

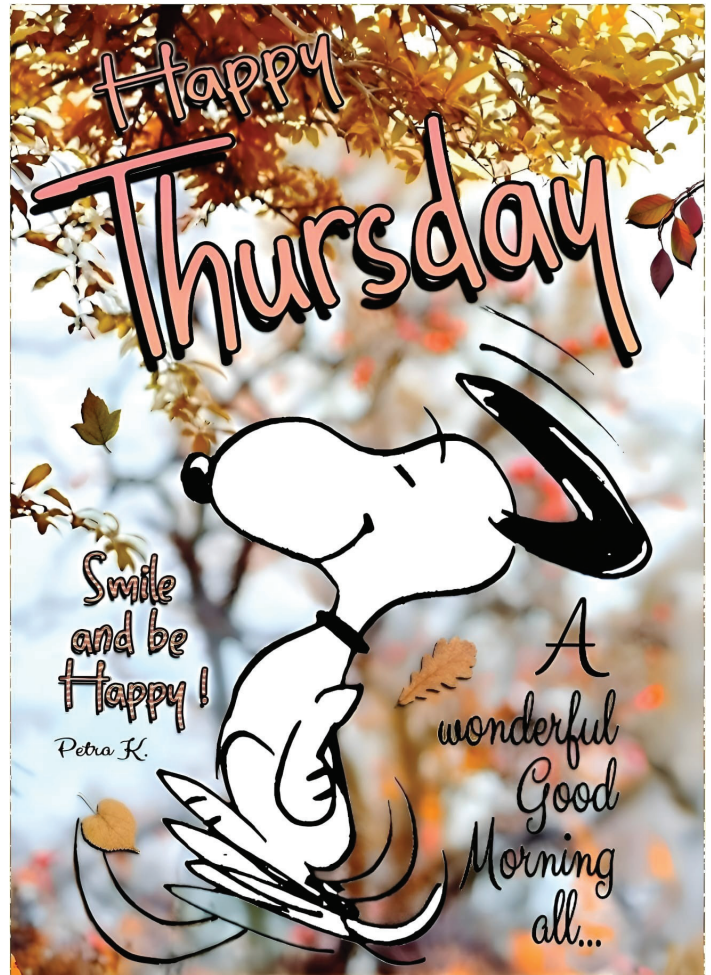
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Thursday, Dec. 18

- Senior Menu: Beef and potatoes, antigua blend, fruit, breadstick.
- School Breakfast: Maple baked French toast.
- School Lunch: Turkey gravy over mashed potatoes, stuffing, cranberries.
- Northeast Conference Wrestling Tournament at Clark, 4 p.m.
- 1st Grade Boys Basketball Practice, 4:30 p.m.
- Middle School Girls Basketball hosts Waubay-Summit: (7th grade @ 6pm, 8th grade @ 7pm)
- 4th Grade BB, 6 p.m.



Friday, Dec. 19

- Senior Menu: Chicken pot pie casserole, roasted potatoes, fruit, biscuits.
- School Breakfast: Breakfast boats.
- School Lunch: Garlic cheese bread, green beans.
- End of Second Quarter
- Elementary Christmas Concert, 1 p.m.
- Basketball DH at West Central (Girls C at 4 p.m. at Becker Center; Boys C at 4 p.m. at Colosseum; Girls JV at Becker Center, 5 p.m.; Boys JV at Colosseum, 5 p.m.; Girls Varsity at Colosseum, 6:30 p.m., Boys Varsity at Colosseum, 8 p.m.)
- Cossack Avalanche Girls Wrestling Tournament, 4:30 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 Addresses Nation

President Donald Trump gave a prime-time address to the nation yesterday to highlight his administration's work on the economy, health care, and immigration. He also announced a \$1,776 dividend to every US soldier. The speech came as a recent poll found his approval ratings had reached a two-term low.

The address also followed his announcement that the US military will impose a total blockade on sanctioned oil tankers near Venezuela. The US has 11 warships operating in the Caribbean Sea—its highest naval buildup there since the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. The Trump administration says it is targeting drug-trafficking boats. Trump has also threatened Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and reportedly gave him an ultimatum to step down or face further US military intervention.

Separately, the Senate voted yesterday to pass a \$901B defense bill that compels Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth to share unedited videos of the recent boat strikes.

And the Oscars Go to ...

The Academy Awards will stream exclusively on YouTube from 2029 to 2033, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences revealed yesterday. The move ends a decadeslong partnership with ABC after that contract expires in 2028.

Disney (which owns ABC) pays around \$100M annually for rights to the Oscars, red carpet coverage, and behind-the-scenes content. The company had been pushing for better terms. Viewership this year stood at 18.1 million, down from a height of 57 million in 1998 following the release of "Titanic." Over the summer, platforms including NBCUniversal and Netflix entered a bidding war. YouTube reportedly paid over nine figures for the show, besting high-eight-figure offers from competitors.

YouTube is the world's most-watched streaming platform with no streaming time limits. The partnership may allow the Academy more flexibility to produce the show without the same restrictions imposed by ABC—and comes as viewership increasingly moves from the big to small screen.

Tennessee Williams Radio Play

A little-known radio play written by American playwright Tennessee Williams was published this week by a quarterly mystery magazine.

Before writing "A Streetcar Named Desire" and other acclaimed Broadway dramas, Williams penned "The Strangers" as a University of Iowa student. The 1938 play, set in a haunted manor, was intended to be performed solely with voice. Such plays gained popularity in the 1920s, with the introduction of household radios. By 1930, plays accounted for roughly 14% of radio programming. Horror was a particularly popular genre in the late 1930s, when about 80% of American households owned radios. The year Williams wrote "The Strangers," an estimated 1.7 million people listened to an adaptation of HG Wells' "The War of the Worlds," and many were fooled into believing a Martian invasion was underway.

Radio shows lost ground to television in the mid-20th century. However, audio-first entertainment has resurged in the 21st century, with podcast monthly listenership increasing from 9% in 2008 to 42% in 2023.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

FIFA announces 2026 World Cup winner will win \$50M, up \$8M from 2022 World Cup prize, but less than half of this year's Club World Cup award.

Tennis star Carlos Alcaraz ends seven-year partnership with coach Juan Carlos Ferrero, who helped him secure 24 tour-level titles.

Amazon MGM Studios drops the first trailer for Melania Trump documentary, premiering Jan. 30; directed by "Rush Hour" series director Brett Ratner, marking his first film since 2017 sexual misconduct and harassment allegations.

Science & Technology

Google releases Gemini 3 Flash, which more than tripled the benchmark knowledge test score of the previous Flash AI model.

... and enables Gemini web app users to build AI-powered mini apps with Opal software.

Scientists deduce Saturn's largest moon, Titan, has a slushy layer beneath its ice—not an underground ocean as long assumed; finding could help narrow the search for life on Titan.

Paleontologists exploring a cave on the Dominican Republic's island of Hispaniola discover prehistoric bee nests burrowed in bones of other animals; researchers believe the cave holds fossils of several never-before-characterized species.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close lower (S&P 500 -1.2%, Dow -0.5%, Nasdaq -1.8%).

Medical supply firm Medline begins trading on Nasdaq after raising around \$6.3B in the year's largest initial public offering.

Warner Bros. Discovery board rejects Paramount's roughly \$108B hostile takeover bid for its studios and HBO Max, citing equity credibility concerns and preferring Netflix's \$72B bid instead.

Oracle shares close down over 5% as Blue Owl Capital reportedly withdraws from funding \$10B data center.

Politics & World Affairs

House passes bill to lower healthcare premiums; bill does not extend enhanced, COVID-19-era subsidies, due to expire Dec. 31.

... and four Republican congressmen join House Democrats to force separate vote on the subsidies.

Dan Bongino announces he will resign as deputy director of the FBI next month.

Nick Reiner makes first court appearance to face first-degree murder charges over alleged killing of his parents, film director Rob Reiner and Michele Singer Reiner.

Police continue search for suspects in killing of MIT professor Nuno FG Loureiro; attack believed to be unrelated to Brown University shooting.

Groton Prairie Mixed Bowling League Week #6 Results

Team Standings: Shihtzus 16, Jackelopes 13, Cheetahs 13, Coyotes 13, Foxes 11, Chipmunks 6

Men's High Games: Roger Spanier 215, Lance Frohling 201, Brad Waage 192

Women's High Games: Suzie Easthouse 195, Darci Spanier 161, Vicki Jorgensen 160

Men's High Series: Roger Spanier 561, Brad Waage 542, Randy Stanley 481

Women's High Series: Suzie Easthouse 487, Brenda Madsen 440, Vicki Jorgensen 440

Week 6 Fun Game: Most 6 Spares – Foxes with 11!

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Pictured in back, left to right, are April Abeln and Lori Giedt; in the middle row are Kristie Gibbs, Ruby Larson, Diane Warrington and Steve Dresbach; in front are Lori Westby and Nancy Larsen. Not pictured are Justin Cleveland and Paul Kosel who did the deliveries.

(Courtesy photo)

Enrich Groton SoDak Inc. board members and dedicated volunteers came together in the true spirit of the season, working side by side to pack Christmas food boxes for families in our community. Through teamwork and generosity, meals will be delivered to 72 Groton SD Community families, helping ensure that the holidays are filled with comfort, care, and a sense of togetherness.

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Groton Legion

Wings

Nite



Groton American Legion

Soon to be a Classic monthly "Legion Wings Nite"

Friday and Saturday

Dec. 19 & 20

6-10pm

What can \$20 get you?



for
Senior Citizens

or anyone using physical therapy
a gym membership at

15 N Main - Ste. 101

Open 24/7

GDI Living Fitness

Call/Text Paul at 605/397-7460

Call/Text Tina at 605/397-7285

for details



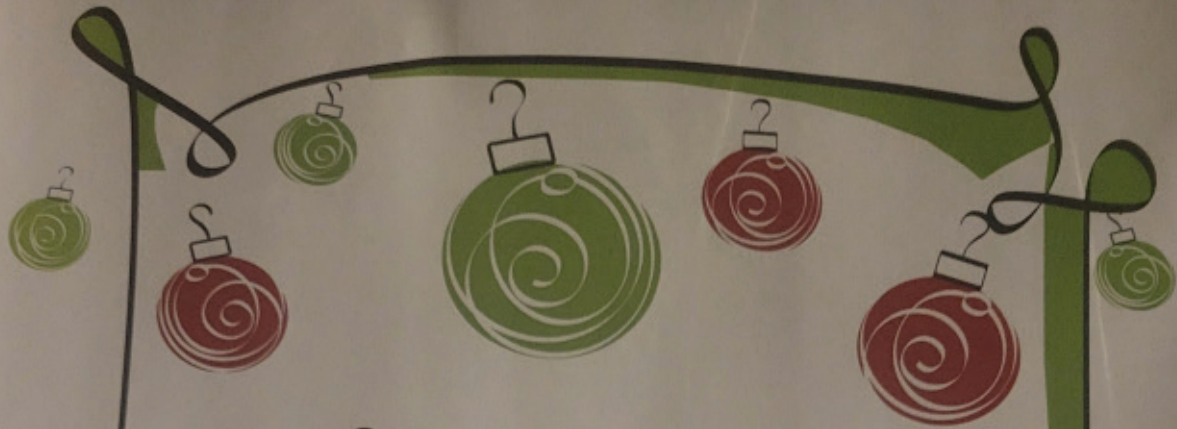
Annual Membership Rates

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

Month-to-Month Rates

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

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



Groton Community Transit
Invites you to their

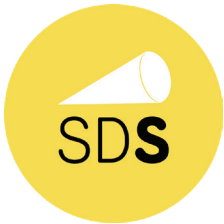
Holiday Bake Sale
Thursday, Dec. 18th,
2025

9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

**Coffee, cider and Christmas
goodies will be served!**

If you would like to donate baked goods, please contact Groton Community Transit
office at 605-397-8661. Any and all donations are welcome!! We are looking
forward to seeing you!!

