly half of the 123 licenses reviewed in Texas were flawed. Some of the other states involved small numbers, but most of the problems were similar. Since Duffy pressed the issue in California, the state has revoked some 21,000 commercial driver's licenses that were issued improperly.

The Transportation Department has threatened to withhold federal highway funding from these states — including \$182 million in Texas and \$160 million in California — if they don't reform their licensing programs and invalidate any flawed licenses.

So far, no state has lost money because they complied or because they have more time to respond. But as part of a separate review, California lost \$40 million for failing to enforce English language requirements for truckers that the Trump administration began enforcing this summer.

States defend their licensing practices

New York State Department of Motor Vehicles spokesperson Walter McClure said the state is following all the federal rules.

"Secretary Duffy is lying about New York State once again in a desperate attempt to distract from the failing, chaotic administration he represents. Here is the truth: Commercial Drivers Licenses are regulated by the Federal Government, and New York State DMV has, and will continue to, comply with federal rules," McClure said in a statement.

Duffy has previously threatened to pull federal funding from New York if the state did not abandon its plan to charge drivers a congestion pricing fee in New York City and if crime on the subway system was not addressed. The Transportation Department also put \$18 billion of funding on hold for two major infrastructure projects in New York, including a new rail tunnel beneath the Hudson River between New York City and New Jersey, because of concerns about whether the spending was based on diversity, equity and inclusion principles.

A spokesperson for Texas Gov. Greg Abbott said in a statement that "public safety is the Governor's top priority, and we must ensure that truckers can navigate Texas roadways safely and efficiently. To support this mission, Governor Abbott directed the Texas Department of Public Safety to strictly enforce English language proficiency requirements and to stop issuing intrastate commercial driver's licenses to drivers who do not meet those standards."

Most of the other states have said they are working to address the concerns the Transportation Department raised.

Previous efforts to restrict immigrant truck drivers

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Immigrants account for about 20% of all truck drivers, but these non-domiciled licenses only represent about 5% of all commercial driver's licenses or about 200,000 drivers. The Transportation Department also proposed new restrictions that would severely limit which noncitizens could get a license, but a court put the new rules on hold.

Trucking trade groups have praised the effort to get unqualified drivers and drivers who can't speak English off the road along with the Transportation Department's actions last week to go after questionable commercial driver's license schools. But immigrant advocacy groups have raised concerns these actions have led to harassment of immigrant drivers and prompted some of them to abandon the profession.

"For too long, loopholes in this program have allowed unqualified drivers onto our highways, putting professional truckers and the motoring public at risk," said Todd Spencer, who is president of the Owner Operator Independent Drivers Association.

Problems with commercial driver's licenses for immigrants found in 8 states so far

By JOSH FUNK AP Transportation Writer

The federal government's crackdown on commercial driver's licenses for immigrants has found problems in eight states so far in the wake of several deadly crashes.

Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy has publicly threatened to withhold millions in federal money from California, Pennsylvania, Minnesota and now New York after investigations found problems such as licenses that remained valid long after an immigrant's legal status expired. But the department quietly also sent letters detailing similar concerns to Texas, South Dakota, Colorado and Washington during the government shutdown after briefly mentioning those states in September.

Concerns about immigrant truck drivers gained attention after a tractor-trailer driver who was not authorized to be in the U.S. made an illegal U-turn and caused an August crash in Florida that killed three people. A fiery California crash that also killed three people in October and involved a truck driver in the country illegally added to the worries.

Duffy proposed new restrictions in September that would severely limit which noncitizens could get a license to drive a semi or a bus, but a court has put the new rules on hold.

In addition, the Trump administration has been seeking to enforce existing English language requirements for truckers since the summer. As of October, about 9,500 truck drivers have been pulled off the road nationwide for failing to demonstrate English proficiency during traffic stops or inspections.

Here's a summary of what has happened so far:

California

The Transportation Department focused first on California because the driver in the Florida crash got a license there. He also went to California after the crash and had to be extradited to face charges.

California fought back after Duffy threatened to pull \$160 million from the state. Gov. Gavin Newsom sparred with Duffy in statements and social media posts defending the state's practices by saying California officials had verified the immigration status of all these drivers through federal databases, as required.

But after that back-and-forth, California revoked 17,000 commercial driver's licenses last month after confirming problems with them. That number has since grown to 21,000. So the Transportation Department hasn't pulled that funding.

But Duffy did revoke a separate \$40 million in federal funding because he said California is the only state not enforcing English language requirements for truckers.

Pennsylvania

The federal government might withhold nearly \$75 million from Pennsylvania if it is not satisfied with the actions the state takes.

The Transportation Department said its audit found a couple of licenses out of 150 it reviewed were valid after the driver's lawful presence in the country ended. In four other cases, the federal government said

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Pennsylvania gave no evidence it had required noncitizens to provide legitimate proof they were legally in the country at the time they got the license.

As it has done in all these states, the Transportation Department ordered Pennsylvania to stop issuing commercial driver's licenses to immigrants until it completed a full review to ensure all the licenses it has issued remain valid and revoke any licenses that aren't.

The federal government said that approximately 12,400 noncitizen drivers hold an unexpired commercial learner's permit or commercial driver's license issued by Pennsylvania.

Minnesota

Duffy 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.

The Transportation Department found some licenses that were valid beyond a driver's work permit and some where the state never verified a driver's immigration status.

The head of Minnesota's Department of Driver and Vehicle Services, Pong Xiong, said the state found a number of administrative issues in the 2,117 non-domiciled commercial licenses the state has issued and took action, including cancelling some licenses. Xiong said the federal audit largely just confirmed the issues Minnesota had already found and corrected.

The state planned to work with federal officials to resolve any remaining questions.

New York

Duffy highlighted concerns about the commercial licenses New York has issued to noncitizens Friday.

Federal investigators found that more than half of the 200 licenses they reviewed in New York were issued improperly with many of them defaulting to be valid for eight years regardless of when an immigrant's work permit expires. And he said the state could not prove it had verified these drivers' immigration status for the 32,000 active non-domiciled commercial licenses it has issued. Plus, investigators found some examples of New York issuing licenses even when applicants' work authorizations were already expired.

"New York must act immediately to comprehensively audit its CDL program and revoke every single illegally issued licenses," said Derek Barrs, administrator of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

State DMV spokesperson Walter McClure defended the state's practices and said New York has been following all the federal rules for this kind of commercial license.

Texas

Nearly half of the 123 licenses investigators reviewed in Texas were flawed, so the Transportation Department threatened to withhold \$182 million if the state doesn't reform its licensing programs and invalidate any flawed licenses.

A spokesperson for Texas Gov. Greg Abbott said in a statement that "public safety is the Governor's top priority, and we must ensure that truckers can navigate Texas roadways safely and efficiently. To support this mission, Governor Abbott directed the Texas Department of Public Safety to strictly enforce English language proficiency requirements and to stop issuing intrastate commercial driver's licenses to drivers who do not meet those standards."

South Dakota

Investigators found three commercial licenses the state issued that were valid longer than they should have been. South Dakota also issues several licenses to Canadian citizens who aren't eligible to get one.

One problematic practice investigators found as they reviewed 51 South Dakota licenses was that the state routinely issues temporary paper licenses that are valid for one year regardless of the immigration status of a driver.

South Dakota officials didn't immediately respond Friday to the concerns. The state could lose \$13.25 million.

Colorado

Roughly 22% of the 99 licenses that were reviewed in Colorado violated federal requirements. That raises questions about the 1,848 active non-domiciled commercial driver's licenses in the state.

Investigators discovered a glitch in Colorado's computer system that will revert to a license valid for four

years when a worker has to do multiple searches in a federal immigration database. Unless the worker is vigilant, some of those extended licenses sneak through.

Eighteen Mexican citizens who weren't eligible were also issued commercial licenses.

Jennifer Giambi, a spokesperson for the Colorado DMV, said the state is in the middle of auditing its licensing program to check for any additional problems, and that audit should be done by January. No new licenses are being issued in the program right now.

Washington

The state could lose \$31.35 million if the Transportation Department isn't satisfied with their response. Investigators only found problems in about 10% of the 125 licenses they reviewed in Washington, but they were alarmed to learn that an internal state review discovered 685 immigrant drivers who were issued regular commercial licenses instead of the non-domiciled ones they should have received. The Transportation Department said that state officials often accepted the wrong documents in those cases.

Washington officials told the AP they couldn't immediately respond Friday while the state is grappling with widespread flooding. But earlier this week, a state Department of Licensing spokesperson, Nathan Olson, said in an email to the Seattle Times that the errors had been addressed and Washington is working to improve its system and procedures.

Higher cost, worse coverage: Affordable Care Act enrollees say expiring subsidies will hit them hard

By ALI SWENSON Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — For one Wisconsin couple, the loss of government-sponsored health subsidies next year means choosing a lower-quality insurance plan with a higher deductible. For a Michigan family, it means going without insurance altogether.

For a single mom in Nevada, the spiking costs mean fewer Christmas gifts this year. She is stretching her budget already while she waits to see if Congress will act.

Less than three weeks remain until the expiration of COVID-era enhanced tax credits that have helped millions of Americans pay their monthly fees for Affordable Care Act coverage for the past four years.

The Senate on Thursday rejected two proposals to address the problem and an emerging health care package from House Republicans does not include an extension, all but guaranteeing that many Americans will see much higher insurance costs in 2026.

Here are a few of their stories.

From a gold plan to a bronze plan, a couple spends more on less

Chad Bruns comes from a family of savers. That came in handy when the 58-year-old military veteran had to leave his firefighting career early because of arm and back injuries he incurred on the job.

He and his wife, Kelley, 60, both retirees, cut their own firewood to reduce their electricity costs in their home in Sawyer County, Wisconsin. They rarely eat out and hardly ever buy groceries unless they are on sale.

But to the extent that they have always been frugal, they will be forced to be even more so now, Bruns said. That is because their coverage under the health law enacted under former President Barack Obama is getting more expensive — and for worse coverage.

This year, the Brunses were paying \$2 per month for a top-tier gold-level plan with less than a \$4,000 deductible. Their income was low enough to help them qualify for a lot of financial assistance.

But in 2026, that same plan is rising to an unattainable \$1,600 per month, forcing them to downgrade to a bronze plan with a \$15,000 deductible.

Kelley Bruns said she is concerned that if something happens to their health in the next year, they could go bankrupt. While their monthly fees are low at about \$25, their new out-of-pocket maximum at \$21,000 amounts to nearly half their joint income.

"We have to pray that we don't have to have surgery or don't have to have some medical procedure done that we're not aware of," she said. "It would be very devastating."

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Family facing higher costs prepares to go without insurance

Dave Roof's family of four has been on ACA insurance since the program started in 2014. Back then, the accessibility of insurance on the marketplace helped him feel comfortable taking the leap to start a small music production and performance company in his hometown of Grand Blanc, Michigan. His wife, Kristin, is also self-employed as a top seller on Etsy.

The coverage has worked for them so far, even when emergencies come up, such as an ATV accident their 21-year-old daughter had last year.

But now, with the expiration of subsidies that kept their premiums down, the 53-year-old Roof said their \$500 per month insurance plan is jumping to at least \$700 a month, along with spiking deductibles and out-of-pocket costs.

With their joint income of about \$75,000 a year, that increase is not manageable, he said. So, they are planning to go without health insurance next year, paying cash for prescriptions, checkups and anything else that arises.

Roof said his family is already living cheaply and has not taken a vacation together since 2021. As it is, they do not save money or add it to their retirement accounts. So even though forgoing insurance is stressful, it is what they must do.

"The fear and anxiety that it's going to put on my wife and I is really hard to measure," Roof said. "But we can't pay for what we can't pay for."

Single mom strains her January budget in hopes Congress acts soon

If you ask Katelin Provost, the American middle class has gone from experiencing a squeeze to a "full suffocation."

The 37-year-old social worker in Henderson, Nevada, counts herself in that category. As a single mom, she already keeps a tight budget to cover housing, groceries and day care for her 4-year-old daughter.

Next year, that is going to be even tougher.

The monthly fee on her plan is going up from \$85 to nearly \$750. She decided she is going to pay that higher cost for January and reevaluate afterward, depending on whether lawmakers extends the subsidies, which as of now appears unlikely. She hopes they will.

If Congress does not act, she will drop herself off the health insurance and keep it only for her daughter because she cannot afford the higher fee for the two of them over the long term.

The strain of one month alone is enough to have an impact.

"I'm going to have to reprioritize the next couple of months to rebalance that budget," Provost said. "Christmas will be much smaller."

Heisman Trophy finalists include 3 quarterbacks and Notre Dame's Jeremiah Love

By EVERETT MERRILL Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Three quarterbacks — Indiana's Fernando Mendoza, Vanderbilt's Diego Pavia and Julian Sayin of Ohio State — joined Notre Dame running back Jeremiah Love in New York on Saturday for the awarding of the Heisman Trophy given to the top player in college football.

Quarterbacks have won the Heisman three of last four years, with two-way player Travis Hunter of Colorado ending the run last season.

The award presentation Saturday night comes after a number of accolades awarded already. Mendoza was named The Associated Press player of the year earlier this week and picked up the Maxwell and Davey O'Brien awards Friday night while Love won the Doak Walker Award.

Hoosier star

Mendoza guided the Hoosiers to their first No. 1 ranking and the top seed in the 12-team College Football bracket, throwing for 2,980 yards and a national-best 33 touchdown passes while also running for six scores. Indiana, the last unbeaten team in major college football, will play a College Football Playoff quarterfinal game in the Rose Bowl on Jan. 1.

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Mendoza, the Hoosiers' first-year starter after transferring from California, is the triggerman for an offense that surpassed program records for touchdowns and points set during last season's surprise run to the CFP.

A redshirt junior, the once lightly recruited Miami native is the second Heisman finalist in school history, joining 1989 runner-up Anthony Thompson. Mendoza is the seventh Indiana player to earn a top-10 finish in Heisman balloting and it marks another first in program history — having back-to-back players in the top 10. Hoosiers quarterback Kurtis Rourke was ninth last year.

Confident Commodore

Pavia threw for a school-record 3,192 yards and 27 touchdowns for the Commodores, who were pushing for a CFP berth all the way to the bracket announcement. He is the first Heisman finalist in Vanderbilt history.

Generously listed as 6 feet tall, Pavia led Vanderbilt to its first 10-win season along with six wins against Southeastern Conference foes. That includes four wins over ranked programs as Vandy reached No. 9, its highest ranking in The Associated Press Top 25 since 1937.

Pavia went from being unrecruited out of high school to junior college, New Mexico State and finally Vanderbilt in 2024 through the transfer portal.

Brash and confident, the graduate student from Albuquerque, New Mexico, calls himself "a chip on the shoulder guy" and he was feisty off the field, too: He played his fourth Division I season under a preliminary injunction as he challenges NCAA eligibility rules; he contends his junior college years should not count against his eligibility, citing the potential losses in earnings from name, image and likeness deals as an illegal restraint on free trade.

Vandy next plays in the ReliaQuest Bowl against Iowa on Dec. 31.

Buckeyes' leader

Sayin led the Buckeyes to a No. 1 ranking for most of the season, throwing for 3,329 yards while tying for second in the country with 31 TD passes ahead of their CFP quarterfinal at the Cotton Bowl on Dec. 31.

The sophomore from Carlsbad, California, arrived at Ohio State after initially committing to Alabama and entering the transfer portal following a coaching change. He played four games last season before winning the starting job. He led the Buckeyes to a 14-7 win in the opener against preseason No. 1 Texas and kept the team atop the AP Top 25 for 13 straight weeks, tying its second-longest run.