Our address is 205 East 2nd Ave-Downtown Groton



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Fights and injuries spiked in South Dakota prisons in 2025

BY: JOHN HULT

Fights and serious injuries spiked higher in South Dakota's state prisons last year than at any point since at least 2018, according to a report released Wednesday by the state Department of Corrections.

The 2025 Annual Statistical Report covers state fiscal year 2025, which ended on June 30.

Prior to 2022, the state did not regularly list assaults or injuries in its annual reports. That year, it released data on those metrics going back to 2018.

In 2025, assaults on staff across the state's five prison campuses increased to 142, which was 95 more than the prior year.

Twenty-two of the assaults for 2025 caused serious injuries, a number twice as high as the previous year. Just over half the assaults involved throwing or spitting substances at officers.

There were 447 inmate-on-inmate fights in men's facilities in 2025, which is 171 more than the prior year. Of the fiscal year 2025 fights, 49 caused serious injuries to inmates.

Fights between women in the state's female correctional facility in Pierre, meanwhile, fell to 52, down from 60 the year before.

Fiscal year 2025 began in July of 2024 with two days of fighting at Mike Durfee State Prison in Springfield, which houses male prisoners. The state said at the time that six inmates were injured, although some prisoners claimed that figure was low.

The statistical report also reports that staff used force to subdue inmates 518 times during the 2025 fiscal year, and used pepper spray on 189 of those occasions. In 2024, staff used force on inmates 264 times.

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.

Half of SD inmates return to prison, two-thirds among Native American women, new report shows

Task force makes recommendations to improve rehabilitation efforts, including endorsement of Christian seminary program

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER

Half the people released from prison in South Dakota return within three years, according to the state Department of Corrections' newly released 2025 annual report — the highest recidivism rate in at least the last eight years.

Among Native Americans released from prison, 59% return within three years — the highest of any race. Native Americans comprise 39% of inmates in the state prison system — 35% among men and 61% among women. The recidivism rate among Native American women is 66%.

Department officials shared the statistics and annual report with members of the Correctional Rehabilitation Task Force at its Wednesday meeting in Pierre. The recidivism rate is seven points higher than last year.

The task force, made up of lawmakers, government officials and nonprofit leaders, is considering ways to reduce the state's recidivism rate by expanding prison-based rehabilitation and helping released inmates transition back into their communities. The group was created earlier this year as lawmakers approved construction of a \$650 million men's prison in Sioux Falls, and it's focusing on behavioral health, educa-

tional, faith-based and Native American-themed programs.

The group approved several recommendations at its meeting, including an endorsement of a faith-based seminary program.

Task force member Rep. John Hughes, R-Sioux Falls, said he hopes for "transformational offerings" to inmates.

"If we don't see lives changed, then I don't know what we're doing here," Hughes said. "We're just managing statistics and personal failures."

'We're not appropriately supporting the Indigenous population'

Task force member Rep. Kady Wittman, D-Sioux Falls, said the increase in recidivism, especially among Native Americans, will "further strain an already strained system."

"It's indicative of the fact that we're not appropriately supporting the Indigenous population," Wittman said. "We're already overincarcerating Indigenous people in South Dakota, and then we're seeing them return at a much higher rate."

The task force approved 11 immediate recommendations for the Department of Corrections. The list includes bringing back evening volunteers in prisons, designating the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate parole program as a "flagship model" in the state, and establishing volunteer roundtables to give feedback on department policy and programs.

The recommendations are "small wins or barriers that can be removed," Wittman said, while the task force continues to work on more complex issues.

Wittman is most excited about a recommendation that the department hire a tribal cultural liaison to coordinate ceremonies, tribal contacts and volunteer access to the state's prisons. The position should be piloted for six months, the task force recommended.

"The fact that the DOC is willing to establish an individual whose sole focus is going to be better programming for its Indigenous population is huge," Wittman said. "They'll hopefully identify where Indigenous programming will be most effective."

Lt. Gov. Tony Venhuizen, the task force chairman, confirmed with recently appointed Corrections Secretary Nick Lamb that the department would look into the recommendations and report back which could be viable options.

New corrections secretary lauds faith-based program

The prison seminary program endorsed by the task force was created by Mississippi Department of Corrections Commissioner Burl Cain while he served as warden of the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola. Cain resigned from his role in Louisiana in 2015 amid investigations of his business dealings.

The program operates in 26 states and partners with accredited, four-year Christian seminary programs to teach inmates. They can earn a seminary degree through the program, often with graduates serving as ministers in prison systems.

Lamb helped implement the program in the Illinois prison system. Within months of its launch, Lamb said, he saw fewer assaults between inmates and against staff.

"Whatever your religious beliefs are, whatever you think, this program works," Lamb said. "It worked everywhere they tried."

Cain spoke to lawmakers in October about the program, ahead of the task force's first meeting in Sioux Falls. He said the state would need a nonprofit to run it. The task force voted on Wednesday to encourage South Dakota Gov. Larry Rhoden's administration to authorize the program.

Rhoden said in a Wednesday news release that he "accepted" the recommendation. The news release did not say who would operate the program, but said it would be privately supported, requiring neither Department of Corrections nor inmate funding.

"Bringing this seminary program to our state will restore hope, build character, and strengthen our correctional system from the inside out," Rhoden said in the news release.

Jon Ozmint, the former director of South Carolina prisons, also presented to the task force in October. He said the recidivism rate for state inmates in the faith-based seminary Cain created is around 2% in South Carolina.

Wittman said after Wednesday's meeting that she has "reservations" about the seminary program.

"I don't necessarily support Burl Cain-style programming in South Dakota prisons because rehabilitation needs to be voluntary, secular and grounded in evidence," Wittman said.

Despite those concerns, she voted in favor of implementing the program.

"I voted yes because, despite my reservations, I know how limited current programs are," Wittman said, "and something is better than nothing."

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

Health Department warns of measles exposure in Rapid City

Three cases since November bring state's 2025 infection count to 15

BY: SETH TUPPER

The South Dakota Department of Health is warning the public about a potential measles exposure at the Rapid City Regional Airport.

The notification came as the agency's website lists three new measles cases in the state since November.

The new cases are the state's first since June, and they raise the number of confirmed measles infections this year in South Dakota to 15.

At the Rapid City airport, the potential exposure was caused by a Butte County resident with a confirmed measles infection, the Health Department said. The potential exposure occurred from 10:45 a.m. to 12:45 p.m. Mountain time on Dec. 10.

"We are sharing this information to help individuals who may have been exposed take steps to protect their health," said State Epidemiologist Joshua Clayton in a news release Wednesday.

Anyone who was at the airport during the exposure window should watch for symptoms for 21 days, the Health Department said. People who are not immune to measles should contact their health care provider to discuss protective options.

Measles symptoms appear in two stages. In the first, the infected person may have a runny nose, cough and a slight fever. The eyes may become reddened and sensitive to light while the fever consistently rises each day.

The second stage begins on the third to seventh day of symptoms and consists of a temperature of 103-105 degrees Fahrenheit, and a red blotchy rash lasting for four to seven days. The rash usually begins on the face and spreads down to the trunk and out to the arms and legs.

Clayton stressed the importance of immunization, saying "any South Dakotan who lacks immunity from vaccination or past infection can get the MMR vaccine to prevent measles infection and its complications."

"MMR" is a reference to the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine, which is typically administered at 12-15 months of age. The second dose of MMR is administered at 4-6 years of age.

"The vaccine is safe and highly effective at preventing measles infection, and two MMR doses usually produce lifelong immunity," the Health Department said.

The kindergarten measles vaccination rate in South Dakota has tumbled from 97% to 90% in the past 10 years. Health officials blame disinformation about vaccine safety, which has contributed to a rise in parents claiming religious exemptions to avoid mandatory school immunizations.

Thirteen of the 15 people infected by measles in South Dakota this year were unvaccinated, according to the state's online dashboard. The vaccination status of the other two infected people is unknown.

Measles was considered eliminated in the United States 25 years ago, but infections have surged as

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vaccination rates have fallen in some states. There have been 1,958 confirmed measles cases in the U.S. so far this year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

South Dakota's 15 cases include eight adults and seven children. There have been eight cases in Lincoln County, three in Butte County, and two apiece in Meade and Pennington counties. Ten of the people were exposed during international travel, two during domestic travel outside South Dakota and three through close contact with an infected person.

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.

Trump claims economic turnaround, after blasting Dems' affordability focus

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — As Americans continue to face rising prices ahead of year-end holidays, President Donald Trump blamed inflation and health care costs on his predecessor during a prime-time speech Wednesday in which he also claimed to have fixed the issues.

Trump "inherited a mess" and has turned the United States into the "envy of the entire globe" by imposing an immigration crackdown, tariffs and tax breaks, he said.

"Over the past 11 months, we have brought more positive change to Washington than any administration in American history. There's never been anything like it, and I think most would agree I was elected in a landslide," Trump said.

Standing before a backdrop of Christmas decorations, Trump also promised \$1,776 checks would arrive for members of the United States military by Christmas.

And he continued to blame Democrats for health care costs that are projected to skyrocket next month when tax credits for Affordable Care Act marketplace plans expire.

Nearly a year into his second term, Trump remains fixated on blaming former President Joe Biden even as his own approval ratings sink, according to numerous recent polls.

A plaque below Biden's photo in Trump's newly installed "Presidential Walk of Fame" display reads "Sleepy Joe Biden," according to reports from journalists present at the White House Wednesday.

"When I took office, inflation was the worst in 48 years, and some would say in the history of our country, which caused prices to be higher than ever before, making life unaffordable for millions and millions of Americans. This happened during a Democrat administration, and it's when we first began hearing the word 'affordability,'" Trump said.

In recent weeks, Trump has said "affordability" is a "hoax."

Yet the bulk of Trump's somewhat hastily scheduled address — the White House announced it Tuesday — focused on lowering costs for housing, electricity and health care.

Trump announced he will send a \$1,776 "warrior dividend" to every U.S. servicemember. The amount is in honor of the year of the country's founding, Trump said. Checks are "already on the way," he said.

That could add up to as much as \$2.6 billion, according to a White House estimate Wednesday night that 1.45 million service members would receive the payment.

Health care costs

He also touted trumprx.gov, where he said Americans can find "unprecedented price reductions" on prescription drugs starting in January.

"These big price cuts will greatly reduce the cost of health care," Trump said.

He boosted a Republican plan on Capitol Hill to fund individual health savings accounts, or HSAs, in annual amounts of \$1,000 to \$1,500 depending on age and poverty level. An HSA is not health insurance.

"I want the money to go directly to the people so you can buy your own health care. You'll get much

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better health care at a much lower price," Trump said.

Four House Republicans defected Wednesday to sign a Democrat-led petition to bypass Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., and force a floor vote in January on extending health insurance premium subsidies for people who buy insurance on the Affordable Care Act marketplace.

'My favorite word'

Trump spent several minutes addressing the economy, stating that prices on groceries and fuel are coming down. Both claims are false, according to government data.

"I am bringing those high prices down and bringing them down fast," Trump said.

The latest consumer price index for September showed gasoline prices rose 4.1% over the past 12 months, and "was the largest factor in the all items monthly increase," increasing 1.5% over the previous month.

Food prices rose faster than overall inflation in recent months, according to the government's latest data. Food prices in August were 3.2% higher than a year ago, according to the data.

Still, Trump claimed an economic turnaround that he credited to his international trade policy.

"Much of this success has been accomplished by tariffs — my favorite word 'tariffs' — which for many decades have been used successfully by other countries against us, but not anymore," he said.