Sayin was only the second Bowl Subdivision quarterback in the last 40 years to have three games in a season with at least 300 yards passing, three touchdowns, no interceptions, and a completion rate of at least 80%. West Virginia's Geno Smith was the other in 2012.

Sayin follows a strong lineage of Ohio State quarterbacks since coach Ryan Day arrived in 2017. Dwayne Haskins (2018), Justin Fields (2019), C.J. Stroud (2021), and Kyle McCord (2023) averaged 3,927 passing yards, 40 TDs, and six interceptions, along with a 68.9% completion rate during their first seasons.

Irish Love

The last running back to win the Heisman was Alabama's Derrick Henry in 2015. Love put himself in the mix with an outstanding season for Notre Dame.

The junior from St. Louis was fourth in the Bowl Subdivision in yards rushing (1,372), fifth in per-game average (114.3) and third with 18 rushing touchdowns for the Fighting Irish, who missed out on a CFP bid and opted not to play in a bowl game.

He was the first player in Notre Dame's storied history to produce multiple TD runs of 90 or more yards, a 98-yarder against Indiana in the first round of last year's playoffs and a 94-yarder against Boston College earlier this season.

He padded his Heisman resume with a series of highlights displaying an uncanny ability to maintain his balance while hurdling defenders, spinning out of tackles or rolling off opponents. He teamed with Jadarian Price to create one of the season's top running back duos, a combination that helped first-time starter CJ Carr emerge as one of the nation's best young quarterbacks.

Grassley built a reputation for government oversight.

Has he abandoned it under Trump?

By JOSHUA GOODMAN, JIM MUSTIAN AND ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As President Donald Trump's top law enforcement officials were firing and forcing out waves of Justice Department veterans, Sen. Chuck Grassley denounced a "political infection" that had poisoned FBI leadership.

The Iowa Republican was not criticizing FBI Director Kash Patel or Attorney General Pam Bondi. In a July statement, he directed his ire at the FBI's "extreme lack of effort" in investigating Democrat Hillary Clinton's use of a private email server as secretary of state a decade ago.

Trump loyalists have roiled the Justice Department, shattering norms and leading to a mass exodus of veteran officials, but the 92-year-old chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee has remained focused on the past.

Critics say Grassley's reluctance to challenge the Trump administration has even extended to a defining issue: His support for whistleblowers making claims of fraud, waste and abuse.

In an interview, Grassley insisted he has not abandoned his oversight role. He said he has felt compelled to investigate issues under earlier presidents to avoid a repeat of what he described as politically motivated prosecutions carried out against Trump and his allies.

"Political weaponization is being brought to the surface and being made more transparent because this administration is the most cooperative of any administration — Republican or Democrat," Grassley said.

Grassley has acknowledged that Congress has ceded a great deal of power to the current administration, a concession he says makes his own oversight more crucial.

"It's going to enhance the necessity for it," he said.

Grassley is known for his focus on oversight

Grassley, upon entering Congress in 1975, quickly developed a reputation for exposing corruption and waste. He once drove to the Pentagon in his orange Chevy Chevette to demand answers from officials about their purchase of \$450 hammers and \$7,600 coffee pots.

He was among the chief proponents in Congress of laws to shield employees who revealed such waste and sponsored the landmark 1989 Whistleblower Protection Act. He also has played a key role in empowering inspectors general, internal watchdogs tasked with rooting out misconduct.

"He has been the conscience of the Senate on whistleblower protection rights for decades," said Tom Devine, legal director for the Government Accountability Project. In the current Congress, he has co-sponsored legislation boosting protections for whistleblowers in the FBI and CIA.

"No one is close to having his impact," Devine said. "That hardly means that we always agree with his judgment calls about policy."

Criticized for not taking on Trump administration

Trump and Grassley are not always in alignment. This past week, for example, they tussled over the pace of confirmation of administration nominees.

Even so, Democrats and good government advocates say Grassley has been conspicuously silent as the administration has investigated Trump's perceived enemies, fired agents who worked on politically sensitive cases and upended the Justice Department's longstanding post-Watergate independence.

Some whistleblowers have been loath to trust him with revelations that might harm the administration, according to interviews with more than a dozen current and former U.S. officials, or their attorneys, several of whom spoke on condition of anonymity because they feared retaliation.

"There are a lot of people concerned he's not the same old Chuck Grassley," said Eric Woolson, author of a 1995 biography of Grassley who once served as a Grassley campaign spokesman.

Grassley rejected that criticism, saying whistleblowers call him regardless of who is in the White House. His office's online portal has received more than 5,300 complaints in 2025, about the same level as past years, staffers reported.

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"His entire career, he's the guy people will trust," said Jason Foster, a former chief investigative counsel to Grassley who founded Empower Oversight, a group that has advocated on behalf of FBI agents disciplined under the Biden administration.

Staunch Trump ally

Many of Grassley's recent actions, however, suggest he has evolved from being a fiercely independent moderate eager to sniff out fraud to being a stalwart Trump ally, according to Democrats and whistleblower advocates.

Some were particularly alarmed at Grassley's dismissal of witnesses who raised concerns about the June nomination of Emil Bove, a high-ranking Justice Department official and former Trump lawyer, to a lifetime federal appeals court seat.

Among several officials who came forward was Justice Department lawyer Erez Reuveni, who said he was fired for refusing to go along with Bove's plans to defy court orders and withhold information from judges to advance the administration's aggressive deportation goals.

Grassley said his staff tried to investigate some of the claims but that lawyers for one whistleblower would not give his staff all the materials they requested in time. Instead of delaying the hearing to dig further, Grassley circled the wagons behind Trump's nominee.

The "vicious rhetoric, unfair accusations and abuse directed at Mr. Bove," Grassley said in a speech, have "crossed the line."

Stacey Young, a former Justice Department lawyer who founded Justice Connection, a network of department alumni mobilized to uphold the department's traditionally apolitical workforce, said she was disappointed Grassley has not used his influence to condemn firings at the department.

"How is the congressional majority not screaming bloody murder? We are watching the near decimation of DOJ in real-time, and Congress is sitting by doing nothing," she said. "Does Sen. Grassley think it's OK that people get fired for doing their jobs?"

At a September oversight hearing, Grassley passed up a chance to grill Patel on a series of terminations of line agents and high-level supervisors, including five whose abrupt and still-unexplained dismissals had generated headlines weeks earlier.

When Democrats pressed Patel about his use of the bureau's plane for personal reasons, Grassley chided Senate colleagues for their disinterest in the travel practices of previous directors.

Grassley has also been an eager conduit for an FBI leadership seeking to expose what it insists was misconduct and overreach in an investigation during the Biden administration into Trump's efforts to overturn the 2020 election.

He has released batches of sensitive documents from that investigation, known as "Arctic Frost," that he says have been furnished by FBI whistleblowers or that have been labeled as "Produced by FBI Director Kash Patel." The records are not the type of documents federal law enforcement would typically make public on its own.

Advocates dismayed over Grassley response to IG firings

Whistleblower advocates said they were dismayed when Grassley failed to take a robust stance when Trump, within days of taking office, fired without cause some inspectors general.

Even some Republican-appointed inspectors general accused Trump of violating a law requiring the White House to provide 30-day notice and rationale to Congress. If any Republican were going to stand up for them, some of the fired inspectors general said, they expected it to be Grassley.

"He has been uncharacteristically silent," said Mark Greenblatt, a Trump appointee at the Interior Department who was among those fired. "It is unimaginable that the Grassley of a few years ago, the man who held nominees and fired off blistering threats at the smallest provocation to protect inspectors general, would be so silent in the face of these assaults."

Grassley responded to the purge by sending Trump a letter requesting officials "immediately" spell out their case-by-case specific reasons for the dismissals.

It took the White House eight months to respond. In a two-page letter, it reasserted presidential authority to fire inspectors general at will and made no attempt to explain its rationale other than to cite "changed priorities."

2 killed in Russia while Ukraine's energy infrastructure is targeted as peace talks press on

By The Associated Press undefined

At least two people were killed in a drone attack in Russia's southwestern Saratov region and parts of Ukraine went without power following targeted assaults on energy infrastructure, local authorities said Saturday, as U.S.-led peace talks on ending the war press on.

The drone attack damaged a residential building and several windows were also blown out at a kindergarten and clinic, said Saratov regional Gov. Roman Busargin.

Russia's defense ministry said it had shot down 41 Ukrainian drones over Russian territory overnight.

In Ukraine, Russia launched overnight drone and missile strikes on five Ukrainian regions, targeting energy and port infrastructure. Ukrainian Interior Minister Ihor Klymenko said Saturday that over a million people were without electricity in the country.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Russia had sent over 450 drones and 30 missiles into Ukraine overnight.

An attack on the Black Sea city of Odesa caused grain silos to catch fire at the port, Ukrainian deputy prime minister and reconstruction minister Oleksiy Kuleba said.

Two people were wounded in attacks on the wider Odesa region, according to regional head Oleh Kiper.

Kyiv and its Western allies say Russia is trying to cripple the Ukrainian power grid and deny civilians access to heat, light and running water for a fourth consecutive winter, in what Ukrainian officials call "weaponizing" the cold.

The latest round of attacks came after Kremlin adviser Yuri Ushakov said Friday that Russian police and National Guard will stay on in eastern Ukraine's Donbas and oversee the industry-rich region, even if a peace settlement ends Russia's nearly four-year war in Ukraine. This underscores Moscow's ambition to maintain its presence in Donbas post-war. Ukraine is likely to reject such a stance as U.S.-led negotiations drag on.

Moscow will give its blessing to a ceasefire only after Ukraine's forces have withdrawn from the front line, Ushakov said in comments published in Russian business daily Kommersant.

Meanwhile, Germany is set to host Zelenskyy on Monday for talks as peace efforts gain momentum and European leaders seek to steer negotiations.

For months, American negotiators have tried to navigate the demands of each side as U.S. President Donald Trump presses for a swift end to Russia's war while growing increasingly exasperated by delays. The search for possible compromises has run into a major obstacle over who keeps Ukrainian territory currently occupied by Russian forces.

Expert tips to ease financial pressure and avoid holiday overspending

By ADRIANA MORGA Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Are you feeling overwhelmed by the pressure to spend money on gifts, parties, and travel this holiday season?

The job market is tough, student loan and credit card debt are rising, and prices for many items remain high due to inflation. If you're feeling financially strained, know that you're not the only one feeling that way, said Lindsay Bryan-Podvin, a financial therapist and host of the Mind Money Balance podcast.

To avoid putting additional pressure on your finances, use the the holidays as a time to be extra-mindful of how you spend. Remember that spending money isn't the only way to show your love to your friends and family.

"We add on all of the years of nostalgia and pressure that we put on the holidays to meet some sort of picture-perfect version," Bryan-Podvin said.

From setting a budget to creating your own traditions, here are expert recommendations to avoid finan-

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cial stress this holiday season:

Start with a budget

What is marketed as “the most wonderful time of the year” can quickly become stressful, Jennifer Seitz, director of education at family finance app Greenlight, said. Setting a budget can help you avoid overspending on gifts, decorations, or any other holiday expenses.

“Be sure to include your travel, your shipping, your seasonal tipping, knowing what you plan to spend in each category and then having a cap in place can make it easier to avoid debt in January,” Seitz said.

While having a budget is the first step, sticking to it is equally essential.

Bryan-Podvin also recommended that you include your regular debt payments in your holiday budget. That way, you avoid falling behind or acquiring more debt.

Shop around for the best deals

When you’re doing your holiday gift shopping, look for sales, coupons or other holiday discounts so you can reduce your overall costs, said Trae Bodge, a shopping expert.

“I’m always looking for maybe a coupon code so I can save a certain percentage off, or I can earn cash back, or I can get a free shipping offer. I really believe in those tools and use them every single time I shop,” Bodge said.

Bodge also recommends you try finding deals with browser extensions such as PayPal Honey and Rakuten.

Decide what matters most to you

The holidays are the season of giving, but spending too much money and energy can have adverse effects on your mental health. Deciding what you care about most can help you avoid financial stress.

Bryan-Podvin recommends that you write down your holiday expenses: travel, celebrations, gifts, etc. Then ask yourself if buying or participating in all of those activities and costs feels good.

“That helps you prioritize what are the things that are most important to you this holiday season,” she said.

While many people equate how much they spend on gifts or how many events they attend with how much they care for their loved ones, that is not the best way to approach the holiday season if you’re financially strained.

Don’t be afraid to say no

Between work parties, family functions and gatherings with friends, the holiday season can quickly become overwhelming both emotionally and financially. If you’re feeling stressed, don’t be afraid to place a boundary and say no to an event or a gift exchange.

“Most people who you say a boundary to are going to understand and (some) are going to be relieved,” Bryan-Podvin said.

Being open about your money can be difficult, but sharing if you are struggling with debt or other financial issues can help family and friends understand that they should prioritize low-cost gifts or activities.

Create your own traditions

In recent years, Seitz has noticed a shift away from spending money on goods and more of a focus on creating meaningful experiences with family.

“I think it’s really important for families to create alternative forms of joy that aren’t necessarily tied to buying. Kids often remember those memories and those traditions, most of all,” Seitz said.

New ways of celebrating don’t have to include a greater expense, they can be as simple as organizing a pancake-making morning with the entire family, playing a new board game, or doing a homemade gift exchange.

Gaza amputees struggle to rebuild lives as the enclave faces shortages of prosthetic limbs

By ABDEL KAREEM HANA and FATMA KHALED Associated Press

NUSEIRAT, Gaza Strip (AP) — Sitting in her wheelchair, Haneen al-Mabhough dreams of rebuilding her family, of cradling a new baby. She dreams of walking again. But with her leg gone, her life in Gaza is on hold, she says, as she waits to go abroad for further treatment.

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An Israeli airstrike in July 2024 smashed her home in central Gaza as she and her family slept. All four of her daughters were killed, including her 5-month-old baby. Her husband was severely burned. Al-Mabhouh's legs were crushed under the rubble, and doctors had to amputate her right leg above the knee.

"For the past year and a half, I have been unable to move around, to live like others. For the past year and a half, I have been without children," she said, speaking at her parents' home.

The 2-month-old ceasefire in Gaza has been slow to bring help for thousands of Palestinians who suffered amputations from Israeli bombardment over the past two years. The World Health Organization estimates there are some 5,000 to 6,000 amputees from the war, 25% of them children.

Those who lost limbs are struggling to adapt, faced with a shortage of prosthetic limbs and long delays in medical evacuations out of Gaza.

The WHO said a shipment of essential prosthetic supplies recently made it into Gaza. That appears to be the first significant shipment for the past two years.

Previously, Israel had let in almost no ready-made prosthetic limbs or material to manufacture limbs since the war began, according to Loay Abu Saif, the head of the disability program at Medical Aid for Palestinians, or MAP, and Nevin Al Ghussein, acting director of the Artificial Limbs and Polio Center in Gaza City.

The Israeli military body in charge of coordinating aid, known as COGAT, did not respond when asked how many prosthetic supplies had entered during the war or about its policies on such supplies.

'My future is paralyzed'

Al-Mabhouh was asleep with her baby girl in her arms when the strike hit their home in Nuseirat, she said. For several weeks while recovering in the hospital, al-Mabhouh had no idea her children had been killed.

She underwent multiple surgeries. Her hand still has difficulty moving. Her remaining leg remains shattered, held together with rods. She needs a bone graft and other treatments that are only available outside of Gaza.

She was put on the list for medical evacuation 10 months ago but still hasn't gotten permission to leave Gaza.

Waiting for her chance to go, she lives at her parents' house. She needs help changing clothes and can't even hold a pen, and remains crushed by grief over her daughters. "I never got to hear her say 'mama,' see her first tooth or watch her take her first steps," she said of her baby.

She dreams of having a new child but can't until she gets treatment.

"It's my right to live, to have another child, to regain what I lost, to walk, just to walk again," she said. "Now my future is paralyzed. They destroyed my dreams."

Medical evacuations remain slow

The ceasefire has hardly brought any increase in medical evacuations for the 16,500 Palestinians the U.N. says are waiting to get vital treatment abroad — not just amputees, but patients suffering many kinds of chronic conditions or wounds.

As of Dec. 1, 235 patients have been evacuated since the ceasefire began in October, just under five a day. In the months before that, the average was about three a day.

Israel last week said it was ready to allow patients and other Palestinians to leave Gaza via the Israeli-held Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt. But it's unsure that will happen because Egypt, which controls the crossing's other side, demands Rafah also be opened for Palestinians to enter Gaza as called for under the ceasefire deal.

Dr. Richard Peepkorn, the WHO's representative in the occupied Palestinian territory, told The Associated Press that the backlog is caused by the lack of countries to host the evacuated patients. He said new medevac routes need to be opened, especially to the Israeli-occupied West Bank and east Jerusalem, where hospitals are ready to receive patients.

For those waiting, life grinds to a standstill

Yassin Marouf lies in a tent in central Gaza, his left foot amputated, his right leg barely held together with rods.

The 23-year-old and his brother were hit by Israeli shelling in May as they returned from visiting their

home in northern Gaza that their family had been forced to flee. His brother was killed. Marouf lay bleeding on the ground, as a stray dog attacked his mangled left leg.

Doctors say his right leg will also need to be amputated, unless he can travel abroad for operations that might save it. Marouf said he can't afford painkillers and can't go to the hospital regularly to have his bandages changed as they're supposed to.

"If I want to go to the bathroom, I need two or three people to carry me," he said.

Mohamed al-Naggar had been pursuing an IT degree at the University of Palestine before the war.

Seven months ago, shrapnel pierced his left leg during strikes on the house where his family was sheltering. Doctors amputated his leg above the knee. His right leg was also badly injured and shrapnel remains in parts of his body.

Despite four surgeries and physical therapy, the 21-year-old al-Naggar can't move around.

"I'd like to travel abroad and put on a prosthetic and graduate from college and be normal like young people outside Gaza," he said.

Gaza faces prosthetic limb shortage

Some 42,000 Palestinians have suffered life-changing injuries in the war, including amputations, brain trauma, spinal cord injuries and major burns, the WHO said in an October report.

The situation has "improved slightly" for those with assistance needs but "there is still a huge overall shortage of assistive products," such as wheelchairs, walkers and crutches. Gaza has only eight prosthetists able to manufacture and fit artificial limbs, the WHO said in a statement to the AP.

The Artificial Limbs and Polio Center in Gaza City, one of two prosthetics centers still operating in the territory, received a shipment of material to manufacture limbs just before the war began in 2023, said its director, Al Ghussein. Another small shipment entered in December 2024, but nothing since.

The center has been able to provide artificial limbs for 250 cases over the course of the war, but supplies are running out, Al Ghussein said.

No pre-made prosthetic legs or arms have entered, according to Abu Saif of MAP, who said Israel does not ban them, but its procedures cause delays and "in the end they ignore it."

Ibrahim Khalif wants a prosthetic right leg so he can get a job doing manual labor or cleaning houses to support his pregnant wife and children.

In January, he lost his leg when an Israeli airstrike hit Gaza City while he was out getting food.

"I used to be the provider for my kids, but now I'm sitting here," Khalif said. "I think of how I was and what I've become."

What to know about King Charles III's cancer treatment and his message to the public

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Medics and health charities on Saturday praised King Charles III for giving a public update on his cancer treatment, saying his call for people to get tested for the disease could save lives.

In a strikingly personal video statement, the British monarch acknowledged that a cancer diagnosis can feel "overwhelming," but said catching the disease early brings "the precious gift of hope."

Here's what to know about the king's condition and his message.

A royal health update

The 77-year-old king said in a statement broadcast Friday that his treatment schedule will be reduced in the new year, "thanks to early diagnosis, effective intervention and adherence to 'doctors' orders.'"

He encouraged others to take advantage of screening programs such as those for breast, bowel and cervical cancer offered by Britain's public health service.

"Early diagnosis quite simply saves lives," the king said in the statement aired during a "Stand Up to Cancer" telethon on TV station Channel 4. He said catching the disease early had allowed him "to continue leading a full and active life even while undergoing treatment."

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Charles has received outpatient treatment for almost two years. Buckingham Palace did not say the king is in remission, but that his treatment is moving to a "precautionary phase" and his condition will be monitored to ensure his continued recovery.

Diagnosed in 2024

Charles announced in February 2024 that he had been diagnosed with cancer, and, in a break from centuries of secrecy about royal health, he has since spoken about the illness, using his story to promote cancer awareness and treatment.

The openness has limits, though. The king has not disclosed what type of cancer he has or what kind of treatment he is receiving. The palace said it was an intentional decision designed to ensure his message reaches the widest possible audience.

The king's cancer was discovered after treatment for an enlarged prostate. While doctors ruled out prostate cancer, tests revealed "a separate issue of concern," palace officials said last year.

Charles suspended his public appearances for about two months after his diagnosis. Since returning to the public eye, he has visited cancer treatment centers across the country and shared stories with fellow patients.

Setting an example

British cancer charities said the number of people seeking information about cancer jumped after the king revealed he was undergoing treatment.

"I know from my own experience that a cancer diagnosis can feel overwhelming," he said in his video statement. "Yet I also know that early detection is the key that can transform treatment journeys, giving invaluable time to medical teams – and, to their patients, the precious gift of hope."

Gemma Peters, chief executive at the charity Macmillan Cancer Support, said: "We are incredibly grateful to His Majesty the King for continuing to share his experience of cancer with such openness and honesty."

Michelle Mitchell, chief executive of the charity Cancer Research UK, wished the king well and said that "when public figures speak openly about their cancer diagnosis, it can prompt others to check in on their health."

Broadcaster Jonathan Dimbleby, the king's authorized biographer, said the statement was "a remarkable thing for a monarch to do."

"It takes guts, and the fact that he came out and did that will save lives," Dimbleby said.

The Princess of Wales, who announced her own cancer diagnosis six weeks after her father-in-law, has also given updates on her treatment. Kate, 43, announced in January that her cancer is in remission.

Iran raises gasoline prices for the first time since deadly 2019 protests

By NASSER KARIMI and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Iran introduced a new pricing tier Saturday for its nationally subsidized gasoline, attempting to rein in spiraling costs for the first time since a price hike in 2019 that sparked nationwide protests and a crackdown that reportedly killed over 300 people.

Cheap gasoline has been viewed for generations as a birthright in Iran, sparking mass demonstrations as far back as 1964 when a price increase forced the shah to put military vehicles on the streets to replace those of striking taxi drivers.

But Iran's theocracy faces a growing squeeze from the country's rapidly depreciating rial currency and economic sanctions imposed due to Tehran's nuclear program.

That has made the cost of having some of the world's cheapest gasoline at a few pennies per gallon that much more expensive. However, the government's hesitant move toward increasing prices likely signals it wants to avoid any confrontation with the nation's exhausted public after Israel launched a 12-day war on the country in June.

"Our discontent has no result," fumed Saeed Mohammadi, a teacher who works as a taxi driver in his spare time to make ends meet. "The government does whatever it likes. They don't ask people if they

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agree or not.”

New rate is still pennies per gallon

At four gas stations in northern Tehran on Saturday morning, drivers seemed relaxed as they refueled in clear, cold weather. Single police vehicles were stationed nearby at times, but there were no long lines at the pumps or other visible problems.

The new pricing system implemented Saturday adds a third pricing level to the country’s long-running subsidy system. The revised structure allows motorists to continue receiving 60 liters (15 gallons) per month at the subsidized rate of 15,000 rials per liter, or 1.25 U.S. cents, and the next 100 liters (26 gallons) will remain at 30,000 rials a liter, or 2.5 cents.

Anything purchased beyond that falls under the new pricing scheme of 50,000 rials per liter, or about 4 cents. Iran introduced fuel rationing back in 2007, but that has yet to ease demand for the ultracheap gasoline.

Even at that new rate, Iranian gasoline prices remain among the lowest in the world.

The difference between the cost of production and delivering the fuel and the price at the pump is the subsidy paid by Iran’s government. The Paris-based International Energy Agency ranked Iran as paying the world’s second-highest energy subsidy costs in 2022, behind only Russia. The IEA put Iran’s oil subsidies at \$52 billion that year, with Iranian officials acknowledging tens of billions of dollars a year go toward artificially keeping energy prices low.

Tehran-based economist Hossein Raghfar said that since 2009, the price of gasoline has grown 15-fold, offering a pessimistic view of the government’s subsidies.

“Not only did it fail in lessening the budget deficit, but it also trapped the country’s economy in a negative loop of inflation and budget deficit,” he said.

Hamid Rezapour, a 35-year-old bank teller, said he believed Iran’s government had “no choice except to increase the price to manage the country’s economy.”

“It needs more money to pay for public needs,” he said. “To me, it is an indirect tax though in a messy economy it barely works.”

First hike since 2019 protests

The move is the most significant change to Iran’s fuel-subsidy system since 2019, when a sudden 50% jump in subsidized prices and a 300% increase in the rate for purchases beyond quota sparked nationwide protests.

Security forces cracked down on demonstrations across 100 cities and towns, with some protesters burning down gas stations and banks. The crackdown that followed killed at least 321 people, according to Amnesty International. Thousands were detained.

Critics say every single 10,000-rial increase in gasoline prices will lead to as much as a 5% increase in inflation. Currently, the nation is struggling with an annual inflation rate of some 40%.

But cheap gas provides an opportunity for employment for the country. There are 25 million vehicles, including 3 million public and government-affiliated cars, as well as 6 million motorbikes in the Islamic Republic. Reportedly, more than 8 million Iranians work as taxi drivers through online platforms, nearly 10% of the population. Uber, meanwhile, has 8.8 million drivers and couriers worldwide.

“It is a start for amending the trend of fuel consumption,” Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad earlier told journalists.

Officials’ comments suggest Iran may seek steeper price increases in the future, as the government reviews prices every three months.

Mohammad Reza Assadi, a 60-year-old taxi driver, offered skepticism that any further protest would make a change.

People have poured into the streets over hikes in the gasoline price in the past, he said, “but they returned home tired and hopeless later at dusk.”

Fighting rages on Thai-Cambodian border despite Trump's ceasefire claim

By JINTAMAS SAKSORNCHAI and GRANT PECK Associated Press

SURIN, Thailand (AP) — Fighting raged Saturday morning along the border of Thailand and Cambodia, even after U.S. President Donald Trump, acting as a mediator, declared that he had won agreement from both countries for a ceasefire.

Thai officials have said they did not agree to a ceasefire, and Cambodia has not commented on Trump's claim. Its defense ministry instead said Thai jets carried out airstrikes Saturday morning. Cambodian media reported Trump's claim without elaborating.

Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow said Saturday that some of Trump's remarks didn't "reflect an accurate understanding of the situation."

"We regret and we're disappointed that some of the points made by President Trump have bearing upon the feeling of the Thai people, Thailand, because we consider ourselves — we are proud, in fact — to be the oldest treaty ally of the United States in the region," he said.

The latest large-scale fighting was set off by a skirmish on Dec. 7 that wounded two Thai soldiers and derailed a ceasefire promoted by Trump that ended five days of earlier combat in July over longstanding territorial disputes.

The July ceasefire was brokered by Malaysia and pushed through by pressure from Trump, who threatened to withhold trade privileges unless Thailand and Cambodia agreed. It was formalized in more detail in October at a regional meeting in Malaysia that Trump attended.

About two dozen people have officially been reported killed in this past week's fighting, while hundreds of thousands have been displaced on both sides of the border.

The Thai military acknowledges 11 of its troops have been killed, while estimating there have been 165 fatalities among Cambodian soldiers. Cambodia has not announced military casualties, but has said at least 11 civilians have been killed and 76 wounded.

Trump on Friday, after speaking to Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul and Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet, had announced an agreement to restart the ceasefire.

"They have agreed to CEASE all shooting effective this evening, and go back to the original Peace Accord made with me, and them, with the help of the Great Prime Minister of Malaysia, Anwar Ibrahim," Trump said in his Truth Social post.

Trump's claim came after midnight in Bangkok. Thai Prime Minister Anutin had after his call with Trump said he had explained Thailand's reasons for fighting and said peace would depend on Cambodia ceasing its attacks first. The Thai foreign ministry later explicitly disputed Trump's claim that a ceasefire had been reached. Anutin's busy day on Friday including dissolving Parliament so new elections could be held early next year.

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet, in comments posted early Saturday morning, also made no mention of a ceasefire.

He said he held phone conversations on Friday night with Trump, and a night earlier with Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, and thanked both "for their continuous efforts to achieve a long-lasting peace between Cambodia and Thailand."

"Cambodia is ready to cooperate in any way that is needed," Hun Manet wrote.

Thailand has been carrying out airstrikes on what it says are strictly military targets, while Cambodia has been firing thousands of medium-range BM-21 rockets that have caused havoc but relatively few casualties.

BM-21 rocket launchers can fire up to 40 rockets at a time with a range of 30-40 kilometers (19-25 miles). These rockets cannot be precisely targeted and have landed largely in areas from where most people have already been evacuated.

However, the Thai army announced Saturday that BM-21 rockets had hit a civilian area in Sisaket province, seriously injuring two civilians who had heard warning sirens and had been running toward a bunker for safety.

Historic rains and flooding trigger dramatic rescues in Washington state

By CEDAR ATTANASIO, CLAIRE RUSH and HALLIE GOLDEN Associated Press

BURLINGTON, Wash. (AP) — When Eddie Wicks and his wife went to bed in their house next to the Snoqualmie River on a Washington state farm known for its sunflower mazes and Christmas trees, they weren't too worried about the flooding heading their way.

After 30 years living in the city of Duvall northeast of Seattle, their family had plenty of experience with floods and always made it through largely unscathed. But as they moved their two donkeys to higher ground and their eight goats to their outdoor kitchen, the water began to rise much quicker than anything they'd experienced before.

"It was hours, not days," he said. "In four hours it had to come up 4 feet."

As the water engulfed their home Thursday afternoon, deputies from the King County Sheriff's Office marine rescue dive unit were able to rescue them and their dog, taking them on a boat the half mile (800 meters) across their field, which had been transformed into a lake.

They were among the thousands forced to evacuate as an unusually strong atmospheric river dumped a foot (30 centimeters) or more of rain in parts of western and central Washington over several days this week and swelled rivers, inundating communities and prompting dramatic rescues from rooftops and vehicles.

The record floodwaters were expected to continue to slowly recede Saturday, but authorities warn that waters will remain high for days, and that there is still danger from potential levee failures or mudslides. There is also the threat of more rain forecast for Sunday.

Still, no deaths have been reported.

Authorities have yet to estimate the costs, but photos and videos show widespread damage, with entire communities or neighborhoods flooded around western and central Washington. Officials have conducted dozens of water rescues, debris and mudslides have closed highways, and raging torrents have washed out roads and bridges.