The U.S. ended fiscal year 2025 with a deficit reaching nearly \$1.8 trillion, or roughly 6% of the domestic economy's gross domestic product.

Trump unilaterally imposed a global 10% tariff on all foreign goods in April, plus higher tariffs on many major trading partners, including the European Union, Japan, South Korea and Vietnam. The Supreme Court is expected to rule soon on whether Trump's emergency tariffs are legal.

Americans have lost faith in Trump's ability to handle the economy, according to an NPR/PBS News/Marist poll published Wednesday.

Trump received a 36% approval rating on his economic strategy, the lowest rating over the past six years that the survey has asked voters the question.

A Fox News poll released Nov. 19 found 76% of respondents saw the economy negatively. Of all voters polled, 41% approved and 58% disapproved of Trump's performance. That's down from the conservative news network's poll of Biden's approval ratings during the same point in his presidency, which the network says was 44%.

Mum on Venezuela

The president did not spend much time addressing his military campaign off the coast of Venezuela, despite declaring just 24 hours beforehand that the U.S. had formed a "blockade" in the Caribbean Sea.

Trump posted on his own social media platform Truth Social Tuesday night that Venezuela is "completely surrounded by the largest Armada ever assembled in the History of South America."

The campaign, which has become top of mind for many lawmakers on Capitol Hill, is about preventing drug smuggling to the U.S., Trump and Republican lawmakers have repeatedly said.

Democratic lawmakers are pressing the Trump administration to release unedited footage of a Sept. 2 strike that killed two shipwrecked individuals who were clinging to what was left of a boat after an initial strike.

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

Federal appeals judges allow Trump's National Guard deployment to D.C., for now

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — A U.S. appeals court ruled Wednesday that National Guard troops can remain in the District of Columbia while the judges take up the case that began when the district sued the Trump administration for deploying roughly 2,000 troops to the nation's capital.

Pointing to the district's special status as a federal territory, a three-judge panel for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia found President Donald Trump would likely succeed in his administration's argument to keep federalized National Guard troops in Washington, D.C.

Wednesday's ruling means the guard troops from the District of Columbia and nine states will continue patrolling Washington, D.C., through February, unless the appeals judges find a lower court order against the mobilization to be correct.

Guard members have been deployed to the district from South Carolina, West Virginia, Mississippi, Louisiana, Tennessee, Ohio, Georgia, Alabama, and South Dakota.

Judge Patricia Millett, appointed by former President Barack Obama, wrote the decision, in which Judges Gregory Katsas and Neomi Rao, both appointed during Trump's first term, concurred.

"Because the District of Columbia is a federal district created by Congress, rather than a constitutionally sovereign entity like the fifty States, the Defendants appear on this early record likely to prevail on the merits of their argument that the President possesses a unique power within the District — the seat of the federal government — to mobilize the Guard," Millet wrote.

Trump mobilized the District of Columbia National Guard and several state guards to the capital under Title 32 status, meaning their members can assist local law enforcement.

District court order

Judge Jia Cobb, for the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, found the administration's deployment of more than 2,000 guard troops in the city illegal but stayed her Nov. 20 decision until Dec. 11 to give the administration time to appeal and remove the guard members from the district's streets.

The Trump administration asked the federal appeals court to grant an emergency stay by Dec. 4, which the judges did.

U.S. senators who oversee armed services policy heard testimony from high-level Department of Defense officials on Dec. 11 regarding the Trump administration's National Guard deployments to five U.S. cities, including Washington, D.C.

Guard member shooting

WASHINGTON, DC - NOVEMBER 27: A small memorial of flowers and an American flag has been set up outside the Farragut West Metro station on November 27, 2025 in Washington, DC. Two members of the West Virginia National Guard were shot on November 26 blocks from the White House in what authorities are calling a targeted shooting. (Photo by Andrew Leyden/Getty Images).jpeg

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

Wednesday's decision comes three weeks after two West Virginia National Guard members were shot on Nov. 26 just blocks from the White House. U.S. Army Spc. Sarah Beckstrom, 20, died from her injuries the following day, Thanksgiving. U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Andrew Wolfe, 24, underwent surgery for critical injuries and remains hospitalized.

Prosecutors charged the suspected shooter, Rahmanullah Lakanwal, a 29-year-old Afghan national who was living in Washington state, with first-degree murder, among other charges.

On the day of the shooting, the Trump administration filed an emergency motion to stay Cobb's order that found Trump's guard deployment to the district was illegal.

Trump initially mobilized 800 National Guard troops to the nation's capital in August after declaring a "crime emergency."

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

Moderate US House Republicans join Dems to force vote on extension of health care subsidies

SD's Rep. Dusty Johnson votes for Republican bill that does not address tax credits

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT AND SHAUNEEN MIRANDA

WASHINGTON — Republican leaders in the U.S. House will face a floor vote in early 2026 on Democrats' plan to extend enhanced Affordable Care Act tax credits for three more years, after passing their own legislation Wednesday night that has little chance of a future in the Senate and does not address the tax credits.

The House vote on that legislation will be required after a handful of moderate Republicans signed on to a discharge petition Wednesday morning. Their dissent with leadership sent a strong signal they are frustrated with the majority's policies and the rising cost of health care for their constituents.

Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., said after a morning vote series on the floor, where he was seen in a heated exchange with Republican Rep. Mike Lawler, that the two "just had some intense fellowship" and "it's all good."

Lawler is one of the four centrist Republicans who signed the discharge petition, putting it over the threshold of 218 to force a vote on the legislation.

"We're working through very complex issues as we do here all the time," Johnson said. "Everybody's working towards ideas — we're keeping the productive conversation going."

The speaker also mounted his own defense, saying he has "not lost control of the House."

That chamber has seen chaos and intraparty divides in the aftermath of the government shutdown, when Johnson opted to send lawmakers home for nearly two months.

"We have the smallest majority in U.S. history," Johnson said. "These are not normal times — there are processes and procedures in the House that are less frequently used when there are larger majorities, and when you have the luxury of having 10 or 15 people who disagree on something, you don't have to deal with it, but when you have a razor-thin margin, as we do, then all the procedures in the book people think are on the table, and that's the difference."

Republicans push through 'extremely modest' bill

House debate on Republican leaders' health care bill later in the day was largely along party lines, with members of both parties talking nearly as much about the Affordable Care Act as they did about the policy in the new legislation.

Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Brett Guthrie, R-Ky., said he believes that law, enacted during President Barack Obama's first term, "has proven to be unaffordable and unsustainable."

Guthrie rebuked Democrats for approving the enhanced ACA marketplace tax credits during the coronavirus pandemic and scheduling them to expire at the end of this year, leading to the current deadlock in Congress.

"Democrats leveraged a public health emergency to shovel hundreds of billions of dollars to big health insurance plans to mask the risk of rising unaffordability of coverage," Guthrie said.

House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y., urged Johnson to put the three-year ACA extension bill up for a vote this week, instead of in the new year.

"Republicans need to bring the Affordable Care Act tax credit extension bill to the floor today," Jeffries said. "Under no circumstances should we leave this Capitol this week, before voting on an extension of

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the Affordable Care Act tax credit bill that we know will pass.”

California Republican Rep. Kevin Kiley, one of the centrists looking for bipartisan solutions on the expiring tax credits, expressed dismay at how debate on health care costs has been handled during the past few months by leaders in both political parties.

“This whole issue encapsulates what is wrong with this institution, where party leaders focus most of their time and energy on trying to blame problems on the other side rather than trying to solve those problems,” Kiley said.

The House Republican bill, he said, is “extremely modest and it has no chance of becoming law because it was hastily thrown together without, apparently, any bipartisan input when bipartisan support is necessary to pass any measure like this.”

“What are we supposed to tell these folks? ‘Oh, don’t worry, it’s Obama’s fault.’ Or, ‘Oh no don’t worry, we did a show vote on this Lower Health Care Premiums for All Americans Act.’ Is that going to be any consolation?” Kiley said.

New Jersey Democratic Rep. Frank Pallone called the House GOP bill a “sham” and said without a vote to extend the expiring ACA tax credits millions of Americans will have to decide if they can afford health insurance coverage.

“They will see prices double, triple and even quadruple,” Pallone said. “It will leave millions with the difficult decision of going without coverage because they simply cannot afford rising costs.”

The House voted 216-211 to approve the Republican health care bill, sending it to the Senate, where it’s highly unlikely it would get the bipartisan support needed to advance without significant revision.

Senate approach

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., said earlier in the day he hadn’t yet decided whether to put the House Democrats’ bill on the floor if it is passed and arrives.

“Well, we’ll see. I mean, we obviously will cross that bridge when we come to it,” Thune said. “Even if they have a sufficient number of signatures, I doubt they vote on it this week.”

Thune said the discharge petition on the three-year ACA tax credits extension is far different from the discharge petition that forced a House floor vote on a bill to require the release of the Epstein files. Files related to Jeffrey Epstein, who died in jail in 2019 awaiting federal trial on sex trafficking charges, have become a target of Congress and victims in recent months.

“That came over here pretty much unanimously, 427 to 1,” Thune said.

“And my assumption is this discharge petition is going to be a very, probably, partisan vote.”

The Senate voted earlier this month on Democrats’ three-year ACA tax credits legislation, a move that Thune agreed to in order to get enough Democratic votes to end the government shutdown. That bill, which is identical to the House version, was unable to get the 60 votes needed to advance on a 51-48 vote.

Both chambers are set to leave Capitol Hill later this week for their two-week winter break and won’t return to work until the week of Jan. 5.

‘We have to do something’

Sen. Jeanne Shaheen said she sees the House discharge petition reaching the 218-signature threshold as “constructive.”

The New Hampshire Democrat said “bipartisan, bicameral talks continue that are also constructive, so hopefully we can see some movement.”

Though she is “hopeful” for a deal in January, Shaheen said “obviously, there’s a lot that needs to happen in order to get something done, but people need relief,” adding that “people in both houses and on both sides of the aisle are hearing from constituents that they want to see something done.”

Missouri Sen. Josh Hawley — one of four Republicans who voted with Democrats to advance the three-year extension plan — reiterated his calls for lawmakers to take action to address the looming premium spikes.

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"I just think we have to do something on the cost of premiums, and I'm not locked into any one thing," he said, acknowledging that he voted for both Democrats' proposal and his GOP colleagues' alternative bill. That effort also failed, at 51-48, to garner the 60 votes needed to move forward.

"I mean, advance any solution — that's my view, but what I think we should not do is just sit back and say, 'Well, you know, good luck. We wish you all the best.'"

Frustration breaks through

The House Republican bill, which Johnson released Friday evening, doesn't extend the enhanced ACA marketplace tax credits.

It 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.

Johnson decided Tuesday not to allow the House to debate any amendments to the bill, blocking moderate Republicans from having their bipartisan proposal to extend the ACA marketplace tax credits with modifications taken up.

That led to considerable frustration, and Wednesday morning, Pennsylvania Republican Reps. Brian Fitzpatrick, Rob Bresnahan and Ryan Mackenzie, along with New York's Lawler, signed the Democrats' discharge petition, putting it at the 218 signatures needed to force a floor vote in that chamber.

"We've worked for months with both parties, in both chambers, and with the White House, all in good faith, to balance all equities and offer a responsible bridge that successfully threaded the needle," Fitzpatrick wrote in a statement.

"Our only request was a Floor vote on this compromise, so that the American People's voice could be heard on this issue," Fitzpatrick added. "That request was rejected. Then, at the request of House leadership I, along with my colleagues, filed multiple amendments, and testified at length to those amendments. House leadership then decided to reject every single one of these amendments. As I've stated many times before, the only policy that is worse than a clean three-year extension without any reforms, is a policy of complete expiration without any bridge. Unfortunately, it is House leadership themselves that have forced this outcome."