President Donald Trump has signed the state's request for an emergency declaration, Washington Gov. Bob Ferguson said.

Officials issued "go now" orders Wednesday to tens of thousands of residents in the Skagit River flood plain north of Seattle, including the farming city of Burlington, home to nearly 10,000 people. By Friday morning, muddy water overflowed a slough and rushed into homes, prompting more urgent warnings for Burlington.

The rain arriving Sunday will cause rivers to rise again, said Robert Ezelle, director of the Washington Military Department's emergency management division.

National Guard fans out to help with evacuations

National Guard members knocked on hundreds of doors in Burlington early Friday to tell residents about the evacuation notice and help transport them to a shelter. By late morning the evacuation order was lifted for part of the city and waters were slowly receding.

The Skagit River drains a wide swath of the rugged Cascade Range before winding west across broad, low-lying farmlands and tulip fields on its way to Puget Sound. Cities like Burlington sit on that delta, leaving them especially vulnerable to floods.

The river crested overnight Thursday into Friday at 37 feet (11.2 meters) in the valley's biggest city, Mount Vernon, surpassing the previous record by a few inches. A flood wall held fast and protected the downtown area.

About 1,000 Burlington residents had to evacuate in the middle of the night, Ferguson said. The water was reportedly 2 to 3 feet (60 to 90 centimeters) deep in certain areas as it flooded homes, police department spokesperson Michael Lumpkin said.

Mario Rincón had been staying at a hotel with his family, including a week-old infant. They returned to their Burlington property Friday but couldn't get inside, as murky floodwaters reached part-way up the first floor.

"It's going to be a few days before the water recedes," he said.

Near the U.S.-Canada border, Sumas, Nooksack and Everson — which together have about 6,500 residents — were inundated. The border crossing at Sumas was closed.

In a social media message, Sumas Mayor Bruce Bosch acknowledged community members were anxious to return to their homes.

"Hang in there," he wrote.

In King County, crews worked through the night to fill a sinkhole on a levee along the Green River in the Seattle suburb of Tukwila, County Executive Girmay Zahilay said Friday.

Crews reach people by boat and by helicopter

Authorities across the state in recent days have rescued people from cars and homes.

Helicopters rescued two families on Thursday from the roofs of homes in Sumas that had been flooded, according to Frank Cain Jr., battalion chief for Whatcom County Fire District 14.

Near Deming, two homes collapsed into the Nooksack River as erosion undercut them. No one was inside at the time.

Climate change has been linked to some intense rainfall. Scientists say that without specific study they cannot directly link a single weather event to climate change, but in general it's responsible for more intense and more frequent extreme storms, droughts, floods and wildfires.

What to know about Kilmar Abrego Garcia's release from immigration custody

BALTIMORE (AP) — Kilmar Abrego Garcia, whose mistaken deportation helped galvanize opposition to President Donald Trump's immigration policies, was released from immigration detention on Thursday, and a judge has temporarily blocked any further efforts to detain him.

Abrego Garcia currently can't be deported to his home country of El Salvador thanks to a 2019 immigration court order that found he had a "well founded fear" of danger there. However, the Trump administration has said he cannot stay in the U.S. Over the past few months, government officials have said they would deport him to Uganda, Eswatini, Ghana and, most recently, Liberia.

Abrego Garcia is fighting his deportation in federal court in Maryland, where his attorneys claim the administration is manipulating the immigration system to punish him for successfully challenging his earlier deportation.

Here's what to know about the latest developments in the case:

Who is Kilmar Abrego Garcia?

Abrego Garcia is a Salvadoran citizen with an American wife and child who has lived in Maryland for years. He immigrated to the U.S. illegally as a teenager to join his brother, who had become a U.S. citizen. In 2019, an immigration judge granted him protection from being deported back to his home country.

While he was allowed to live and work in the U.S. under Immigration and Customs Enforcement supervision, he was not given residency status. Earlier this year, he was mistakenly deported to El Salvador, despite the earlier court ruling.

In custody since March

When Abrego Garcia was deported in March, he was held in a notoriously brutal Salvadoran prison despite having no criminal record.

The Trump administration initially fought efforts to bring him back to the U.S. but eventually complied after the U.S. Supreme Court weighed in. He returned to the U.S. in June, only to face an arrest warrant on human smuggling charges in Tennessee. Abrego Garcia was held in a Tennessee jail for more than two months before he was released on Friday, Aug. 22, to await trial in Maryland under home detention.

His freedom lasted a weekend. On the following Monday, he reported to the Baltimore immigration office for a check-in and was immediately taken into immigration custody. Officials announced plans to deport him to a series of African countries, but they were blocked by an order from U.S. District Judge Paula Xinis in Maryland.

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No deportation order

On Thursday, after months of legal filings and hearings, Xinis ruled that Abrego Garcia should be released immediately. Her ruling hinged on what was likely a procedural error by the immigration judge who heard his case in 2019.

Normally, in a case like this, an immigration judge will first issue an order of removal. Then the judge will essentially freeze that order by issuing a "withholding of removal" order, according to Memphis immigration attorney Andrew Rankin.

In Abrego Garcia's case, the judge granted withholding of removal to El Salvador because he found Abrego Garcia's life could be in danger there. However, the judge never took the first step of issuing the order of removal. The government argued in Xinis' court that the order of removal could be inferred, but the judge disagreed.

Without a final order of removal, Abrego Garcia can't be deported, Xinis ruled.

Possible next steps

The only way to get an order of removal is to go back to immigration court and ask for one, Rankin said. But reopening the immigration case is a gamble because Abrego Garcia's attorneys would likely seek protection from deportation in the form of asylum or some other type of relief.

One wrinkle is that immigration courts are officially part of the executive branch, and the judges there are not generally viewed as being as independent as federal judges.

"There might be independence in some areas, but if the administration wants a certain result, by all accounts it seems they're going to exert the pressure on the individuals to get that result," Rankin said. "I hope he gets a fair shake, and two lawyers make arguments — somebody wins, somebody loses — instead of giving it to an immigration judge with a 95% denial rate, where everybody in the world knows how it's gonna go down."

Alternatively, the government could appeal Xinis' order to the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals and try to get her ruling overturned, Rankin said. If the appeals court agreed with the government that the final order of removal was implied, there could be no need to reopen the immigration case.

Free for now

In compliance with Xinis' order, Abrego Garcia was released from immigration detention in Pennsylvania on Thursday evening and allowed to return home for the first time in months. However, he was also told to report to an immigration officer in Baltimore early the next morning.

Fearing that he would be detained again, his attorneys asked Xinis for a temporary restraining order. Xinis filed that order early Friday morning. It prohibits immigration officials from taking Abrego Garcia back into custody, at least for the time being. A hearing on the issue could happen as early as next week.

The criminal case continues

Meanwhile, in Tennessee, Abrego Garcia has pleaded not guilty in the criminal case where he is charged with human smuggling and conspiracy to commit human smuggling.

Prosecutors claim he accepted money to transport, within the United States, people who were in the country illegally. The charges stem from a 2022 traffic stop in Tennessee for speeding. Body camera footage from a Tennessee Highway Patrol officer shows a calm exchange with Abrego Garcia. There were nine passengers in the car, and the officers discussed among themselves their suspicions of smuggling. However, Abrego Garcia was eventually allowed to continue driving with only a warning.

Abrego Garcia has asked U.S. District Court Judge Waverly Crenshaw to dismiss the smuggling charges on the grounds of "selective or vindictive prosecution."

Crenshaw earlier found "some evidence that the prosecution against him may be vindictive" and said many statements by Trump administration officials "raise cause for concern." Crenshaw specifically cited a statement by Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche on a Fox News Channel program that seemed to suggest the Justice Department charged Abrego Garcia because he won his wrongful-deportation case.

The two sides have been sparring over whether senior Justice Department officials, including Blanche, can be required to testify in the case.

Trump says he's sealed Thailand-Cambodia ceasefire, but fighting continues

By AAMER MADHANI and JINTAMAS SAKSORNCHAI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said Friday that Thai and Cambodian leaders had agreed to renew a truce after days of deadly clashes, even as Thai and Cambodian officials suggested there is still work to do to get the ceasefire that the U.S. administration had helped broker earlier this year back on track.

Trump announced the agreement to restart the ceasefire in a social media posting following calls with Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul and Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet.

"They have agreed to CEASE all shooting effective this evening, and go back to the original Peace Accord made with me, and them, with the help of the Great Prime Minister of Malaysia, Anwar Ibrahim," Trump said in his Truth Social post.

The Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Saturday disputed Trump's assertion that a ceasefire was agreed to without providing any details, and Thai defense ministry spokesperson Surasant Kongsiri said clashes were still ongoing. Cambodia's defense ministry reported that Thailand continued to carry out strikes early Saturday. Those strikes could not be independently verified.

Thai prime minister differs with Trump

After speaking with Trump on Friday but before the U.S. president's social media posting, Anutin said he reiterated to Trump that Thailand's position was to keep fighting until Cambodia no longer posed a threat to its sovereignty.

"I told him that he had better talk to our friend. Don't just say that we have to stop fighting," Anutin said. "You should announce to the world that Cambodia will stop firing, will withdraw their forces, will clear all land mines. Please show us the actions."

Trump wrote in his Friday social media post, "The roadside bomb that originally killed and wounded numerous Thai Soldiers was an accident, but Thailand nevertheless retaliated very strongly."

The comment was an apparent reference to recent land mine explosions along the border that triggered tensions between the two countries.

The Thai army reported multiple injuries from the explosions but no deaths and Anutin on Saturday refuted Trump's characterization.

"It's definitely not a roadside accident," Anutin said Saturday morning on his Facebook account. "Thailand will continue to perform military actions until we feel no more harm and threats to our land and people. I want to make it clear. Our actions this morning already spoke."

Trump, a Republican, said Malaysia's prime minister had played an important role in helping him push Thailand and Cambodia to once again agree to "resolving what could have evolved into a major War between two otherwise wonderful and prosperous Countries!"

The original ceasefire in July was brokered by Malaysia and pushed through by pressure from Trump, who threatened to withhold trade privileges unless Thailand and Cambodia agreed. It was formalized in more detail in October at a regional meeting in Malaysia that Trump attended.

Despite the deal, the two countries carried on a bitter propaganda war and minor cross-border violence continued.

Conflict has a long history

The roots of the Thai-Cambodian border conflict lie in a history of enmity over competing territorial claims. These claims largely stem from a 1907 map created while Cambodia was under French colonial rule, which Thailand maintains is inaccurate. Tensions were exacerbated by a 1962 International Court of Justice ruling that awarded sovereignty to Cambodia, which still riles many Thais.

Thailand has deployed jet fighters to carry out airstrikes on what it says are military targets. Cambodia has deployed BM-21 rocket launchers with a range of 30-40 kilometers (19-25 miles).

According to data collected by public broadcaster ThaiPBS, at least six of the Thai soldiers who were killed were hit by rocket shrapnel.

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The Thai army's northeastern regional command said Thursday that some residential areas and homes near the border were damaged by BM-21 rocket launchers from Cambodian forces.

The Thai army also said it destroyed a tall crane atop a hill held by Cambodia where the centuries-old Preah Vihear temple is located, because it allegedly held electronic and optical devices used for military command and control purposes.

Trump has repeatedly made the exaggerated claim that he has helped solve eight conflicts, including the one between Thailand and Cambodia, since returning to office in January, as evidence of his negotiating prowess. And he's not been shy about his desire to be recognized with a Nobel Peace Prize.

In an exchange with reporters later Friday, Trump credited his administration with doing a "a very good job" with its push to stem the renewed fighting.

"And we got it, I think, straightened out today," Trump said at an unrelated event in the Oval Office. "So Thailand and Cambodia is in good shape."

African and Middle East agreements also under strain

Another ceasefire that Trump takes credit for working out, between the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda, is also under strain, just after the leaders of the African nations traveled to Washington to sign a peace deal.

A joint statement released by the International Contact Group for the Great Lakes expressed "profound concern" over the situation in Congo's South Kivu region, where new deadly violence blamed on the Rwandan-backed M23 militia group has exploded in recent days.

The Great Lakes contact group — which includes Belgium, Britain, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, the United States and the European Union — has urged all sides "to uphold their commitments" under the deal signed last week and "immediately de-escalate the situation."

And Trump's internationally endorsed plan to end the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza is still not finalized and in limbo, with sporadic fighting continuing while a critical second phase remains a work in progress.

Speaker Johnson unveils health care plan as divided Republicans scramble for alternative

By KEVIN FREKING and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate failed to get anywhere on the health care issue this week. Now it's the House's turn to show what it can do.

Speaker Mike Johnson unveiled a Republican alternative late Friday, a last-minute sprint as his party refuses to extend the enhanced tax subsidies for those who buy policies through the Affordable Care Act, also called Obamacare, which are expiring at the end of the year. Those subsidies help lower the cost of coverage.

Johnson, R-La., huddled behind closed doors in the morning — as he did days earlier this week — working to assemble the package for consideration as the House focuses the final days of its 2025 work on health care.

"House Republicans are tackling the real drivers of health care costs to provide affordable care," Johnson said in a statement announcing the package. He said it would be voted on next week.

Later Friday, though, House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries said: "House Republicans have introduced toxic legislation that is completely unserious, hurts hardworking America taxpayers and is not designed to secure bipartisan support. If the bill reaches the House floor, I will strongly oppose it."

Time is running out for Congress to act. Democrats engineered the longest federal government shutdown ever this fall in a failed effort to force Republicans to the negotiating table on health care. But after promising votes, the Senate failed this week to advance both a Republican health care plan and the Democratic-offered bill to extend the tax credits for three years.

Now, with just days to go, Congress is about to wrap up its work with no consensus solution in sight.

What Republicans are proposing

The House Republicans offered a 100-plus-page package that focuses on long-sought GOP proposals

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to enhance access to employer-sponsored health insurance plans and clamp down on so-called pharmacy benefit managers.

Republicans propose expanding access to what's referred to as association health plans, which would allow more small businesses and self-employed individuals to band together and purchase health coverage.

Proponents say such plans increase the leverage businesses have to negotiate a lower rate. But critics say the plans provide skimpier coverage than what is required under the Affordable Care Act.

The Republicans' proposal would also require more data from pharmacy benefit managers, or PBMs, as a way to help control drug costs. Critics say PBMs have padded their bottom line and made it more difficult for independent pharmacists to survive.

Additionally, the GOP plan includes mention of cost-sharing reductions for some lower-income people who rely on Obamacare, but those do not take effect until January 2027.

The emerging package from the House Republicans does not include an extension of an enhanced tax credit for millions of Americans who get insurance coverage through the Affordable Care Act. Put in place during the COVID-19 crisis, that enhanced subsidy expires Dec. 31, leaving most families in the program facing more than double their current out-of-pocket premiums, and in some cases, much more.

What Trump wants

President Donald Trump has said he believes Republicans are going to figure out a better plan than Obamacare — something he has promised for years — but offered few details beyond his idea for providing Americans with stipends to help buy insurance.

"I want to see the billions of dollars go to people, not to the insurance companies," Trump said late Friday during an event at the White House. "And I want to see the people go out and buy themselves great healthcare."

The president did not comment directly on the House's new plan. He has repeatedly touted his idea of sending money directly to Americans to help offset the costs of health care policies, rather than extending the tax credits for those buying policies through Obamacare. It's unclear how much money Trump envisions. The Senate GOP proposal that failed to advance would have provided payments to new health savings accounts of \$1,000 a year for adult enrollees, or \$1,500 for those ages 50 to 64.

It appeared there were no such health savings accounts in the new House GOP plan.

Political pressure is building for many

Going Johnson's route has left vulnerable House Republicans representing key battleground districts in a tough spot.

Frustrated with the delays, a group of more centrist GOP lawmakers is aligning with Democrats to push their own proposals for continuing the tax credits, for now, so that Americans don't face rising health care costs.

They are pursuing several paths for passing a temporary ACA subsidy extension, co-sponsoring a handful of bills. They are also signing onto so-called discharge petitions that could force a floor vote if a majority of the House signs on.

Such petitions are designed to get around the majority's control and are rarely successful, but this year has proven to be an exception. Lawmakers, for example, were able to use a discharge petition to force a vote on the release of the Jeffrey Epstein files held by the Department of Justice.

One petition, filed by Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick, R-Pa., had signatures from 12 Republicans and 12 Democrats as of Friday afternoon. It would force a vote on a bill that includes a two-year subsidy extension and contains provisions designed to combat fraud in the ACA marketplace. There are also restrictions for PBMs, among other things.

Another petition from Rep. Josh Gottheimer, D-N.J., has 39 signatures and is broadly bipartisan. It's a simpler proposal that would force a vote on a one-year ACA enhanced subsidy extension and would include new income caps limiting who qualifies for the enhanced credit.

Both discharge petitions have enough Republicans' support that they would likely succeed if Jeffries encouraged his caucus to jump on board. So far, he's not tipping his hand.

"We're actively reviewing those two discharge petitions and we'll have more to say about it early next

week," Jeffries said.

Meanwhile, Jeffries is pushing Democrats' own discharge petition, which has 214 signatures and would provide for a clean three-year subsidy extension. No Republicans have signed onto that one.

And as Republicans made clear in the Senate this week, a three-year extension without changes to the program has no chance of passing their chamber.

Record floods in Washington state trigger dramatic rescues and evacuations

By CEDAR ATTANASIO and CLAIRE RUSH Associated Press

BURLINGTON, Wash. (AP) — Record floodwaters began slowly receding in Washington state on Friday after triggering evacuations, inundating communities and prompting dramatic rescues from rooftops and vehicles. But authorities warned that waters would still be high for days, and that danger from potential levee failures remained.

"This is not just a one- or two-day crisis," Gov. Bob Ferguson said at a news briefing. "These water levels have been historic, and they're going to remain very high for an extended period of time."

President Donald Trump has signed the state's request for an emergency declaration, Ferguson said.

An unusually strong atmospheric river dumped a foot (30 cm) or more of rain in parts of western Washington over several days and swelled rivers. No deaths have been reported, Ferguson said.

Authorities have yet to estimate the costs, but photos and videos show widespread damage, with entire communities or neighborhoods flooded around western and central Washington. Officials have conducted dozens of water rescues, debris and mudslides have closed highways, and raging torrents have washed out roads or bridges.

Officials issued "go now" orders Wednesday to tens of thousands of residents in the Skagit River flood plain north of Seattle, including the farming city of Burlington, home to nearly 10,000 people. By Friday morning, muddy water overflowed a slough and rushed into homes, prompting more urgent warnings for Burlington.

National Guard fans out amid flood evacuations

National Guard members knocked on hundreds of doors in Burlington early Friday to tell residents about the evacuation notice and help transport them to a shelter if needed. By late morning the evacuation order was lifted for part of the city and waters were slowly receding. But the river remained high, and flash flooding remained a risk due to prolonged pressure on the levees.

The Skagit River drains a wide swath of the rugged Cascade Range before winding west across broad, low-lying farmlands and tulip fields on its way to Puget Sound. Cities like Burlington sit on that delta, leaving them especially vulnerable to floods.

The river crested overnight at 37 feet (11 meters) in the valley's biggest city, Mount Vernon, surpassing the previous record by a few inches. A flood wall completed in Mount Vernon in 2018 held fast and protected the downtown area.

About 1,000 Burlington residents had to evacuate in the middle of the night, Ferguson said. The water was reportedly 2 to 3 feet (0.6 to 0.9 meters) deep in certain areas as it flooded homes, police department spokesperson Michael Lumpkin said.

Mario Rincón had been staying at a hotel with his family, including a week-old infant. They returned to their Burlington property Friday but couldn't get inside to assess the damage, as murky floodwaters reached part-way up the first floor. He had moved some items upstairs in anticipation.

"It's going to be a few days before the water recedes," he said. "We're going to be looking where to stay in the meantime, and it's kind of difficult because my mom and my mother-in-law are visiting from Mexico until the end of December for the holidays."

The heaviest rain is over in the region, but the impact remains widespread.

"It's going to take a while for the flood waters to recede," said Robert Ezelle, director of the Washington Military Department's emergency management division. "There's a lot of water that fell in the mountains

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and it's gonna take its time to work through the river drainages."

More rain is expected beginning Sunday. That will cause rivers to rise again, Ezelle said.

Near the U.S.-Canada border, Sumas, Nooksack and Everson — which together have about 6,500 residents — were inundated. The border crossing at Sumas was closed.

Sumas Mayor Bruce Bosch said much of the city had been "devastated" — just four years after a similar flood. In a social media message, he acknowledged the community was anxious to return to their homes. "Hang in there," he wrote.

In King County, crews worked through the night to fill a sinkhole on a levee along the Green River in the Seattle suburb of Tukwila, county executive Girmay Zahilay said Friday. Another county wastewater employee got trapped inside a treatment facility during flooding but continued to work for days to keep critical plant operations running, Zahilay said.

"That commitment protected public health for millions of people," he said.

Crews reach people by boat and by helicopter

Authorities across Washington state in recent days have rescued people from cars and homes.

Helicopters rescued two families on Thursday from the roofs of homes in Sumas that had been flooded by about 15 feet (4.6 meters) of water, according Frank Cain Jr., battalion chief for Whatcom County Fire District 14.

Near Deming, two homes collapsed into the Nooksack River as erosion undercut them. No one was inside at the time.

Animals were also rescued, including a rooster that had found refuge on a tree branch. Kayakers navigating floodwaters near Burlington hoisted their paddles to save the animal.

Further south in Oregon, a landslide took out a portion of a highway near the central Oregon coast, the state transportation department said, adding it would be a long-term closure.

Climate change has been linked to some intense rainfall. Scientists say that without specific study they cannot directly link a single weather event to climate change, but in general it's responsible for more intense and more frequent extreme storms, droughts, floods and wildfires.

House Democrats release photos of Trump, Clinton and Andrew from Epstein's estate

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Democrats released a selection of photos from the estate of Jeffrey Epstein on Friday, including some of Donald Trump, Bill Clinton and the former Prince Andrew.

The dozens of photos initially released by Democratic lawmakers on the House Oversight Committee were a small part of more than 95,000 they received from the estate of Epstein, who died in a New York jail cell in 2019 while awaiting trial on sex trafficking charges. The photos released Friday were separate from the case files that the Department of Justice is now under compulsion to release, but anticipation is growing as the Trump administration faces a deadline next week to produce the Epstein files that have been the source of conspiracy theories and speculation for years.

The photos were released without captions or context and included a black-and-white image of Trump alongside six women whose faces were blacked out.

The president said he hadn't seen the photos from Epstein's estate released Friday, but they were "no big deal."

Trump said Epstein was "all over Palm Beach" and had "photos with everybody."

Rep. Robert Garcia, the top Democrat on the House Oversight Committee, did not say whether any of the women in the photos was a victim of abuse, but he added, "Our commitment from day one has been to redact any photo, any information that could lead to any sort of harm to any of the victims."

White House spokesperson Abigail Jackson accused Democrats of "selectively releasing cherry-picked photos with random redactions to try and create a false narrative" and called it part of a "Democrat hoax against President Trump."

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Many of the photos have already circulated in the public. Democrats pledged to continue to release photos in the days and weeks ahead, as they look to pressure Trump over his Republican administration's earlier refusal to release documents in the Epstein probe. Garcia said his staff had looked through about a quarter of the images it had received from Epstein's estate, which included photos that were sent to him or that he had in his possession.

"Donald Trump right now needs to release the files to the American public so that the truth can come out and we can actually get some sense of justice for the survivors," Garcia added.

He initially released 19 photos Friday morning, then roughly 70 more photos later Friday, including one of Epstein taking a bath, a photo of him with a swollen lip, photos of his home and a photo of him posing with a book about the scandal.

Trump, once a close friend of Epstein, has said he parted ways with him long before he faced the sex trafficking charges. Clinton, too, has minimized his relationship with Epstein, acknowledging that he traveled on Epstein's private jet but saying through a spokesperson that he had no knowledge of the late financier's crimes. Clinton also has never been accused of misconduct by Epstein's known victims. However, Republicans on the House committee are pushing him and Hillary Clinton to testify in their investigation.

Rep. James Comer, the GOP chair of the House Oversight Committee, threatened late Friday to begin contempt of Congress proceedings against the Clintons if they don't appear next week or reschedule depositions in January.

A spokesperson for the Republican-controlled committee also said that nothing in the documents the committee has received shows "any wrongdoing" by Trump.

Andrew lost his royal titles and privileges this year amid new revelations of his ties to Epstein, though he has denied wrongdoing.

The photo release also included images of the right-wing political operative Steve Bannon, billionaires Richard Branson and Bill Gates, filmmaker Woody Allen, former Treasury Secretary Larry Summers and law professor Alan Dershowitz. The men have denied any wrongdoing in their associations with Epstein, who kept many high-profile figures in his circle of friends.

Amid an earlier release of emails between Summers and Epstein, Summers stepped away from his teaching position at Harvard University and faced other fallout to his standing in academic circles.

Allen has faced allegations from his adopted daughter, Dylan Farrow, of molesting her as a child. He has denied the allegations.

Some lawmakers, however, believe that other high-powered figures could be implicated in Epstein's abuse if the full case files from the Justice Department are released.

Rep. Thomas Massie, a Kentucky Republican who was instrumental in passing a bill to require the public release of the files, said it was a good sign that the Department of Justice has sought to have grand jury material released from several courts.

"The grand jury material is just a small fraction of what the DOJ needs to release, because the FBI and DOJ probably has evidence that they chose not to take to the grand jury because the evidence they're in possession of would implicate other people, not Epstein or Maxwell," he said.

Justice Department asks appeals court to block judge's contempt inquiry in mass deportation case

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department asked an appeals court Friday to block a contempt investigation of the Trump administration for failing to turn around planes carrying Venezuelan migrants to El Salvador in March.

The department also is seeking Chief Judge James Boasberg's removal from the case, accusing him of a "radical, retaliatory, unconstitutional campaign" against the Trump administration.

It marks a dramatic escalation in the Justice Department's lengthy feud with the judge appointed to the bench by Democratic President Barack Obama, setting the stage for a showdown over the judiciary's

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power to serve as a check on an administration that has pushed the boundaries of court orders.

The department asked the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit to rule on its requests before Monday, when Boasberg is scheduled to hear testimony from a former government attorney who filed a whistleblower complaint.

A three-judge panel from the appeals court agreed to temporarily suspend Boasberg's contempt-related order. The panel, composed of two judges nominated by Trump and one nominated by Democratic President Joe Biden, said its administrative stay isn't a ruling on the merits of the government's requests. But it casts some doubt on whether Monday's hearing will proceed as planned.

Department officials claim Boasberg is biased and creating "a circus that threatens the separation of powers and the attorney-client privilege alike."

"The forthcoming hearing has every appearance of an endless fishing expedition aimed at an ever-widening list of witnesses and prolonged testimony. That spectacle is not a genuine effort to uncover any relevant facts," they wrote.

Boasberg has said that a recent ruling by the appeals court gave him the authority to proceed with the contempt inquiry. The judge is trying to determine if there is sufficient evidence to refer the matter for prosecution.

Boasberg, who has been chief judge of the district court in Washington, D.C., since March 2023, has said the Trump administration may have "acted in bad faith" by trying to rush Venezuelan migrants out of the country in defiance of his order blocking their deportations to El Salvador.

In an April 16 order, the judge said he gave the administration "ample opportunity to rectify or explain their actions" but concluded that "none of their responses has been satisfactory."

"The Constitution does not tolerate willful disobedience of judicial orders — especially by officials of a coordinate branch who have sworn an oath to uphold it," Boasberg wrote.

The Trump administration has denied any violation, saying the judge's March 15 directive to return the planes was made verbally in court but not included in his written order.

Trump called for impeaching Boasberg in March. In July, the Justice Department filed a misconduct complaint accusing Boasberg of making improper public comments about Trump and his administration.

In a social media post Friday, Attorney General Pam Bondi accused Boasberg of engaging in "lawless judicial activism."

"This radical, retaliatory, unconstitutional campaign against the Trump Administration will not stand," Bondi wrote.

Boasberg has scheduled a hearing Monday for testimony by former Justice Department attorney Erez Reuveni, whose whistleblower complaint claims a top department official suggested the Trump administration might have to ignore court orders as it prepared to deport Venezuelan migrants.

The judge also scheduled a hearing Tuesday for testimony by Deputy Assistant Attorney General Drew Ensign. The Justice Department has said Ensign conveyed Boasberg's March 15 oral order and a subsequent written order to the Department of Homeland Security.

"This long-running saga never should have begun; should not have continued at all after this Court's last intervention; and certainly should not be allowed to escalate into the unseemly and unnecessary interbranch conflict that it now imminently portends," department officials said in Friday's court filing.

In a written declaration to the court, Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said she made the decision not to return the planes to the U.S. after receiving "privileged legal advice" from the Homeland Security Department's acting general counsel and "through him from the senior leadership of the Department of Justice."

Boasberg called Noem's declaration "cursory" and said it doesn't provide him with enough information to determine whether she willfully violated his March 15 order.

Boasberg on Friday refused to cancel or delay next week's hearings.

"To begin, this inquiry is not some academic exercise," he wrote. "Approximately 137 men were spirited out of this country without a hearing and placed in a high-security prison in El Salvador, where many suf-

ferred abuse and possible torture, despite this Court's order that they should not be disembarked."

Humanoid robots take center stage at Silicon Valley summit, but skepticism remains

By MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writer

MOUNTAIN VIEW, Calif. (AP) — Robots have long been seen as a bad bet for Silicon Valley investors — too complicated, capital-intensive and "boring, honestly," says venture capitalist Modar Alaoui.

But the commercial boom in artificial intelligence has lit a spark under long-simmering visions to build humanoid robots that can move their mechanical bodies like humans and do things that people do.

Alaoui, founder of the Humanoids Summit, gathered more than 2,000 people this week, including top robotics engineers from Disney, Google and dozens of startups, to showcase their technology and debate what it will take to accelerate a nascent industry.

Alaoui says many researchers now believe humanoids or some other kind of physical embodiment of AI are "going to become the norm."

"The question is really just how long it will take," he said.

Disney's contribution to the field, a walking robotic version of "Frozen" character Olaf, will be roaming on its own through Disneyland theme parks in Hong Kong and Paris early next year. Entertaining and highly complex robots that resemble a human — or a snowman — are already here, but the timeline for "general purpose" robots that are a productive member of a workplace or household is farther away.

Even at a conference designed to build enthusiasm for the technology, held at a Computer History Museum that's a temple to Silicon Valley's previous breakthroughs, skepticism remained high that truly humanlike robots will take root anytime soon.