Jeffries introduced petition

The discharge petition, introduced last month by House Democratic Leader Jeffries, sat just below the signatures needed for weeks as centrist Republicans tried to broker a deal that could become law.

When that logjam broke with the moderates' signatures, it set up a House floor vote, but any legislation must move through the Senate as well and gain President Donald Trump's signature.

Without a law to extend the enhanced ACA marketplace subsidies, roughly 22 million Americans will see their health insurance premiums spike by thousands of dollars next year, if they can fit the rise in costs into their budgets.

SD's Rep. Johnson votes for Republican bill that doesn't extend ACA credits

FROM SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota, voted for a Republican health care bill Wednesday that would not extend the enhanced Affordable Care Act ("Obamacare") marketplace tax credits.

He released a statement afterward saying the bill would "fix a broken system and provide more options for people who are struggling to make ends meet."

"Obamacare made health care unaffordable for the American family," Johnson said. "Many families are paying more for their health insurance than they pay for their mortgage or rent. The program has become riddled with waste, fraud, and abuse, which only drives prices higher for those trying to do right."

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 from the House speaker.

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 voted 216-211 to approve the bill, sending it to the Senate, where it’s unlikely to get the bipartisan support needed to advance without significant revision.

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.

Shauneen Miranda is a reporter for States Newsroom’s Washington bureau. An alumna of the University of Maryland, she previously covered breaking news for Axios.

Soybeans have been a top U.S. ag export for decades. What happens when the top buyer stops buying?

The Trump administration has announced \$12 billion in relief for farmers, but that won’t cover all their losses

BY: CASSANDRA STEPHENSON, GABBY NELSON AND MÓNICA CORDERO

RYDER, N.D., — Tyler Stafslie is a fourth-generation farmer who’s worked his family’s land in central North Dakota for about 20 years. Roughly half of his 2,500 acres are typically dedicated to soybeans, a major crop in the state and in the Mississippi River Basin. But growing soybeans has become less profitable over the last decade as input costs rose and the Trump administration’s tariff negotiations in 2018 and 2025 destabilized trade and strained farmers’ incomes.

This year, wary of the precarious export market, Stafslie decreased his soybean acres by half.

“We’ve been experiencing in ag, the last couple of years, a downturn in commodity prices, a lot of that related to just a large supply across the globe of major commodities, but then you add this trade war on top of it, and it’s like the icing on the cake,” Stafslie said.

The administration announced earlier this month a \$12 billion fund for one-time payments to row crop farmers to offset a portion of their inflation- and trade-related losses in the 2025 crop year.

Farmers were asking for the federal relief funds and are happy the administration is finally answering, said Stafslie. But he’s still facing uncertainty. The administration has yet to announce how much money per acre eligible growers will be receiving, and the funds will not be distributed until February, further stressing farmers like him with large debt and growing interest.

“Payments announced this week must be followed by additional and expedient efforts to keep farmers on the land and to improve the farm safety net, leaving annual bailouts as cautionary historical context rather than ongoing policy,” David Howard, policy development director of the National Young Farmers Coalition, wrote in a statement Tuesday.

Farmers and farming associations are looking for longer term solutions: to diversify trade partners and increase domestic uses for soybeans as export revenues become less certain. Some, like Stafslie, are shifting to other crops, like corn and wheat.

Soybeans are the largest agricultural export in the U.S. The legume covers more than 81 million acres — or 10% — of all U.S. farmland, the U.S. Department of Agriculture reported in September, and more than 40% of the nation’s soybeans are exported to other countries.

U.S. farmers received \$24.5 billion from soybean exports in 2024, with Chinese purchases accounting for \$12.6 billion — roughly twice the amount purchased by the next five largest export partners combined, according to USDA data.

But this year, China stopped purchasing U.S. soybeans during tariff negotiations with the Trump administration, instead falling back on its relationships with Brazil and other South American countries to meet

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its soybean needs. For U.S. soybean farmers, this growing season ends with low prices, unsold harvests, big financial losses and uncertainty going into the next season despite a tentative new deal with China.

"We learned firsthand that being heavily reliant on China for export sales is only good when things are good," University of Tennessee Professor of Agricultural and Resource Economics Andrew Muhammad said.

How did we get here?

Soybeans brought by traders and missionaries from Asia first took root in North America in small quantities in the 1700s, but the USDA did not begin tracking soybeans as a crop until the early 1920s.

Around that time, the USDA, land grant university extension agents and farm groups started to promote the soybean to farmers as a soil-fertilizing crop that yielded high-protein meal for animal feed, oil, and even meat replacements for human consumption. The Mississippi River Basin's flat plains and intermittent rain proved to be ideal conditions for the crop.

Soybeans gained a foothold on U.S. farms in "fits and starts" over several decades, author Matthew Roth writes in his book, "Magic Bean: The Rise of Soy in America," but really took off as a cash crop after World War I. Its success was later buoyed by the Agricultural Adjustment Act that allowed soy plantings while restricting other commodities as a way to stabilize crop prices during the Great Depression, policies limiting foreign oils, and the growing need for animal feed and oil during World War II, according to Roth.

The crop helped diversify farming in the south and midwest. By the 1960s, Roth writes, "the soybean had insinuated itself thoroughly into the American diet," but indirectly – as feed for the country's livestock, oils for salads and derivatives in processed foods.

At the same time, soybeans proved to be a desirable product for international trade partners. In 1989, U.S. soybean exports totaled around \$4 billion, about a fifth of which went to Japan. The Freedom to Farm Act in 1996 allowed farmers to plant single-crop fields, and with rising export demand from China starting in the early 1990s, many farmers chose to plant soybeans, Roth wrote.

In 2001, China joined the World Trade Organization and gained better access to globalized trade with the organization's members, including the U.S., according to Muhammad and the Council on Foreign Relations. From there, growth in China's tourism economy and middle class spurred increased demand for meat protein, Muhammad said, heightening the country's need for animal feed in the form of U.S. soybeans.

By 2000, the crop was planted on more than 74 million U.S. acres, according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

"Over time, China has grown, and it seems to be the case that our total export sales have grown with our exports to China," Muhammad explained. "They've sort of driven that rise over the last two decades."

Brazil's soybean industry has competed with American exports since the 1970s, but since 2017 has consistently exported more than the U.S.

When Trump first upped tariffs on Chinese goods in 2018, China retaliated, Muhammad said, and began investing more heavily in purchases and transportation infrastructure in Brazil. Their turn toward Brazil as a primary provider during trade negotiations in 2025 "represents a return on that investment (for China)," he said.

Farmers in the U.S. are reckoning with the fallout.

Farming pains and changing plans

Justin Sherlock farms 2,400 acres of corn and soybeans in eastern North Dakota. His dad started farming in the early 2000s and he took over the farm in 2012.

"The last, you know, 13 years that I've been going, the last decade, has been pretty tough to really try and get established," he said.

For Sherlock, China coming to market very late in the 2025 harvest season was a blow to profits. Nearly one-quarter of the state's agricultural exports hinge on soybeans, with China serving as the largest market for U.S. grain.

Sherlock was able to sell most of his soybean crop early to North Dakota soybean elevators — facilities

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that store the beans — which then found domestic processors in Nebraska and Kansas to sell to. But those domestic markets were also absorbing the supply that would typically be exported to China, so prices — around \$8.65 per bushel — dropped significantly below Sherlock's cost of production. He said he will lose "several hundred thousands of dollars" this year, on top of similar losses last year.

"We just have to find a way to hopefully make it to next year," he said. "That's the struggle right now for a lot of producers."

Especially for young or beginning producers, said Sherlock, farmers will likely be having "tough financial discussions with their bankers and lenders." Or, worst case scenario, these losses could mean losing their farms.

"You cannot have a successful agriculture industry in North Dakota without trade," he said. "It's so important that we fix these trade relationships and get back to doing business with other countries."

Trade uncertainty was keenly felt by soybean farmers in several Mississippi River Basin states, many of which lead the nation in soybean production and exports.

Illinois accounts for 16% of the country's total soybean exports, followed by Iowa with 13%, according to the most recent data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service. North Dakota comprises 5% of national exports.

Even in states that aren't among the country's top producers, soybeans can make up a significant portion of the state farm economy. Tennessee ranks 16th in the nation for soybean exports, for example, but soybeans were the highest-ranked agricultural commodity produced in the state in 2023, bringing in more than \$990 million in cash receipts. In 2025, soybeans covered nearly 1.5 million acres of Tennessee farmland — the most of any crop in the state — according to the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture.

The USDA's Economic Research Service reported in July that more soybeans are being processed domestically. Most of the soybeans that stay in the U.S. are crushed into oil and meal, and a majority of that meal goes toward feeding livestock. The oil is used in biofuels, for industrial uses, and in food. New crush facilities that separate the beans into oil and meal are under construction in North Dakota, Nebraska, Wisconsin, Iowa, Kansas and Ohio — states that previously shipped soybeans to other countries to be processed. Biofuel has increased domestic demand for soybeans — and crush facilities — since around 2010, providing an alternative for farmers facing lower demand from traditional export partners.

April Hemmes, a fourth-generation farmer in north-central Iowa, said in September that she is fortunate to have nearby options for her beans: there is an ethanol plant and a crush facility that makes soybean meal, biodiesel and food-grade oil, about 10 miles away from her farm. Farmers who don't have those options will have a harder time adapting to changing export markets, she wrote in an email.

The lack of money in farmers' pockets is trickling down to other sectors in farming communities, too, said John Bartman, a regenerative farmer working about 850 acres in northern Illinois. He pointed to farm equipment dealers and factories in Illinois and Iowa that are shuttering well-paying jobs because business has been so slow.

"So it's more than just farmers who have been affected by this," Bartman said.

What comes next?

In October, China and the U.S. hammered out a trade agreement. China agreed to purchase at least 12 million metric tons of U.S. soybeans by the end of the year, according to the White House, and will purchase at least 25 million metric tons each year through 2028. USDA export sales data from Oct. 2 through Dec. 8 shows China made soybean purchases from the U.S. totaling about 2.8 million metric tons.

For comparison, China purchased an annual average of 29 million metric tons of soybeans from the United States between 2020 and 2024, according to The Center for Strategic and International Studies, an international public policy think tank.

The deal "really isn't much of a trade deal at all," Bartman said.

"We've just gone through this tariff war, which we're still going through right now, and what did we get out of it? China agreed to buy less soybeans than what we had last year, and we as farmers have suffered

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the collateral damage from this," Bartman said.

With low trade prices and higher input costs, he warned, "we have not improved our economic situation for next year."

Bartman is among farmers who are promoting investment in domestic uses for soybeans, including biofuels and plastics, though he acknowledges that a market the size of China's will be "very difficult" to replace.

Muhammad said the turbulence in the soybean exports market shows that disruption of stable trade policy has consequences, which can hurt some sectors more than others.

The U.S. agriculture sector is often a political target in trade disputes, he said, because other countries understand the agricultural community's significance in U.S. politics.

"It's not a major export in the context of all exports, but it's a politically viable community, and it carries a lot of heft in the context of trade agreements and trade policy because of the national security nature of food," Muhammad said.

Farmers who are eligible for the Trump administration's \$12 billion Farmer Bridge Assistance program should expect the USDA to announce payment rates for crops the week of Dec. 22, according to the department. Payments are limited to up to \$155,000 per person or legal entity.

The program appears similar to a \$10 billion aid package offered to farmers impacted by trade retaliation in 2018. Those subsidies did not cover all of farmers' losses.

For many farmers like Sherlock, these subsidies are a necessity for short-term survival. He said any farming subsidies he receives go straight to paying his bills and paying off loans.