"The humanoid space has a very, very big hill to climb," said Cosima du Pasquier, founder and CEO of Haptica Robotics, which works to give robots a sense of touch. "There's a lot of research that still needs to be solved."

The Stanford University postdoctoral researcher came to the conference in Mountain View, California, just a week after incorporating her startup.

"The first customers are really the people here," she said.

Researchers at the consultancy McKinsey & Company have counted about 50 companies around the world that have raised at least \$100 million to develop humanoids, led by about 20 in China and 15 in North America.

China is leading in part due to government incentives for component production and robot adoption and a mandate last year "to have a humanoid ecosystem established by 2025," said McKinsey partner Ani Kelkar. Displays by Chinese firms dominated the expo section of this week's summit, held Thursday and Friday. The conference's most prevalent humanoids were those made by China's Unitree, in part because researchers in the U.S. buy the relatively cheap model to test their own software.

In the U.S., the advent of generative AI chatbots like OpenAI's ChatGPT and Google's Gemini has jolted the decades-old robotics industry in different ways. Investor excitement has poured money into ambitious startups aiming to build hardware that will bring a physical presence to the latest AI.

But it's not just crossover hype — the same technical advances that made AI chatbots so good at language have played a role in teaching robots how to get better at performing tasks. Paired with computer vision, robots powered by "visual-language" models are trained to learn about their surroundings.

One of the most prominent skeptics is robotics pioneer Rodney Brooks, a co-founder of Roomba vacuum maker iRobot who wrote in September that "today's humanoid robots will not learn how to be dexterous despite the hundreds of millions, or perhaps many billions of dollars, being donated by VCs and major tech companies to pay for their training." Brooks didn't attend but his essay was frequently mentioned.

Also missing was anyone speaking for Tesla CEO Elon Musk's development of a humanoid called Optimus, a project that the billionaire is designing to be "extremely capable" and sold in high volumes. Musk said three years ago that people can probably buy an Optimus "within three to five years."

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The conference's organizer, Alaoui, founder and general partner of ALM Ventures, previously worked on driver attention systems for the automotive industry and sees parallels between humanoids and the early years of self-driving cars.

Near the entrance to the summit venue, just blocks from Google's headquarters, is a museum exhibit showing Google's bubble-shaped 2014 prototype of a self-driving car. Eleven years later, robotaxis operated by Google affiliate Waymo are constantly plying the streets nearby.

Some robots with human elements are already being tested in workplaces. Oregon-based Agility Robotics announced shortly before the conference that it is bringing its tote-carrying warehouse robot Digit to a Texas distribution facility run by Mercado Libre, the Latin American e-commerce giant. Much like the Olaf robot, it has inverted legs that are more birdlike than human.

Industrial robots performing single tasks are already commonplace in car assembly and other manufacturing. They work with a level of speed and precision that's difficult for today's humanoids — or humans themselves — to match.

The head of a robotics trade group founded in 1974 is now lobbying the U.S. government to develop a stronger national strategy to advance the development of homegrown robots, be they humanoids or otherwise.

"We have a lot of strong technology, we have the AI expertise here in the U.S.," said Jeff Burnstein, president of the Association for Advancing Automation, after touring the expo. "So I think it remains to be seen who is the ultimate leader in this. But right now, China has certainly a lot more momentum on humanoids."

King Charles III says his cancer treatment is being reduced as he promotes benefits of screening

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — King Charles III said Friday that early diagnosis and treatment will allow doctors to reduce his cancer treatment in the new year as he encouraged others to take advantage of screening programs that can detect the disease early when it is easiest to treat.

Charles, 77, revealed the positive outlook in a recorded message broadcast on British television as part of a campaign to promote such screening, which increases the likelihood of successful treatment.

"Early diagnosis quite simply saves lives," the king said.

"I know, too, what a difference it has made in my own case, enabling me to continue leading a full and active life even while undergoing treatment," he added.

Buckingham Palace said his treatment is moving to a "precautionary phase" and his condition will be monitored to ensure his continued recovery.

Friday's message is the latest example of how Charles has used his own story to promote cancer awareness and treatment since he announced his diagnosis in February 2024. That seems to have paid off, with British cancer charities saying the number of people seeking information about cancer jumped after the king revealed he was undergoing treatment.

But the king has never revealed what type of cancer he has or the kind of treatment he is receiving. The palace said this was an intentional decision designed to ensure his message reaches the widest possible audience.

"The advice from cancer experts is that, in his determination to support the whole cancer community, it is preferable that His Majesty does not address his own specific condition but rather speaks to those affected by all forms of the disease," the palace said in a statement.

The king's cancer was discovered after treatment for an enlarged prostate. While doctors ruled out prostate cancer, tests revealed "a separate issue of concern," palace officials said last year.

Charles suspended his public appearances for about two months after his diagnosis so he could focus on his treatment and recovery. But he continued with state business and retained his constitutional role as head of state.

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The king returned to the public eye in April of last year with a visit to a cancer-treatment center at University College Hospital in central London, where he met with staff and shared stories with fellow cancer patients.

"It's always a bit of a shock, isn't it, when they tell you," he said, sympathizing with one patient as chemotherapy drugs dripped into her arm.

Charles' decision to disclose his diagnosis was a departure for Britain's royals, who have traditionally considered their health to be a personal matter and shared few details with the public.

"As I have observed before, the darkest moments of illness can be illuminated by the greatest compassion," he said. "But compassion must be paired with action. This December, as we gather to reflect on the year past, I pray that we can each pledge, as part of our resolutions for the year ahead, to play our part in helping to catch cancer early.

"Your life — or the life of someone you love — may depend upon it," he said.

Tumbling tech stocks drag Wall Street to its worst day in 3 weeks

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — More drops for superstar artificial-intelligence stocks knocked Wall Street off its record heights on Friday.

The S&P 500 fell 1.1% from its all-time high for its worst day in three weeks. The weakness for tech stocks yanked the Nasdaq composite down by a market-leading 1.7%, and the Dow Jones Industrial Average gave back 245 points, or 0.5%, after setting its own record the day before.

Broadcom dragged the market lower and tumbled 11.4% even though the chip company reported a stronger profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected. Analysts called the performance solid, and CEO Hock Tan said strong 74% growth in AI semiconductor revenue helped lead the way.

But investors may have been concerned with some of Broadcom's financial forecasts, including how much profit it can squeeze out of each \$1 of revenue. The AI heavyweight may also have simply run out of momentum after its stock came into the day with a surge of 75.3% for the year so far, more than quadruple the S&P 500's gain.

Broadcom's drop added to worries about the AI boom that flared a day before. That's when Oracle plunged nearly 11% despite likewise reporting a bigger profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected.

Questions remain about whether all the spending that Oracle is doing on AI technology will produce the kind of profits that make it worth the expense, along with how the tech giant will pay for it. Such doubts are dogging the AI industry broadly, even as many billions of dollars continue to flow in.

Broadcom was the heaviest weight on the S&P 500 Friday, followed by Nvidia. The chip company that's become the poster child of the AI boom fell 3.3%. Oracle fell another 4.5%.

The stock market also felt some pressure from the bond market, where the yield on the 10-year Treasury climbed to 4.18% from 4.14% late Thursday. Higher yields can discourage investors from paying high prices for stocks and other investments, particularly when critics say they already look too expensive.

Friday's drops for AI superstars continue a jagged return toward Earth after they earlier had been the main engine lifting Wall Street higher. Other stocks that used to struggle with uncertainty about the U.S. economy's strength and what the Federal Reserve will do with interest rates, meanwhile, have been doing better.

The stocks in the Dow Jones Industrial Average, which has much less of an emphasis on tech, rose 1% this past week. That's much better than the Nasdaq composite's drop of 1.6%.

Notwithstanding Friday's rise in yields, investors have been feeling more optimistic about interest rates. The Fed earlier this week cut its main interest rate for the third time this year and indicated another cut may be ahead in 2026.

Wall Street loves lower rates because they can boost the economy and send prices for investments higher, even if they potentially make inflation worse.

The Fed's chair, Jerome Powell, did hint on Wednesday that interest rates may be on hold for a while.

But he helped soothe nerves when his comments appeared less harsh than some investors expected in shutting off the possibility of more cuts in 2026.

Stocks of companies that depend on spending by U.S. consumers were relatively strong Friday, as two out of every five stocks within the S&P 500 rose. Oil prices eased this week, which could help ease people's bills, and hopes are rising that easier interest rates will help support spending.

Chipotle Mexican Grill rose 3.6%, McDonald's climbed 2.3% and Norwegian Cruise Line added 1.5%.

The biggest gain in the S&P 500 came from Lululemon Athletica, which jumped 9.6% after reporting better profit and revenue for the three months through Nov. 2 than analysts expected. It also said its CEO, Calvin McDonald, plans to step down at the end of January following pressure to boost revenue.

All told, the S&P 500 fell 73.59 points to 6,827.41. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 245.96 to 48,458.05, and the Nasdaq composite slumped 398.69 to 23,195.17.

In stock markets abroad, indexes fell modestly in Europe following a stronger finish in Asia.

Stocks jumped 1.7% in Hong Kong and rose 1.4% in Tokyo for two of the world's bigger gains.

Sherrone Moore charged with stalking, home invasion after being fired as Michigan football coach

By LARRY LAGE and ED WHITE Associated Press

ANN ARBOR, Mich. (AP) — Fired University of Michigan football coach Sherrone Moore "barged his way" into the apartment of a woman with whom he had been having an affair and threatened to kill himself after she reported the relationship to the school and he lost his job, prosecutors said Friday.

Moore was charged with three crimes, including felony home invasion and stalking.

As he watched by video from jail, authorities laid out extraordinary allegations against Moore and provided details that answered a key question: What led Michigan to suddenly oust the 39-year-old coach Wednesday after his second season at the helm of the storied football program?

Moore and the woman had been having an affair "for a number of years" before she ended the relationship Monday, said Kati Rezmierski, Washtenaw County first assistant prosecutor.

Moore repeatedly called the woman and texted her, but she refused to respond, Rezmierski said.

"Eventually she presented herself to the University of Michigan. Cooperated in some form of an investigation. As we all now know (Moore) was fired from his employment," the prosecutor said.

Moore was dismissed for an inappropriate relationship with a staff member, the school said Wednesday without offering details.

Shortly after losing his job, Moore stormed into the woman's apartment, "then proceeded to a kitchen drawer, grabbed several butter knives and a pair of kitchen scissors. And began to threaten his own life," Rezmierski said.

The prosecutor quoted Moore as telling the woman: "I'm going to kill myself. I'm going to make you watch. My blood is on your hands. You've ruined my life."

"She was terrorized," Rezmierski said.

A not-guilty plea was entered on Moore's behalf by District Court Magistrate Odetalla Odetalla, and he was released from jail after meeting the \$25,000 bond. Moore said very little in court besides acknowledging that he must have no contact with the woman, among other conditions.

The court hearing was held just 4 miles (6.4 kilometers) from Michigan Stadium where Moore, who is married and has three children, coached his last game against rival Ohio State in front of more than 100,000 fans on Nov. 29.

Defense attorney Joe Simon said Moore was taken to a hospital for a mental health evaluation after his arrest Wednesday and then returned to the jail.

He said Moore would "absolutely comply" with the judge's order for an additional evaluation. Moore must wear a GPS tracking device, stay in Michigan and abstain from alcohol. The next court hearing was set for Jan. 22.

"There's no evidence to suggest he's a threat," Simon said.

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Moore signed a five-year contract with a base annual salary of \$5.5 million last year. According to the terms of his deal, the university will not have to buy out the remaining years of his contract because he was fired for cause.

Moore, the team's former offensive coordinator, was promoted to lead the Wolverines after they won the national title. He succeeded Jim Harbaugh, who returned to the NFL to lead the Los Angeles Chargers.

Michigan is set to play No. 14 Texas on Dec. 31 in the Citrus Bowl. Biff Poggi, who filled in for Moore when he was suspended earlier this season in relation to a Harbaugh-era sign-stealing scandal, will serve as interim coach.

While the school seeks a new head coach, the Wolverines may lose players in the transfer portal this winter and donors who help fund revenue-sharing and NIL deals may hesitate to invest in the winningest program in college football history.

Florida plows ahead with push to roll back certain vaccine mandates for schoolchildren

By KATE PAYNE Associated Press/Report for America

PANAMA CITY BEACH, Fla. (AP) — Florida officials are plowing ahead with a proposal to roll back certain vaccine mandates for the state's schoolchildren, after Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis called for the state to become the first in the nation to eliminate all school vaccination requirements.

Pediatricians, infectious disease physicians and teachers have decried the push to undermine vaccines, which for generations have been a cornerstone of public health policy for keeping children and adults safe from potentially deadly — but preventable — diseases.

Experts have warned that doing away with the mandates could allow for a dangerous resurgence of preventable childhood diseases and deaths, amounting to a reversal of one of the greatest advancements in public health history.

Dozens of parents, physicians, educators and advocates crowded into a hotel conference room in Panama City Beach on Friday to testify on a rule change proposed by the Florida Department of Health that would eliminate requirements that Florida children receive the hepatitis B, varicella and Haemophilus influenzae type b or Hib vaccines in order to attend public or private K-12 schools. The proposal also does away with a requirement for the pneumococcal conjugate vaccine for children attending child care facilities.

Other state mandates related to vaccines for polio, mumps, tetanus and other diseases are enshrined in Florida law and would require legislative action to be rolled back.

Pediatrician Eehab Kenawy, who practices in Panama City, detailed two unvaccinated children his hospital has cared for in the past six months, both of whom contracted Hib, which can cause severe infections and brain swelling.

"One child unfortunately succumbed at four months of age. No vaccines," Kenawy said.

The mother of another Hib patient, a two-and-a-half-year-old, begged to have her child vaccinated after the child developed a grave brain infection, Kenawy said.

"Quote unquote, mother's words: 'please give my child every vaccine you can,' " he said. "This is what we're seeing."

Florida Surgeon General Joseph Ladapo, who has long clashed with the medical establishment, has cast current requirements in schools and elsewhere as "immoral" intrusions on people's rights that hamper parents' ability to make health decisions for their children.

All U.S. states and territories require that children attending child care centers and schools be vaccinated against a number of diseases, including, measles, mumps, polio, tetanus, whooping cough and chickenpox.

All states allow exemptions for children with medical conditions that prevent them from receiving certain vaccines. Most also permit exemptions for religious or other nonmedical reasons.

Emotional public hearing

Friday's public hearing grew emotional at times, as parents and activists opposed to the mandates her-

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alded the importance of personal freedom, while longtime physicians recalled hospital wards full of gravely sick children in the years before the widespread availability of vaccines.

When pediatrician Paul Robinson trained at Vanderbilt University in the 1980s, he cared for countless children "suffering from diseases we now prevent," including Hib.

"It didn't cause mild illness. It caused children to die," Robinson said, recalling the survivors who were left with "deafness, paralysis or lifelong neurologic injury."

The policy being pushed by the state's surgeon general is "dangerous," he added.

Jamie Schanbaum's legs and fingers were amputated after she contracted meningitis as a 20-year-old college student in Texas. She traveled from Brooklyn, New York, to testify in support of vaccines, recounting her seven-month hospital stay as she battled the vaccine-preventable disease and the challenges of living without her limbs.

"No one should go through this experience," Schanbaum said.

"How about the relearning to use my hands? Feed myself? Wipe myself? This is the reality of what it's like to survive something like this," she added.