"There will be a lot of producers, especially young, beginning producers, who won't be able to make it and farm next year if we don't do something to help them pay their bills from this year," he said.

Even established producers are worried. Stafslieen works land that's been in his family since 1912, but the tough years are piling up.

"This is my future. This is my retirement. I don't have a 401k plan. I have a farm," said Stafslieen, who lives on the farm with his wife, Shannon, and their two kids. "If I have to keep burning through this equity, that's very, very scary for my future and my family's future."

Cassandra Stephenson covers issues impacting rural West Tennessee as a Report for America corps member at The Tennessee Lookout.

Gabrielle Nelson covers environment, agriculture and energy along the Missouri River. Before joining Buffalo's Fire, she worked as an environmental reporting intern at the nonprofit publication Bridge Michigan, covering climate change, renewable energy and the Great Lakes. Gabrielle received a journalism degree from Michigan State University, where she worked as an entertainment editorial assistant and DJ for the college radio station Impact 89FM.



St. John's Lutheran

Christmas Program

on Thurs., Dec. 18, 7 p.m.

Groton
Area
Tigers
Groton, SD

GDILIVE



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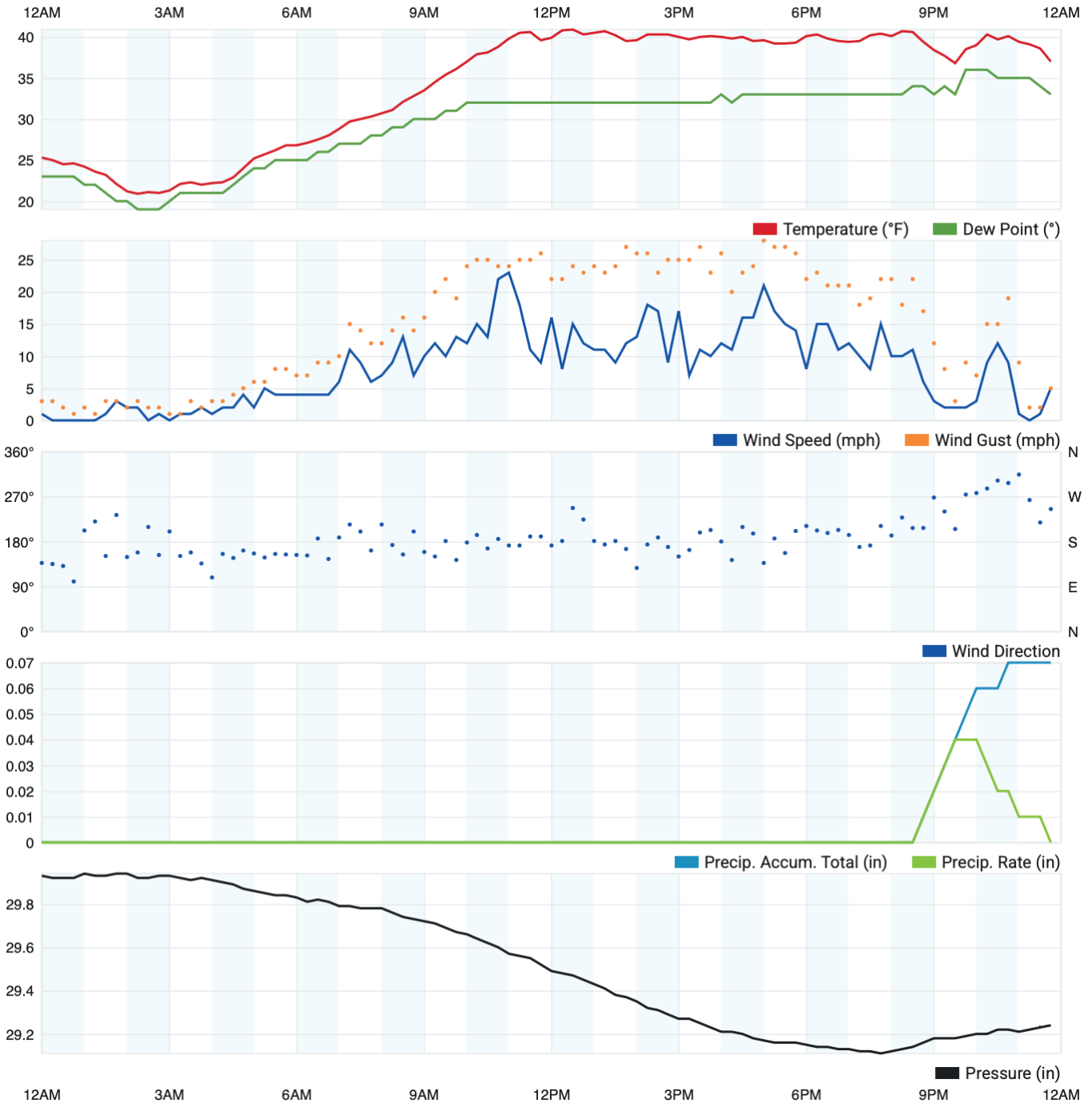
For more info: GDILIVE.COM

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

December 17, 2025



Broton Daily Independent

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Warning

Thursday

Thursday
Night

Friday

Friday Night

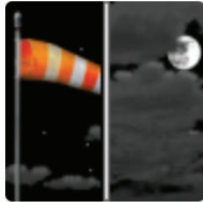
Saturday



80% → 30%

High: 20 °F ↓

Snow and Patchy Blowing Snow then Chance Snow and Windy



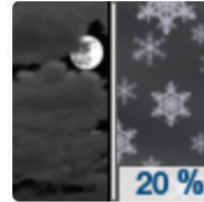
Low: 0 °F

Mostly Clear and Blustery then Partly Cloudy



High: 30 °F

Mostly Cloudy



Low: 15 °F

Mostly Cloudy then Slight Chance Snow



High: 25 °F

Sunny



What We Can Expect Today

December 18, 2025

3:48 AM

Bottom Line, Up Front

Key Messages for Wind:

- Northwest wind **gusts of 60 to 70+ mph** will continue this morning with winds diminishing west to east across the region this evening.
- Impacts:** High winds may damage property and cause power outages.
- Travel will be difficult, especially for high profiles vehicles.**

NEW

What Has Changed?

- Blizzard Warning** has been issued for Day, Marshall, and Roberts County.
- Winter Weather Advisory** remains in effect for Clark County in northeastern SD and Traverse County in MN
- High Wind Warning** remains in effect for the entire forecast area through the afternoon

Key Messages for Snow/Flash Freeze:

- Falling snow (even if light) and gusty winds will lead to reduced visibility.**
 - Especially over and along the Sisseton Hills where **blizzard conditions are expected.**
 - Visibilities may drop below 1/4 mile due to falling snow.
- Impacts:** When snow is falling, the combination of the winds and snow will reduce visibilities.
 - A drop in temperatures of 20 to 30 degrees may lead the **rain that fell earlier to become ice!**
 - Will make for slick road conditions!**
 - Travel will be difficult, especially for the morning commute**

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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Northwest wind gusts of 60-70+ mph will continue this morning, highest gusts over central SD. Winds will diminish west to east across the region this evening. High winds may damage property and cause power outages. Travel will be difficult, especially for high profiles vehicles. Falling snow and gusty winds will lead to reduced visibility. Especially over and along the Sisseton Hills where blizzard conditions are expected. Visibilities here may drop below 1/4 mile due to falling snow. A drop in temperatures of 20 to 30 degrees may lead the rain that fell earlier to become ice!

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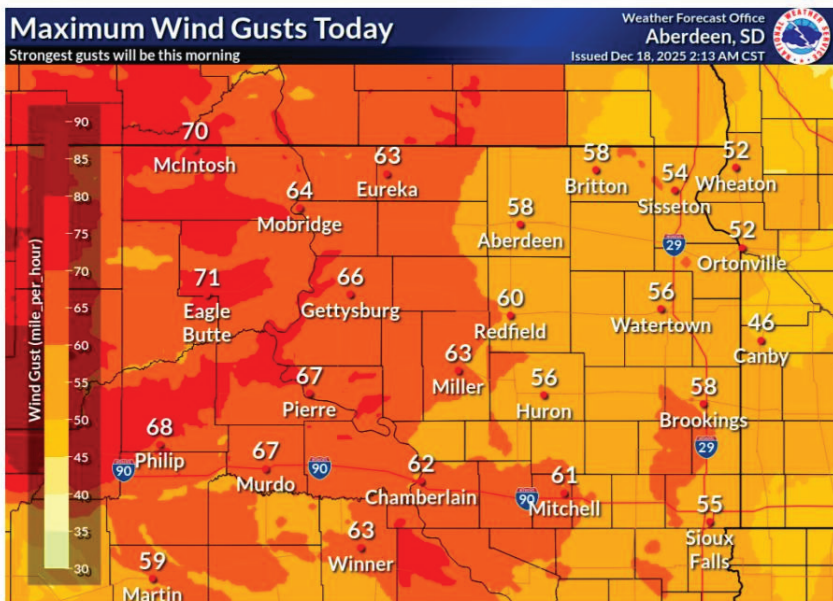
Wind Gusts and Timing Today

December 18, 2025
3:53 AM

Strongest winds/gusts this morning through the midday

Peak Wind Timeframe

Maximum Wind Gust Forecast (mph)



	12/18							
	Thu							
	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am
Aberdeen	55	56	52	46	30	20	9	16
Britton	56	58	55	51	36	22	8	14
Brookings	56	58	54	53	40	29	15	9
Chamberlain	62	59	55	48	26	15	12	21
Clark	53	58	56	54	39	26	12	20
Eagle Butte	71	62	53	43	21	18	25	30
Ellendale	59	60	56	51	33	20	9	16
Eureka	63	60	56	48	30	16	16	25
Gettysburg	66	59	56	46	28	17	20	28
Huron	55	56	55	49	29	20	10	16
Kennebec	66	63	61	53	30	18	18	26
McIntosh	67	61	53	40	18	18	25	31
Milbank	45	53	54	51	43	33	16	12
Miller	63	59	56	49	31	20	14	24
Mobridge	63	56	48	39	23	14	20	26
Murdo	67	60	55	45	24	17	21	26
Pierre	66	56	51	43	23	13	17	24
Redfield	59	60	59	53	31	22	13	21
Sisseton	49	54	53	49	40	30	13	13
Watertown	54	55	53	53	41	30	14	13
Webster	52	54	54	51	39	28	12	16
Wheaton	45	52	51	49	43	33	16	12

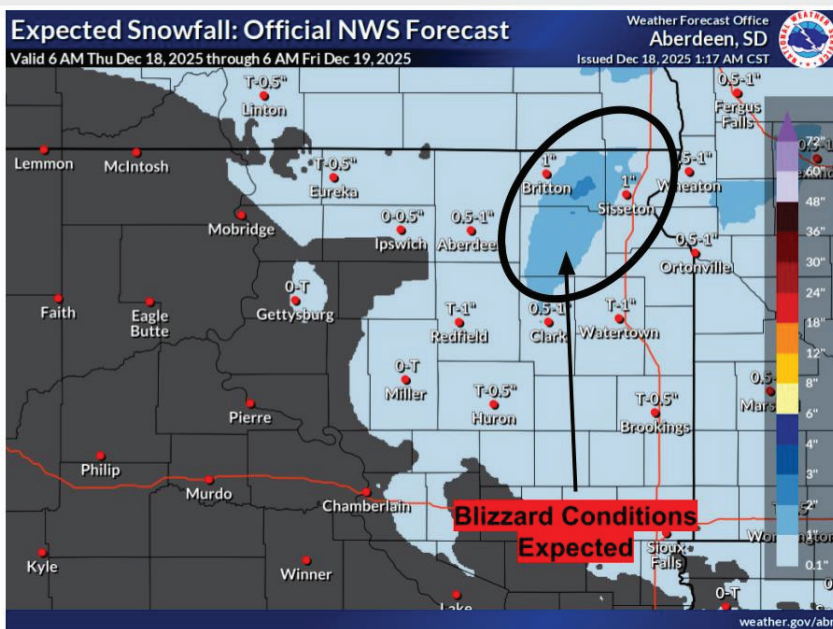
- Northwest winds with gusts from 60 to 70+ mph expected. **Highest gusts over central South Dakota this morning.**



Expected Snowfall Today

December 18, 2025
3:56 AM

- Locations in the oval are expected to receive the most snow today.
 - Generally 1-2+ inches of snowfall.
 - Falling snow (even if light) and the winds gusting to 60 mph will lead to reduced visibility.**
 - Especially over and along the Sisseton Hills where **whiteout conditions are expected**
- The hazardous conditions will impact the morning commute.