Rise of vaccine skepticism

Vaccination efforts across the country and around the world have stalled in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw an explosion in vaccine skepticism. Florida's proposal comes as U.S. Department of Health Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has worked to reshape the nation's vaccine policies to match his long-standing suspicions about the safety and effectiveness of well-established shots.

Mary Helms, a mother and grandmother from Apalachicola, Florida, referenced Kennedy as she voiced her "full support" for rolling back the mandates.

"Medical choice and medical freedom in all ways is a God-given and sovereign human right," Helms said.

Susan Sweetin's voiced filled with emotion as she described her then-newborn son being rushed off for a hepatitis B shot that she said "injured" him. Sweetin is a marketing executive for the National Vaccine Information Center, a group connected to Kennedy.

"This is not informed consent. That is coercion. Vaccines should never be tied to a child's education," Sweetin said.

Asked if the state consulted national medical experts such as the American Academy of Pediatrics on the rule development, a department representative declined to answer directly, stating: "the rule language is grounded in policy based on considerations that favor parental rights and medical freedom."

Measles outbreak in South Carolina

Florida's push comes as a monthslong measles outbreak continues in South Carolina, almost entirely among school-age children.

State health officials there have said 116 of the 126 cases have been in children under 18, with two-thirds of them in children from age 5 to 17.

The outbreak has been centered in Spartanburg County, where just 90% of students have all the vaccines required to be in school — one of the lowest rates in South Carolina. The state has a religious exemption for vaccines, and almost all of the unvaccinated students use it.

Leadership of US command in Latin America changes hands amid criticism of boat strikes

By JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

DORAL, Fla. (AP) — A U.S. Navy admiral who oversees military operations in Latin America handed off command responsibilities Friday as scrutiny increases over the Trump administration's deadly strikes on alleged drug boats in the region.

Adm. Alvin Holsey has retired one year into a posting that typically lasts three to four years and transferred leadership duties to his top military deputy, Air Force Lt. Gen. Evan Pettus, during a ceremony at U.S. Southern Command headquarters near Miami.

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In farewell remarks, Holsey did not mention the military operations or the reasons for his early retirement. But he urged his successor to uphold longstanding partnerships in the region by standing firmly behind the shared values of democracy and support for the rule of law.

"To be a trusted partner, we must be credible, present and engaged," Holsey said.

Holsey's shock retirement was announced by the Pentagon in October, over a month into the Trump administration's strikes on suspected drug boats in the Caribbean Sea and the eastern Pacific Ocean that have killed at least 87 people. With the campaign facing growing scrutiny by Congress, Holsey briefed key lawmakers earlier this week.

Long-term replacement for Holsey hasn't yet been named

The ceremony Friday was more subdued than past retirements, held outdoors amid a small crowd of mostly Southern Command staff and without Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, because President Donald Trump has yet to nominate Holsey's replacement.

Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, made no mention of the military operations in Latin America as he thanked Holsey for his 37 years of service. Caine referred to Holsey as a "stoic" leader and "quiet professional" who always leads with his heart and head.

"It's never been about you, it's been about people, it's been about others," Caine said. "You've never said 'I' in all the conversations we've had. You've always said 'we.' ... The impact you've had will last for a long time."

Holsey is departing as Congress is scrutinizing the boat attacks, including one that killed two survivors clinging to the wreckage of an initial strike. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Hegseth and other top officials have given classified briefings on Capitol Hill this week.

Holsey also spoke this week to key lawmakers overseeing the U.S. military by classified video call. Sen. Jack Reed, the top Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, said afterward that Holsey answered senators' questions but that "there are still many questions to be answered." Reed later added that Holsey did not give a reason for his retirement other than saying it was a personal decision.

Boat strike scrutiny increases

Experts in the rules of warfare, human rights groups and even some of Trump's allies in Congress have questioned the legality of the attacks on those accused of ferrying drugs. For decades, they were arrested at sea by the Coast Guard and brought to the U.S. for criminal prosecution.

The 22 known strikes against alleged drug-smuggling vessels are being supported by a giant flotilla of U.S. warships, attack helicopters, thousands of troops and even the nation's most advanced aircraft carrier.

Trump's Republican administration has defended its aggressive tactics, designating several drug cartels in Latin America as foreign terrorist organizations and declaring that the U.S. is in armed conflict with those criminal organizations, relying on a legal argument that gained traction after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

The campaign has ramped up pressure on Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, who has been charged with narcoterrorism in the U.S. In a sharp escalation Wednesday, U.S. forces seized a sanctioned oil tanker that the Trump administration has accused of smuggling illicit crude. Sale of that oil on global energy markets is critical to Maduro's grip on power.

Maduro has insisted the real purpose of the U.S. military operations is to force him from office.

Holsey's departure is the latest in a long line of sudden retirements and firings that have befallen the military's top ranks since Hegseth took charge of the Pentagon.

A native of rural Fort Valley, Georgia, whose father and several uncles served in Vietnam, Holsey relinquished his command to Pettus to a soulful rendition of "Midnight Train to Georgia."

Pettus, a fighter jet pilot with combat experience in Afghanistan and Iraq, had been serving as Holsey's top deputy since late 2024. However, it's unclear how long the Arkansas native will remain in the job. Whomever Trump nominates must be confirmed by the Senate.

Russian police and National Guard will stay in Ukraine's Donbas postwar, a Kremlin official says

By DASHA LITVINOVA and ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A senior Kremlin official said Friday that Russian police and National Guard will stay on in eastern Ukraine's Donbas and oversee the industry-rich region, even if a peace settlement ends Russia's nearly four-year war in Ukraine.

The remarks by Kremlin adviser Yuri Ushakov underscore Moscow's ambition to maintain its presence in Donbas post-war. Ukraine is likely to reject such a stance as U.S.-led negotiations drag on.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Ukrainian units have recaptured several settlements and neighborhoods near the city of Kupiansk in the northeastern Kharkiv region, following a monthlong operation aimed at reversing Russian advances there.

Kupiansk has in recent months been one of the most closely contested sectors of the around 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line, and the claimed Ukrainian progress of around 40 sq. km. (15 sq. miles) would be a setback for Russia.

Less than two months ago, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Ukrainian troops in Kupiansk were surrounded and offered to negotiate their surrender. He said a media visit to the area would prove it. Putin has sought to portray Russia as negotiating from a position of strength in the war.

Obstacles in a push to peace

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz's office said he would host Zelenskyy on Monday for talks as peace efforts gain momentum and European leaders seek to steer negotiations. Afterward, numerous European heads of state and government, as well as the leaders of the European Union and NATO, will join the meeting, a statement said.

Moscow will give its blessing to a ceasefire only after Ukraine's forces have withdrawn from the front line, Ushakov also said in comments published Friday in Russian business daily Kommersant.

He told Kommersant "it's entirely possible that there won't be any troops (in the Donbas), either Russian or Ukrainian" in a postwar scenario. But he said that "there will be the National Guard, our police, everything necessary to maintain order and organize life."

For months, American negotiators have tried to navigate the demands of each side as U.S. President Donald Trump presses for a swift end to Russia's war and grows increasingly exasperated by delays. The search for possible compromises has run into a major obstacle over who keeps Ukrainian territory that Russian forces have occupied so far.

Since Moscow's 2014 illegal annexation of Crimea and the seizure of territory in the east by Russia-backed separatists later that year, as well as land taken after the full-blown invasion was launched on Feb. 24, 2022, Russia has captured about 20% of its neighbor.

Ukraine says its constitution doesn't allow it to surrender land. Russia, which illegally annexed Donetsk and three other regions illegally in 2022, says the same. Ushakov said that "no matter what the outcome (of peace talks), this territory (the Donbas) is Russian Federation territory."

On Thursday, Trump compared the negotiations to a very complex real estate deal. He said that he wants to see more progress in talks before sending envoys to possible meetings with European leaders over the weekend.

In October, Trump said the Donbas region will have to be "cut up" to end the war.

Ukrainian counterattacks

In recent months, Russia's army has made a determined push to gain control of all parts of Donetsk and neighboring Luhansk, which together make up the valuable Donbas region.

Its slow slog across the Ukrainian countryside, using its significant advantage in troop numbers in a corrosive war of attrition, has been costly in terms of casualties and losses of armor. Although outnumbered, Ukrainian defenders have held firm in many areas and counterattacked in others.

Ukrainian forces said Friday that they had advanced around Kupiansk. They gradually cut off Russian supply routes into the city, starting on Sept. 22, and regained control of the villages of Kindrashivka and

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Radkivka, as well as several northern districts of the city, according to a statement by Ukrainian National Guard's Khartia Corps posted on Facebook.

Fighting is ongoing in central Kupiansk, where more than 200 Russian soldiers are encircled, the statement said.

Zelenskyy posted a video of himself standing on the road into Kupiansk on Friday. Explosions could be heard in the background as he spoke.

"Today, it is critically important to achieve results on the battlefield so that Ukraine can achieve results in diplomacy," Zelenskyy said in the video, praising his troops on Ukraine's Ground Forces Day.

Russian officials made no immediate comment, and the Ukrainians statements couldn't be independently verified.

Ukraine also has developed its long-range strike capabilities using domestically produced weapons to disrupt Russia's war machine.

Its Special Operations Forces, or SSO, said Friday that an operation in the Caspian Sea struck two Russian vessels carrying military equipment and arms.

The ships named Kompozitor Rakhmaninov and Askar-Saridzha are under U.S. sanctions for transporting arms between Russia and Iran, the SSO said in a statement on social media. It didn't say what weapons it used in its attack.

Cross-border drone strikes

A Ukrainian drone attack wounded seven people, including a child, in the Russian city of Tver, acting Gov. Vitaly Korolev said Friday. Falling drone debris struck an apartment building in the city, which lies northwest of Moscow, Korolev said.

Russia's air defenses destroyed 90 Ukrainian drones overnight, Russia's Defense Ministry said.

Russian drones struck a residential area of Pavlohrad, in Ukraine's central Dnipropetrovsk region, killing one person and wounding four others, the head of the local military administration, Vladyslav Haivanenko, wrote on the Telegram messaging channel on Friday.

Ukraine's southern Odesa region came under a large-scale drone attack overnight, according to regional chief Oleh Kiper. The attack damaged energy infrastructure, he said. More than 90,000 people were without electricity on Friday morning, Deputy Energy Minister Roman Andarak said.

Ukraine's air force said that Russia launched 80 drones across the country during the night.

Federal judge issues order to prohibit immigration officials from detaining Kilmar Abrego Garcia

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

BALTIMORE (AP) — A federal judge blocked U.S. immigration authorities on Friday from re-detaining Kilmar Abrego Garcia, saying she feared they might take him into custody again just hours after she had ordered his release from a detention center.

The order came as Abrego Garcia appeared at a scheduled appointment at an Immigration and Customs Enforcement field office roughly 14 hours after he walked out of immigration detention facility in Pennsylvania.

His lawyers had sent an urgent request to the judge, warning that ICE officials could immediately place him back into custody. Instead, Abrego Garcia exited the building after a short appointment, emerging to cheers from supporters who had gathered outside.

Speaking briefly to the crowd, he urged others to "stand tall" against what he described as injustices carried out by the government.

Abrego Garcia became a flashpoint of the Trump administration's immigration crackdown earlier this year when he was wrongly deported to a notorious prison in El Salvador. He was last taken into custody in August during a similar check-in.

Officials cannot re-detain him until the court conducts a hearing on the motion for the temporary restraining order, U.S. District Judge Paula Xinis in Maryland said. She wrote that Abrego Garcia is likely to

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succeed on the merits of any further request for relief from ICE detention.

"For the public to have any faith in the orderly administration of justice, the Court's narrowly crafted remedy cannot be so quickly and easily upended without further briefing and consideration," she wrote.

Abrego Garcia on Friday stopped at a news conference outside the building, escorted by a group of supporters chanting "We are all Kilmar!"

Abrego Garcia says he has 'so much hope'

"I stand before you a free man and I want you to remember me this way, with my head held up high," Abrego Garcia said through a translator. "I come here today with so much hope and I thank God who has been with me since the start with my family."

He urged people to keep fighting.

After Abrego Garcia spoke, he went through security at the field office, escorted by supporters.

When Abrego Garcia's attorney, Simon Sandoval-Moshenberg, announced to the crowd assembled outside that his client would walk back out the field office's doors again, he stressed that the legal fight was not over.

"Yesterday's order from Judge Xinis and now the temporary restraining order this morning represent a victory of law over power," Sandoval-Moshenberg said.

The agency freed him just before 5 p.m. on Thursday in response to a ruling from Xinis, who wrote federal authorities detained him after his return to the United States without any legal basis.

Mistakenly deported and then returned

Abrego Garcia is a Salvadoran citizen with an American wife and child who has lived in Maryland for years. He immigrated to the U.S. illegally as a teenager to join his brother, who had become a U.S. citizen. In 2019, an immigration judge granted him protection from being deported back to his home country, where he faces danger from a gang that targeted his family.

While he was allowed to live and work in the U.S. under ICE supervision, he was not given residency status. Earlier this year, he was mistakenly deported and held in a notoriously brutal Salvadoran prison despite having no criminal record.

Facing mounting public pressure and a court order, President Donald Trump's Republican administration brought him back to the U.S. in June, but only after issuing an arrest warrant on human smuggling charges in Tennessee. He has pleaded not guilty to those charges and asked a federal judge there to dismiss them.

A lawsuit to block removal from the US

The 2019 settlement found he had a "well founded fear" of danger in El Salvador if he was deported there. So instead ICE has been seeking to deport him to a series of African countries. Abrego Garcia has sued, claiming the Trump administration is illegally using the removal process to punish him for the public embarrassment caused by his deportation.

In her order releasing Abrego Garcia, Xinis wrote that federal authorities "did not just stonewall" the court, "They affirmatively misled the tribunal." Xinis also rejected the government's argument that she lacked jurisdiction to intervene on a final removal order for Abrego Garcia, because she found no final order had been filed.

ICE freed Abrego Garcia from Moshannon Valley Processing Center, about 115 miles (185 kilometers) northeast of Pittsburgh, on Thursday just before the deadline Xinis gave the government to provide an update on Abrego Garcia's release.

He returned home to Maryland a few hours later.

Immigration check-in

Check-ins are how ICE keeps track of some people who are released by the government to pursue asylum or other immigration cases as they make their way through a backlogged court system. The appointments were once routine but many people have been detained at their check-ins since the start of Trump's second term.

The Department of Homeland Security sharply criticized Xinis' order and vowed to appeal, calling the ruling "naked judicial activism" by a judge appointed during the Obama administration.

"This order lacks any valid legal basis, and we will continue to fight this tooth and nail in the courts,"

said Tricia McLaughlin, the department's assistant secretary.

Sandoval-Moshenberg said the judge made it clear that the government can't detain someone indefinitely without legal authority.

Abrego Garcia has also applied for asylum in the U.S. in immigration court.

Charges in Tennessee

Abrego Garcia was hit with human smuggling and conspiracy to commit human smuggling charges when the U.S. government brought him back from El Salvador. Prosecutors alleged he accepted money to transport within the United States people who were in the country illegally.

The charges stem from a 2022 traffic stop in Tennessee for speeding. Body camera footage from a Tennessee Highway Patrol officer shows a calm exchange with Abrego Garcia. There were nine passengers in the car, and the officers discussed among themselves their suspicions of smuggling. However, Abrego Garcia was eventually allowed to continue driving with only a warning.

A Department of Homeland Security agent testified at an earlier hearing that he did not begin investigating the traffic stop until after the U.S. Supreme Court said in April that the Trump administration must work to bring back Abrego Garcia.