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Probably the most impactful part of this system will be the potential for snow squalls. There may be at least a band or two of intense snow along with the high winds, resulting in rapid reductions to visibility (even if there isn't much accumulation) and a significant travel hazard. Current timing on squalls is early Thursday morning.

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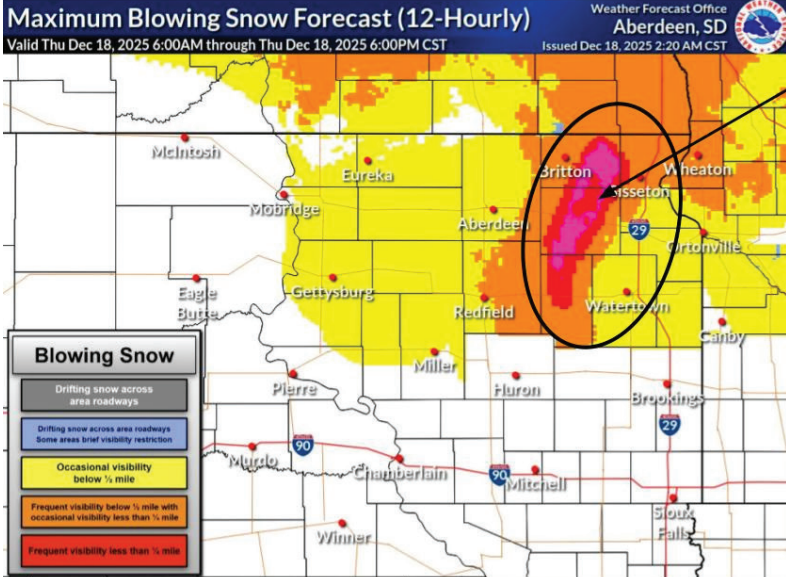


Reduced Visibilities Due to Blowing Snow

December 18, 2025
4:03 AM

Greatest impacts 6am to Noon today

Blowing Snow Impacts - 6am today to 6pm this evening



Key Messages

- Over/along the Sisseton Hills, the **combination of falling snow and the strong winds will lead to significantly reduced visibilities at times today.**
 - Greatest impacts will be this morning.
 - Visibilities are expected to be reduced **to blizzard level** (1/4 mile or less)
- As the snow comes to an end this afternoon, the blowing snow will gradually come to an end.

Impacts (Red/Pink area)

- Falling and blowing snow frequently reducing visibility below a half mile will make travel dangerous, especially in open country. There may be occasional whiteout conditions.



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Over/along the Sisseton Hills, the combination of falling snow and the strong winds will lead to significantly reduced visibilities at times today. Greatest impacts will be this morning through the midday. As the snow comes to an end this afternoon, the blowing snow will gradually come to an end. Falling and blowing snow frequently reducing visibility below a half mile will make travel dangerous, especially in open country. There may be occasional whiteout conditions.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 41 °F at 12:35 PM

Low Temp: 21 °F at 2:11 AM

Wind: 29 mph at 5:16 PM

Precip: : 0.07

Today's Info

Record High: 58 in 1979

Record Low: -37 in 2016

Average High: 28

Average Low: 7

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.34

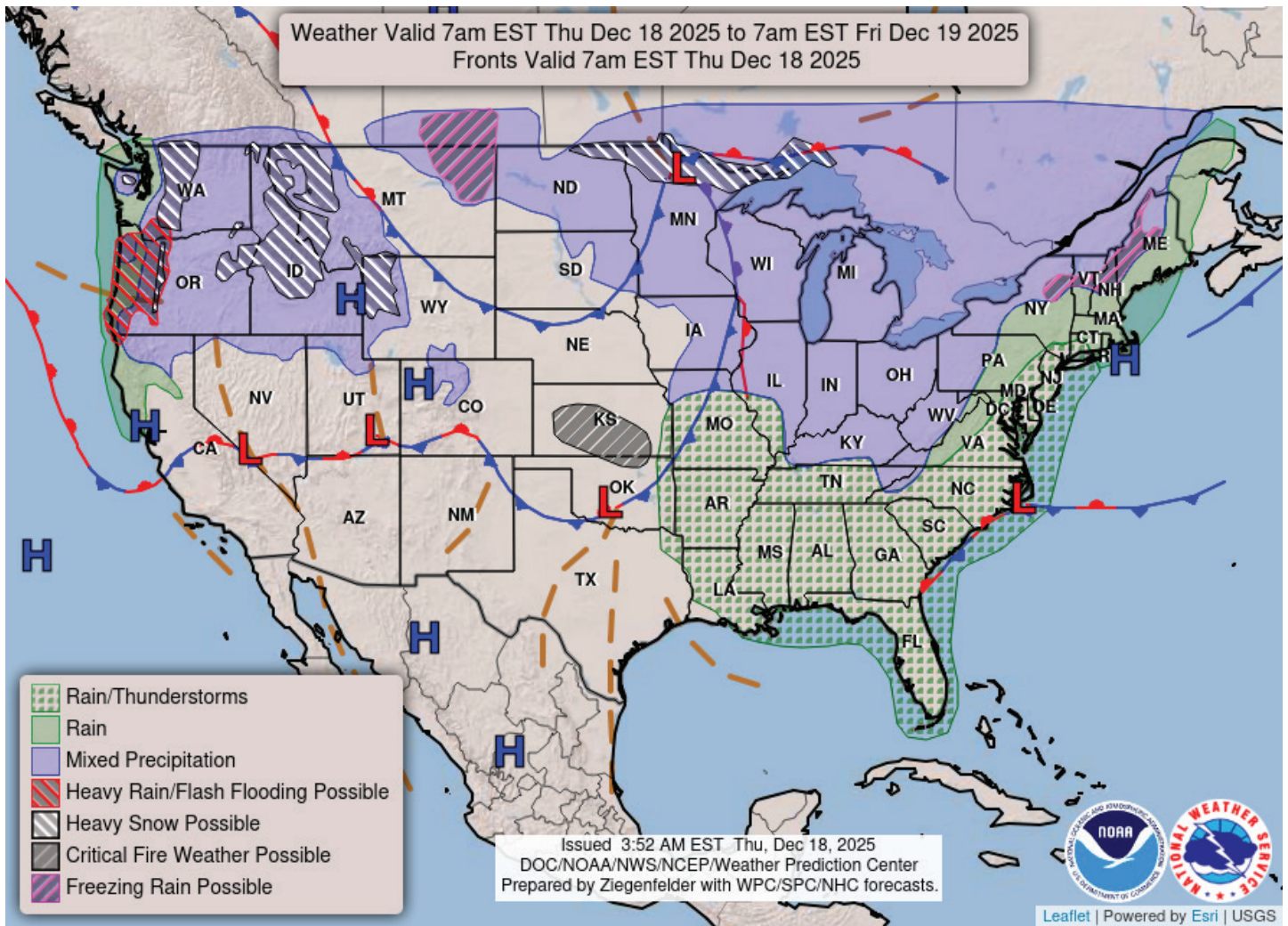
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.67

Average Precip to date: 21.55

Precip Year to Date: 25.48

Sunset Tonight: 4:50 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:08 am



Today in Weather History

December 18, 1985: Bitter cold impacted most places in South Dakota as low temperatures dropped 20 degrees below zero or lower. The coldest temperature was 30 below zero at Huron in Beadle County and Canton in Lincoln County. Aberdeen dropped to 22 below zero, Highmore and Mobridge fell to 23 below zero; Britton fell to 24 below zero, and Summit bottomed out at 25 below.

December 18, 1996: A powerful Alberta Clipper and a slow-moving deep Arctic high-pressure system brought widespread, prolonged blizzard conditions to the entire region from the 16th to the 19th. The clipper dropped from 1 to 5 inches of snowfall on top of the already extensive snow cover of 1 to almost 4 feet. Across central and north-central South Dakota, northerly winds increased to 25 to 40 mph with gusts to 55 mph late in the morning of the 16th. Temperatures also fell, and widespread blizzard conditions and dangerous wind chills of 40 to 70 below zero developed, prevailing through noon on the 18th. Across northeast South Dakota, conditions changed through late on the day of the 16th, with widespread blowing snow, falling temperatures, and dangerous wind chills. Blizzard conditions developed on the morning of the 17th and continued into the evening of the 18th. Conditions changed throughout the afternoon of the 16th in west-central Minnesota, with a full-fledged blizzard by the morning of the 17th.

North winds of 30 to 40 mph gusting to 50 mph brought visibilities near zero and caused heavy drifting, making travel difficult. Many people had to be rescued from their vehicles after getting stuck in massive snowdrifts or going into ditches because of low visibilities. Some people had to wait to be rescued for many hours, for some over a day. Due to the massive amount of blowing snow, widespread heavy drifting occurred across the entire area, blocking roads, making travel difficult, and leaving some people stranded to wait out the storm. Some snowdrifts from the storm were as high as 15 feet, with a few houses almost buried. A Burlington Northern locomotive became stuck in a 12-foot drift near Hazel and had to be dug out. Due to the weight of the snow, the roof of a hangar at the Gettysburg Airport collapsed on an airplane.

All schools were let out early on the 16th, with some schools not reopening until the 20th. Several school buses went into the ditch or got stuck in drifts and had to be pulled out. There were several accidents, most with minor injuries; however, one accident in Dewey County resulted in serious injury. Most of the roads, state highways and Interstate 90 were closed for a day or two until road crews could get to them. Interstate 29 also received heavy drifting, with parts of it closed for a while during the storm. Most snow plows had to be called back because they could not see the roads or the roads would be drifted over shortly after they were plowed. Some county snow removal budgets were already depleted or were close to being consumed. Emergency personnel and road crews were working extended hours to keep up with the storm. Rescue vehicles had a difficult time responding to emergencies. In one case, a lady from Mobridge had to be brought to Aberdeen. The 100-mile trip took six hours. Also, a rural Westport man died because the rescue units could not get to him in time.

Airports were closed, or flights were canceled or delayed. Mail was delayed for some people up to several days with a massive backup of Christmas packages. Some government offices and many businesses were closed for several days. All sports and other activities were postponed or canceled. Farmers and ranchers had a difficult time getting feed to their livestock. Many cattle were loose and had to be found as they walked on snowdrifts over fences. The storm also killed several animals and a countless number of pheasants with some buried in the snow. Several dairy producers had to dump thousands of pounds of milk because trucks could not get to them in time. Fortunately, there were only spotty power outages throughout the storm. For several hours on the night of the 16th in the extreme cold, 3000 people in Pierre were without power for several hours.

December 18th, 2016: An Arctic airmass over the Northern Plains produced bitterly cold temperatures. In South Dakota, both Aberdeen and Watertown broke their record low by several degrees, with both falling to 37 degrees below zero. The Arctic air combined with 10 to 20 mph winds brought wind chills to 35 to 60 degrees below zero across the region.

Contagious Joy

Joy naturally flows from knowing Christ, and it draws others to Him..

1 John 1:1-4: The Incarnation of the Word of Life

1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. 2 The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. 3 We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. 4 We write this to make our[a] joy complete.

Jesus calls us to be His witnesses (Acts 1:8). On hearing this, some Christians worry that they need special skills or charisma in order to explain the good news to someone else. Yet to bear witness is not merely to share the plan of salvation. The phrase literally means “to know by personal experience” or “testify to.” In today’s passage, John wrote that he was sharing things he’d experienced firsthand. What he was saying is this: “I’m full of joy because of the experience of knowing Jesus, and I want you to share in that joy.”

When you’re in love with someone, you are excited about the relationship and enjoy spending time together. Likewise, when you’re in love with Jesus, you can’t keep to yourself the joy that comes from knowing Him—it just spills over, bearing witness and strengthening other believers. People around you will pick up on the deep, genuine gladness in your heart that goes beyond natural happiness. And some who don’t yet know the Lord will find themselves hungering for the joy you have.

Witnessing is not a matter of eloquence or talent; it’s an overflow of a relationship with Jesus. As you allow the Holy Spirit to increasingly express His life and power through you, contagious joy will be the fruit of His indwelling presence.

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:

12.16.25

20 24 46 59 65 7

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$90,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 38

DRAW: Mins 0 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.17.25

14 30 38 40 47 6

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$10,020,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 53

DRAW: Mins 0 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.17.25

11 13 20 40 41 7

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 17 Hrs 7 Mins 59

DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.17.25

17 19 20 27 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$135,000

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 7

DRAW: Mins 59 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.17.25

24 43 65 66 68 3

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 36

DRAW: Mins 59 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.17.25

25 33 53 62 66 17

Power Play: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$1,500,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 36

DRAW: Mins 59 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Bruns scores 23 as South Dakota beats NAIA's Dakota State 80-71

By The Associated Press undefined

VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — Isaac Bruns had 23 points to lead South Dakota to an 80-71 victory over NAIA member Dakota State on Wednesday night.

Bruns shot 5 of 10 from the field and 12 for 16 from the free-throw line for the Coyotes (7-6). Jordan Crawford added 15 points, five rebounds and three steals. Cameron Fens totaled 13 points and 11 rebounds.

The Trojans were led by Nathan Ojukwu's 27 points. Kaleel Sutton-White added 10 points.

The Associated Press created this story using technology provided by Data Skrive and data from Sportradar.

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 63, Lakota Tech 40
Crazy Horse 81, Oelrichs 15
Little Wound 84, Omaha Nation, Neb. 62
Mahpiya Luta Red Cloud 85, Crow Creek Tribal School 30
Pine Ridge 56, McLaughlin 23
Rapid City Christian 62, White River 36
Tiospa Zina 69, Santee, Neb. 29
Wakpala 63, Tiospaye Topa 46
Wall 70, Lower Brule 32

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

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 60, Little Wound 48
Crazy Horse 42, Takini 18
Dupree 48, Oelrichs 31
Lower Brule 59, Tiospa Zina 26
Mahpiya Luta Red Cloud 75, Marty 21
Omaha Nation, Neb. 54, Custer 20
Rapid City Christian 67, Santee, Neb. 25
Wakpala 62, Tiospaye Topa 12
Wall 60, St. Francis Indian 22
White River 45, Pine Ridge 42

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

World shares are mixed after AI worries drag Wall Street tech stocks lower

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer

BANGKOK (AP) — World shares were mixed on Thursday after declines for AI stocks dragged the U.S. market to its worst day in nearly a month.

Traders were waiting for an update later in the day on U.S. inflation, and on a decision Friday by Japan's central bank on interest rates. The Bank of Japan is expected to raise its key rate by 0.25 percentage point to tamp down price pressures, despite a contraction in the July-September quarter.

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Germany's DAX edged 0.2% higher to 24,007.33, while the CAC 40 in Paris gained 0.4% to 8,114.30. Britain's FTSE 100 was up 0.3% to 9,800.00.

The future for the S&P 500 gained 0.3%, while that for the Dow Jones Industrial Average inched up 0.1%.

In Asian trading, Tokyo's Nikkei 225 lost 1% to 49,001.50, with technology shares leading the decline.

Technology and telecoms giant SoftBank sank 4%. Computer chip maker Tokyo Electron lost 3.2% while chip testing equipment maker Advantest dropped 3.3%.

Honda Motor Corp. fell 2.2% after reports said it was suspending production at some plants in Japan and China due to shortages of computer chips.

South Korea's Kospi sank 1.5% to 3,994.51, also pulled lower by selling of shares in electronics companies and automakers. LG Electronics declined 3.1%, while Samsung Electronics lost 0.3%.

Chinese markets were mixed. Hong Kong's Hang Seng bounced back from early losses to gain 0.1%, closing at 25,498.13. The Shanghai Composite index edged 0.2% higher, to 3,876.37.

In Australia, the S&P/ASX 200 was nearly unchanged at 8,588.20.

Later Thursday, the U.S. government will report on inflation last month. Economists expect that report to show prices for U.S. consumers continue to rise faster than anyone would like.

On Wednesday, the S&P 500 fell 1.2% and the Dow dipped 0.5%. The Nasdaq composite dropped 1.8%.

Slightly more stocks rose within the S&P 500 than fell, but they got drowned out by the drops for companies in the artificial-intelligence industry.

The sector is being pressured by questions over whether Big Tech companies' share prices have shot too high, whether all the investment in AI will be profitable and productive enough to justify the costs, and by worries over stratospheric levels of debt some companies are taking on to pay for it all.

Broadcom dropped 4.5%, Oracle fell 5.4% and CoreWeave sank 7.1%. Nvidia, the chip company that's become Wall Street's most influential stock because of its tremendous size, fell 3.8% and was the day's heaviest weight on the S&P 500.

Power companies that jumped earlier in the year on expectations for stronger demand from electricity-sucking data centers also lost some of their shine. Constellation Energy fell 6.7%.

On the winning side of Wall Street were oil companies, after President Donald Trump ordered a blockade of all "sanctioned oil tankers" into Venezuela.

That sent the price of a barrel of benchmark U.S. crude higher by 1.2% to \$55.94. just a day after it sank to its lowest level since 2021.

Early Thursday, U.S. crude was up 12 cents at \$55.93 per barrel. Brent crude, the international standard, gained 8 cents to \$59.76 per barrel. It had climbed 1.3% on Wednesday.

Oil prices have been falling for most of this year on expectations that companies are pumping more than enough crude to meet the world's demand.

Netflix added 0.2% after Warner Bros. Discovery's board said it still recommends shareholders approve a buyout offer from the streaming giant for its Warner Bros. business, rather than a competing hostile bid from Paramount Skydance for the entire company.

Warner Bros. Discovery fell 2.4%, while Paramount Skydance dropped 5.4%.

In other dealings early Thursday, the U.S. dollar rose to 155.92 Japanese yen from 155.70 yen. The euro slipped to \$1.1727 from \$1.1743.

Belgium demands ironclad guarantees of protection as EU leaders weigh a massive loan for Ukraine

By LORNE COOK, SAM MCNEIL and ANGELA CHARLTON Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — Belgium insisted on Thursday that its European Union partners must provide ironclad guarantees that it will be protected from Russian retaliation before it would back a massive loan for Ukraine.

At a high-stakes EU summit in Brussels, the 27-nation bloc's leaders are set to decide on whether to use tens of billions of euros in frozen Russian assets to underwrite a loan to meet Ukraine's military and financial needs over the next two years.

The bulk of the assets — some 193 billion euros (\$227 billion) as of September — are held in the Brussels-based financial clearing house Euroclear. Russia's Central Bank sued Euroclear last week.

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"Give me a parachute and we'll all jump together," De Wever told members of the Belgian parliament just before the summit began. "If we have confidence in the parachute that shouldn't be a problem."

Belgium raises its concerns as it faces Russian pressure

Belgium fears that Russia will strike back and would prefer that the bloc borrow the money on international markets. It wants frozen assets held in other European countries to be thrown into the pot as well, and for its partners to guarantee that Euroclear will have the funds it needs should it come under legal attack.

European officials say Russia is waging a campaign of sabotage and disruption across the continent. The Central Bank lawsuit ramped up pressure on Belgium and its European partners ahead of the summit.

The "reparations loan" plan would see the EU give 90 billion euros (\$106 billion) to Ukraine. Countries like the U.K., Canada and Norway would make up any shortfall.

Russia's claim to the assets would still stand, but the assets would remain locked away at least until the Kremlin ends its war on Ukraine and pays for the massive damage it's caused over four years of war.

In mapping out the loan plan, the European Commission set up safeguards to protect Belgium, but De Wever remains unconvinced.

"I have not yet seen a text that could satisfactorily address Belgium's concerns," he said. "I hope to see one today."

De Wever insisted that Belgium remains "a faithful ally" of Ukraine and wants to continue to help.

Allies maintain support for Ukraine

Whatever method they use, the leaders have pledged to meet most of Ukraine's needs for the next two years. The International Monetary Fund estimates that would amount to 137 billion euros (\$160 billion). The war-ravaged country is at risk of bankruptcy and needs the money by spring.

"We have to find a solution today," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen told reporters. "We will not leave the European Council without a solution for the funding of Ukraine for the next two years." EU Council President António Costa, who is chairing the meeting, has vowed to keep leaders negotiating until an agreement is reached, even if it takes days.

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said: "Now we have a simple choice. Either money today or blood tomorrow." He insisted that "all European leaders have to rise to the occasion."

EU envoys have worked around the clock in recent weeks to flesh out the details and narrow differences among the 27 member countries. If enough countries object, the plan could be blocked. There is no majority support for a plan B of raising the funds on international markets.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said that he hopes Belgium's concerns can be addressed.

"The reactions of the Russian president in recent hours show how necessary this is. In my view, this is indeed the only option. We are basically faced with the choice of using European debt or Russian assets for Ukraine, and my opinion is clear: we must use the Russian assets."

Hungary and Slovakia oppose von der Leyen's plan for a reparations loan. Apart from Belgium, Bulgaria, Italy and Malta are also undecided.

"I would not like a European Union in war," said Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who sees himself as a peacemaker. He's also Russian President Vladimir Putin's closest ally in Europe. "To give money means war."

Orbán described the loan plan as "a dead end," and said that "the whole idea is a stupid one."

Rain creates a crimson spectacle on Iran's Hormuz Island for the first time this year

TEHARN, Iran (AP) — Rainfall on Iran's Hormuz Island briefly transformed the coastline of its famed Red Beach into a striking natural scene this week, as runoff flowing over the shore turned the water shades of deep red, intensifying the island's iron-rich soil and washing it into the sea.

The beach is known for its vivid red sand and cliffs, created by high concentrations of iron oxide.

When rain falls, as it did starting on Tuesday, streams of red soil flow toward the shoreline, coloring both the beach and the surrounding water and creating a sharp contrast with the blue waters of the Persian Gulf.

The phenomenon regularly attracts tourists, photographers and social media attention.

Beyond its visual appeal, the red soil — locally known as gelak — is exported in limited quantities and used in the production of cosmetics, pigments and some traditional products.

Hormuz Island lies in the Strait of Hormuz, where the Persian Gulf meets the Gulf of Oman, about 1,080 kilometers (670 miles) south of Iran's capital, Tehran. Rainfall is relatively rare on the arid island, and happens mainly during the winter and early spring.

The island has become a popular destination with visitors drawn to its unusual landscapes.

US announces massive package of arms sales to Taiwan valued at more than \$10 billion

By MATTHEW LEE and SIMINA MISTREANU Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration has announced a massive package of arms sales to Taiwan valued at more than \$10 billion that includes medium-range missiles, howitzers and drones, drawing an angry response from China.