This holiday season isn't very merry for consumers, an AP-NORC poll finds

By JOSH BOAK and AMELIA THOMSON-DEVEAUX Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — This holiday season isn't quite so merry for American shoppers as large shares are dipping into savings, scouring for bargains and feeling like the overall economy is stuck in a rut under President Donald Trump, a new AP-NORC poll finds.

The vast majority of U.S. adults say they've noticed higher than usual prices for groceries, electricity and holiday gifts in recent months, according to the survey from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Roughly half of Americans say it's harder than usual to afford the things they want to give as holiday gifts, and similar numbers are delaying big purchases or cutting back on nonessential purchases more than they would normally.

It's a sobering assessment for the Republican president, who returned to the White House in large part by promising to lower prices, only to find that inflation remains a threat to his popularity just as it did for Democrat Joe Biden's presidency. The poll's findings look very similar to an AP-NORC poll from December 2022, when Biden was president and the country was grappling with higher rates of inflation. Trump's series of tariffs have added to inflationary pressures and generated anxiety about the stability of the U.S. economy, keeping prices at levels that many Americans find frustrating.

The president has insisted there is "no" inflation and the U.S. economy is booming, as he expressed frustration that the public feels differently.

"When will people understand what is happening?" Trump said Thursday on Truth Social. "When will Polls reflect the Greatness of America at this point in time, and how bad it was just one year ago?"

Most U.S. adults, 68%, continue to say the country's economy is "poor," which is unchanged from December 2024, before Trump returned to the presidency.

Americans are feeling strained as they continue to see high prices

White House officials plan to send Trump barnstorming across the country in hopes of bucking up people's faith in the economy before next year's midterm elections. But the president this week in Pennsylvania defended the price increases tied to his tariffs by suggesting that Americans should buy fewer dolls and pencils for children. His message is a jarring contrast with what respondents expressed in the poll, even among people who backed him in the 2024 election.

Sergio Ruiz, 44, of Tucson, Arizona, said he is using more buy now, pay later programs to spread out over time the expense of gifts for his children. He doesn't put a huge emphasis on politics, but he voted for Trump last year and would like to see lower interest rates to help boost his real estate business. He

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believes that more Americans having higher incomes would help to manage any affordability issues.

"Prices are up. What can you do? You need to make more money," Ruiz said.

The poll found that when they do shop, about half of Americans are finding the lowest price more than they would normally. About 4 in 10 are dipping into their savings more than at other times.

Democrats are more likely than Republicans to say they're cutting back on expenses or looking for low prices, but many Republicans are budgeting more than usual as well. About 4 in 10 Republicans are looking for low prices more than they usually would, while a similar share are shopping for nonessential items less than usual.

Views are largely similar to when Biden was president

People felt similarly dismal about holiday shopping and the economy when Biden was president in 2022. Inflation had spiked to a four-decade high that summer. Three years later, inflation has eased substantially, but it's still running at 3%, a full percentage point above the Federal Reserve's target as the job market appears to have entered a deep freeze.

The survey indicates that it's the level of prices — and not just the rate of inflation — that is the point of pain for many families. Roughly 9 in 10 U.S. adults, 87%, say they've noticed higher than usual prices for groceries in the past few months, while about two-thirds say they've experienced higher prices than usual for electricity and holiday gifts. About half say they've seen higher than normal prices for gas recently.

The findings on groceries and holiday gifts are only slightly lower than in the 2022 poll, despite the slowdown from an inflation rate that hit a four-decade peak in the middle of that year.

Consumer spending has stayed resilient despite the negative sentiments about the economy, yet Trump's tariffs have caused changes for shoppers such as Andrew Russell.

The 33-year-old adjunct professor in Arlington Heights, Illinois, said he used to shop for unique gifts from around the globe and buy online. But with the tariffs, he got his gifts locally and "this year, I only bought things that I can pick up in person," he said.

Russell, who voted Democratic in last year's election, said he worries about the economy for next year. He thinks the investment in artificial intelligence has become a bubble that could burst, taking down the stock market.

Little optimism about an economic rebound in 2026

Few people expect the situation to meaningfully improve next year — a sign that Trump has done little to instill much confidence from his mix of tariffs, income tax cuts and foreign trips to attract investments. Trump has maintained that the benefits from his policies will begin to snowball in 2026.

About 4 in 10 U.S. adults expect next year will be economically worse for the country. Roughly 3 in 10 say conditions won't change much. Only about 2 in 10 think things will get better, with Republicans being more optimistic.

The belief that things will get better has slipped from last year, when about 4 in 10 said that 2025 would be better than 2024.

Millicent Simpson, 56, of Cleveland, Ohio, said she expects the economy to be worse for people like her who rely on Medicaid for health care and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Simpson voted Democratic last year and blames Trump for the greater economic pressures that she faces going into the winter.

"He's making it rough for us," she said. "He's messing with the government assistance for everybody, young and old."

Belarus leader hosts US envoy as he seeks to improve his country's ties with the West

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

Authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko on Friday hosted a U.S. envoy for talks in the Belarus capital of Minsk, the latest step in the isolated leader's effort to improve ties with the West.

Lukashenko met with President Donald Trump's special envoy for Belarus, John Coale, according to state

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news agency Belta and the presidential press service. The press service said the talks would continue Saturday.

The last time U.S. officials met with Lukashenko, Washington announced easing some of the sanctions against Belarus, and more than 50 political prisoners were released and brought to Lithuania. Overall, Belarus released more than 430 prisoners since July 2024 in what was widely seen as an effort at a rapprochement with the West.

"They say Trump loves flattery. But I'm not aiming for flattery. I want to say that I really like his actions lately," Belta quoted Lukashenko as saying.

A close ally of Russia, Minsk has faced Western isolation and sanctions for years. Lukashenko has ruled the nation of 9.5 million with an iron fist for more than three decades, and the country has been sanctioned repeatedly by Western countries — both for its crackdown on human rights and for allowing Moscow to use its territory in the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Lukashenko's rule was challenged after a 2020 presidential election that kept him in power, when tens of thousands of people poured into the streets to protest a vote widely seen as rigged. They were the largest demonstrations in Belarus' history, after the country became independent following the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union.

In an ensuing crackdown, tens of thousands of people were detained, with many beaten by police. Prominent opposition figures either fled the country or were imprisoned.

Five years after the mass demonstrations, Lukashenko won a seventh term in an election that the opposition called a farce.

More recently, however, Belarus has begun to free some political prisoners to try to win favor with the West. Since Donald Trump returned to the White House this year, Lukashenko has released dozens of prisoners, including key dissident figure Siarhei Tsikhanouski — the husband of exiled opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. His release came after a visit to Belarus by U.S. envoy Keith Kellogg.

Trump spoke to Lukashenko by phone in August after one such release and even suggested a face-to-face meeting in what would be a big victory for the Belarusian leader, who has been dubbed "Europe's Last Dictator."

A month later, Lukashenko freed more than 50 prisoners, and the U.S. lifted sanctions on the country's national airline, Belavia, allowing it to repair and buy parts for its planes, including Boeing aircraft.

Those released were brought to Lithuania. But one — prominent opposition activist Mikola Statkevich — refused to leave Belarus. The 69-year-old, who described the government's actions as a "forced deportation," got off the bus and stayed for several hours in the no-man's land between the countries before being taken away by Belarusian police and returned to prison.

Human rights advocates point out that Belarusian authorities continue their relentless crackdown on dissent despite the prisoners releases, with more people regularly arrested on politically motivated charges.

There are still about 1,200 political prisoners in Belarus, according to human rights group Viasna, including its founder, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ales Bialiatski.

New footage shows six Israeli hostages celebrating Jewish holiday, months before they were killed

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

TEL AVIV (AP) — New footage of six Israeli hostages shows them celebrating the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah while being held captive in a tunnel in Gaza, several months before they were killed.

Israel said all six were killed last August by Hamas, shortly before Israeli troops arrived.

The videos and photos were published Thursday for the first time by the forum representing hostage families. They show Israeli-American Hersh Goldberg-Polin, 23; Ori Danino, 25; Eden Yerushalmi, 24; Almog Sarusi, 27; Alexander Lobanov, 33; and Carmel Gat, 40, filmed under duress, walking through a tunnel in Gaza, playing cards on the floor and lighting the holiday candles.

The forum said the footage was found in Gaza and documented the hostages' months in captivity. At

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least some was likely filmed during Hanukkah in December 2023, weeks after they'd been abducted during Hamas' Oct. 7, attack that sparked the war.

The Israeli army said their bodies were recovered from a tunnel in the southern Gaza city of Rafah and there was no doubt Hamas killed them. The Israeli Health Ministry said that autopsies had determined the hostages were shot at close range.

At the time of their deaths, a senior Hamas official said the hostages would still be alive if Israel had accepted a U.S.-backed proposal that Hamas said it had recently agreed to.

Families praise hostages' unity and strength

The hostages' killings last year sparked protests across the country, at a time when ceasefire negotiations were dragging, with many blaming Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for failing to reach a deal. Some of the hostages — Goldberg-Polin, Yerushalmi and Gat — had been slated to be released in the first phase of a ceasefire proposal discussed a month prior.

"It's truly heartbreaking ... They managed to protect their humanity and each other, and we failed to protect them," Gili Roman, who has family ties to Gat, told The Associated Press. Netanyahu praised himself for bringing home all of the hostages but he brought them home in body bags, he said. Roman said that the families saw the videos a few months ago but only received them from the army recently.

The videos are a reminder of the failure by Israel and Hamas to reach a deal when both knew the hostages were still alive, said Gil Dickmann, a cousin of Gat. Now the body of the last remaining hostage, police officer Ran Gvili, must be returned, Dickmann said.

"We will demand from our government, we will demand from Hamas to not to do anything else, not to proceed to the second stage (of the current ceasefire deal) until Rani is back and all the hostages are back," he said.

In a statement Thursday the families of the hostages said Hamas filmed the videos as propaganda, and thanked Israelis and people around the world for watching the harrowing footage. "The entire world must see our loved ones in these moments, their unity, strength, and humanity even in the darkest times. They were taken alive, they survived in captivity, and they should have come home alive," said the statement.

The footage comes days ahead of Hanukkah this year and as the two-month-old ceasefire reaches a critical point. With the remains of one hostage still in Gaza, the first phase of the U.S.-brokered ceasefire is nearly complete. Now, the key players — including Israel, Hamas, the United States and a diverse list of international parties — are to move to a more complicated second phase.

Candles and prayers for Hanukkah

The series of short videos and photos shows the hostages seated on blankets on the floor, at times embracing one another and saying prayers over the Hanukkah candles. In one video they're heard counting down and wishing each other a happy new year. In one photo the two women, Yerushalmi and Gat, are seated across from each other with a chessboard between them. Some videos panned across the hostages as they smiled or spoke to the camera.

"We are here in good health, alive, and they are taking care of us," said Goldberg-Polin, in Hebrew. "We want to return back home."

A native of Berkeley, California, Goldberg-Polin lost part of his left arm to a grenade in the attack and the stump of his arm is seen in the video. His parents, U.S.-born immigrants to Israel, were some of the most high-profile relatives of hostages on the international stage.

In another message of hope, Sarusi sits on the floor in a white tank top beside the burning Hanukkah candles.

"Happy holiday to all of us and to all the people of Israel," he said into the camera. "With the help of the holiday's miracles, we will come home."

A 6.9 magnitude earthquake causes small tsunami waves off northeastern Japan

TOKYO (AP) — A 6.9 magnitude earthquake shook northeastern Japan and caused small tsunami waves but no apparent damage Friday, days after a stronger quake in the same region.

Friday's quake occurred off the east coast of Aomori prefecture, in the north of Honshu, the main Japanese island, at a depth of 20 kilometers (12.4 miles) at 11:44 a.m., according to the Japan Meteorological Agency, which issued a tsunami advisory that was lifted about two hours later.

Small waves were reported in Hokkaido and Aomori prefectures, but no serious damage or injuries were reported.

The quake followed a 7.5 magnitude earthquake Monday that caused injuries, light damage and a small tsunami on Japan's Pacific coast.

At least 34 people were injured in that quake, power was knocked out temporarily in places, and tsunami waves more than 2 feet (0.6 meters) above tide levels were measured in Kuji port in Iwate prefecture.

Authorities had warned of possible aftershocks.

Officials said after Monday's quake there was also a slight increase in the risk of a megaquake, at magnitude 8 or stronger, and a possible tsunami occurring along Japan's northeastern coast from Chiba, just east of Tokyo, to the northernmost main island of Hokkaido. The agency urged residents in the area to monitor their emergency preparedness, reminding them that the caution is not a prediction of such a strong earthquake.

The recent quakes occurred around the area where the magnitude 9.0 quake and tsunami in 2011 killed nearly 20,000 people and destroyed the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

Today in History: December 13, Saddam Hussein captured in Iraq

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Saturday, Dec. 13, the 347th day of 2025. There are 18 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Dec. 13, 2003, Saddam Hussein was captured by U.S. forces while hiding in a hole under a farmhouse in Adwar, Iraq, near his hometown of Tikrit.

Also on this date:

In 1862, Union forces led by Maj. Gen. Ambrose Burnside launched failed frontal assaults against entrenched Confederate soldiers during the Civil War Battle of Fredericksburg; the soundly defeated Northern troops withdrew two days later after suffering heavy casualties.

In 1937, during the Second Sino-Japanese War, Japanese soldiers captured the Chinese city of Nanjing and began what would be a weeklong massacre of an estimated 200,000 to 300,000 citizens, war prisoners and soldiers.

In 1996, the U.N. Security Council chose Kofi Annan of Ghana to become the world body's seventh secretary-general.

In 2000, Republican George W. Bush claimed the presidency a day after the U.S. Supreme Court shut down further recounts of disputed ballots in Florida; Democrat Al Gore conceded, delivering a call for national unity.

In 2001, the Pentagon publicly released a captured videotape of Osama bin Laden in which the al-Qaida leader said the deaths and destruction achieved by the Sept. 11 attacks exceeded his "most optimistic" expectations.

In 2014, thousands of protesters marched in New York, Washington and other U.S. cities to call attention to the killing of unarmed Black men by white police officers.

In 2019, the House Judiciary Committee approved two articles of impeachment accusing President Donald Trump of abuse of power in his dealings with Ukraine and obstruction of Congress in the investigation that followed. He would later be acquitted by the Senate.

In 2022, President Joe Biden signed the Respect for Marriage Act providing federal recognition and pro-

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tection for same-sex and interracial marriages, calling it "a blow against hate in all its forms."

Today's Birthdays: Actor-comedian Dick Van Dyke is 100. Music/film producer Lou Adler is 92. Singer-TV host John Davidson is 84. Baseball Hall of Famer Ferguson Jenkins is 83. Rock musician Jeff "Skunk" Baxter is 77. Rock musician Ted Nugent is 77. Country singer-musician Randy Owen (Alabama) is 76. Actor Wendie Malick is 75. Country musician John Anderson is 71. Actor Steve Buscemi (boo-SEH'-mee) is 68. Singer-actor Morris Day is 68. Football Hall of Famer Richard Dent is 65. Actor-comedian Jamie Foxx is 58. Actor-reality TV star NeNe Leakes is 58. Hockey Hall of Famer Sergei Fedorov is 56. Rock singer-musician Tom DeLonge (Blink-182) is 50. Rock singer Amy Lee (Evanescence) is 44. Singer-songwriter Taylor Swift is 36. Actor Maisey Stella is 22.