The State Department announced the sales late Wednesday during a nationally televised address by President Donald Trump, who made scant mention of foreign policy issues and did not speak about China or Taiwan at all. U.S.-Chinese tensions have ebbed and flowed during Trump's second term, largely over trade and tariffs but also over China's increasing aggressiveness toward Taiwan, which Beijing has said must reunify with the mainland.

The eight arms sales agreements announced Wednesday cover 82 high-mobility artillery rocket systems, or HIMARS, and 420 Army Tactical Missile Systems, or ATACMS — similar to what the U.S. had been providing Ukraine during the Biden administration to defend itself from Russia — worth more than \$4 billion. They also include 60 self-propelled howitzer systems and related equipment worth more than \$4 billion and drones valued at more than \$1 billion.

Other sales in the package include military software valued at more than \$1 billion, Javelin and TOW missiles worth more than \$700 million, helicopter spare parts worth \$96 million and refurbishment kits for Harpoon missiles worth \$91 million.

In separate but nearly identical statements, the State Department said the sales serve "U.S. national, economic, and security interests by supporting the recipient's continuing efforts to modernize its armed forces and to maintain a credible defensive capability."

"The proposed sale(s) will help improve the security of the recipient and assist in maintaining political stability, military balance, and economic progress in the region," the statements said.

China's Foreign Ministry attacked the move, saying it would violate diplomatic agreements between China and the U.S.; gravely harm China's sovereignty, security and territorial integrity; and undermine regional stability.

"The 'Taiwan independence' forces on the island seek independence through force and resist reunification through force, squandering the hard-earned money of the people to purchase weapons at the cost of turning Taiwan into a powder keg," said Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun.

"This cannot save the doomed fate of 'Taiwan independence' but will only accelerate the push of the Taiwan Strait toward a dangerous situation of military confrontation and war. The U.S. support for 'Taiwan Independence' through arms will only end up backfiring. Using Taiwan to contain China will not succeed," he added.

Under federal law, the U.S. is obligated to assist Taiwan with its self-defense, a point that has become increasingly contentious with China, which has vowed to take Taiwan by force, if necessary.

Taiwan's Defense Ministry in a statement Thursday expressed gratitude to the U.S. over the arms sale, which it said would help Taiwan maintain "sufficient self-defense capabilities" and bring strong deterrent capabilities. Taiwan's bolstering of its defense "is the foundation for maintaining regional peace and stability," the ministry said.

Taiwan's Foreign Minister Lin Chia-lung similarly thanked the U.S. for its "long-term support for regional security and Taiwan's self-defense capabilities," which he said are key for deterring a conflict in the Taiwan Strait, the body of water separating Taiwan from China's mainland.

The arms sales comes as Taiwan's government has pledged to raise defense spending to 3.3% of the island's gross domestic product next year and to reach 5% by 2030. The boost came after Trump and the Pentagon requested that Taiwan spend as much as 10% of its GDP on its defense, a percentage well above what the U.S. or any of its major allies spend on defense. The demand has faced pushback from Taiwan's opposition KMT party and some of its population.

Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te last month announced a special \$40 billion budget for arms purchases, including to build an air defense system with high-level detection and interception capabilities called Taiwan Dome. The budget will be allocated over eight years, from 2026 to 2033.

The U.S. boost in military assistance to Taiwan was previewed in legislation adopted by Congress that Trump is expected to sign shortly.

Last week, the Chinese embassy in Washington denounced the legislation, known as the National Defense Authorization Act, saying it unfairly targeted China as an aggressor. The U.S. Senate passed the bill Wednesday.

Mourners grieve 10-year-old slain in Bondi mass shooting as Australia's leader pledges new hate laws

By CHARLOTTE GRAHAM-McLAY, KRISTEN GELINEAU and TRISTAN LAVALETTE Associated Press SYDNEY (AP) — Hundreds of mourners bearing bright bouquets and clutching each other in grief gathered at a funeral in Sydney on Thursday for a 10-year-old girl who was gunned down in an antisemitic massacre during a Hanukkah celebration at Bondi Beach.

Matilda, whose last name is being withheld at the request of her family, was enjoying a petting zoo at the festivities on Sunday just before she was killed along with 14 other people in a mass shooting targeting Jews. The suspects, a father and son, were inspired by the Islamic State group, Australian authorities have said.

Beaming photos of Matilda have become a focal point for Australia's grief at one of the worst hate-fueled attacks ever committed in the country. The massacre has prompted a national reckoning about antisemitism and questions about whether the country's leaders took seriously enough the threat to Australian Jews.

Matilda's parents, who arrived in Australia from Ukraine, "moved away from war-torn Eastern Europe to come here for a good life," Rabbi Dovid Slavin told The Associated Press as he entered the service.

"They did something that a parent is OK to do, take their child to a family event at Bondi beach," he added. "If it ended this way, it's something for collective responsibility for every adult in this country."

Albanese vows to enact fresh hate laws

Speaking to reporters in Australia's capital Canberra at the same Matilda's service began, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese unveiled a tranche of legislative plans he said would curb radicalization and hate.

Among his proposals were measures to broaden the definition of hate speech offenses for preachers and leaders who promote violence, to bolster punishments for such crimes, to designate some groups as hateful, and to allow judges to consider hate as an aggravating factor in cases of online threats and harassment.

Officials would have greater powers to reject or cancel visas "for those who spread hate and division in this country, or would do so if they were allowed to come here," Albanese added. He didn't suggest a timeline for the reforms, citing their legal complexity.

"There have been organizations which any Australian would look at and say their behavior, their philosophy and what they are trying to do is about division and has no place in Australia," Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke told reporters.

"And yet for a generation, no government has been able to successfully take action against them because they have fallen just below the legal threshold."

The announcement followed Albanese's pledge to tighten Australia's gun controls, which are already some of the toughest in the world. State leaders, too, have promised additional initiatives on firearms and stricter rules for protest gatherings.

Still, the fact that Albanese has not attended any of the victims' funerals so far — with local media re-

porting he has not been invited, despite the presence of other political leaders — hints at the fury among some Australian Jews feel toward the leader.

Albanese said measures his government has already enacted, including a ban in February on Nazi salutes, show that he has taken the threat of antisemitism seriously.

"I of course acknowledge that more could have been done and I accept my responsibility for the part in that as prime minister of Australia," Albanese said Thursday. "But what I also do is accept my responsibility to lead the nation and unite the nation."

A probe into suspected shooters unfolds

Meanwhile, investigators continued to probe the suspected gunmen's links in Australia and their travel to the Philippines before the attack, said Krissy Barrett, the country's police chief. Authorities earlier divulged that the younger shooting suspect, Naveed Akram, 24, was investigated for six months by Australia's security services in 2019.

The older shooter, Sajid Akram, 50, who was shot dead on Sunday, had amassed the guns used in the massacre legally. His gun license was granted in 2023, after his son came to the attention of authorities.

Philippine National Security Adviser Eduardo Año told The Associated Press on Thursday that there was no indication that the two received any training for the attack in the Philippines. He said that the suspected gunmen had stayed in a budget hotel in downtown Davao city for the whole of their visit in November.

Año, a former military chief of staff, said in a statement that "the duration of their stay would not have allowed for any meaningful or structured training."

Naveed Akram is being treated at a Sydney hospital and was charged Wednesday with 59 offences, including murder and committing a terrorist act. He has not entered a plea and many details of the case against him are suppressed by a judge.

Health authorities said Thursday that 16 other people are being treated in hospitals across Sydney. Two are in critical condition, with the status of one having deteriorated to critical that morning.

Mourners attend funeral after funeral

As the investigations unfolded, Sydney's closely-knit Jewish community made their way to funeral after funeral. As well as the service Thursday for the youngest person killed, Matilda, mourners attended a funeral for the oldest, 87-year-old Alex Kleytman.

The Holocaust survivor was protecting his wife when he was shot dead, she told reporters outside a hospital this week. Others slain included rabbis, a man shot while throwing bricks at one of the gunman, and a married couple who were killed when they tried to tackle one shooter as he got out of his car to begin the attack.

At Matilda's funeral, a rabbi read a tribute from teachers at the 10-year-old's school, who described her as "our little ray of sunshine."

Matilda, who had been delighted to win a national literacy prized two days before she died, "had an incredible gift to bring joy to those around her," her school's tribute said.

Grief overflowed as the coffin was carried out of the hall. Around the mourners, bumblebee balloons bobbed in the afternoon breeze, a reference to her family nickname Matilda Bee.

Mourners and reporters alike were handed stickers featuring a smiling cartoon bumblebee holding a menorah. Above the image was Matilda's name printed in purple, her favorite color.

"I don't want to sound selfish," Slavin said. "But I and many others are thinking, this could have been my child."

Mourners grieve 10-year-old slain in Bondi mass shooting as Australia's leader pledges new hate laws

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Speaking to reporters in Australia's capital Canberra at the same Matilda's service began, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese unveiled a tranche of legislative plans he said would curb radicalization and hate.

Among his proposals were measures to broaden the definition of hate speech offenses for preachers and leaders who promote violence, to bolster punishments for such crimes, to designate some groups as hateful, and to allow judges to consider hate as an aggravating factor in cases of online threats and harassment.

Officials would have greater powers to reject or cancel visas "for those who spread hate and division in this country, or would do so if they were allowed to come here," Albanese added. He didn't suggest a timeline for the reforms, citing their legal complexity.

"There have been organizations which any Australian would look at and say their behavior, their philosophy and what they are trying to do is about division and has no place in Australia," Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke told reporters.

"And yet for a generation, no government has been able to successfully take action against them because they have fallen just below the legal threshold."

The announcement followed Albanese's pledge to tighten Australia's gun controls, which are already some of the toughest in the world. State leaders, too, have promised additional initiatives on firearms and stricter rules for protest gatherings.

Still, the fact that Albanese has not attended any of the victims' funerals so far — with local media reporting he has not been invited, despite the presence of other political leaders — hints at the fury among some Australian Jews feel toward the leader.

Albanese said measures his government has already enacted, including a ban in February on Nazi salutes, show that he has taken the threat of antisemitism seriously.

"I of course acknowledge that more could have been done and I accept my responsibility for the part in that as prime minister of Australia," Albanese said Thursday. "But what I also do is accept my responsibility to lead the nation and unite the nation."

A probe into suspected shooters unfolds

Meanwhile, investigators continued to probe the suspected gunmen's links in Australia and their travel to the Philippines before the attack, said Krissy Barrett, the country's police chief. Authorities earlier divulged that the younger shooting suspect, Naveed Akram, 24, was investigated for six months by Australia's security services in 2019.

The older shooter, Sajid Akram, 50, who was shot dead on Sunday, had amassed the guns used in the massacre legally. His gun license was granted in 2023, after his son came to the attention of authorities.

Philippine National Security Adviser Eduardo Año told The Associated Press on Thursday that there was no indication that the two received any training for the attack in the Philippines. He said that the suspected gunmen had stayed in a budget hotel in downtown Davao city for the whole of their visit in November.

Año, a former military chief of staff, said in a statement that "the duration of their stay would not have allowed for any meaningful or structured training."

Naveed Akram is being treated at a Sydney hospital and was charged Wednesday with 59 offences, including murder and committing a terrorist act. He has not entered a plea and many details of the case against him are suppressed by a judge.

Health authorities said Thursday that 16 other people are being treated in hospitals across Sydney. Two

are in critical condition, with the status of one having deteriorated to critical that morning.

Mourners attend funeral after funeral

As the investigations unfolded, Sydney's closely-knit Jewish community made their way to funeral after funeral. As well as the service Thursday for the youngest person killed, Matilda, mourners attended a funeral for the oldest, 87-year-old Alex Kleytman.

The Holocaust survivor was protecting his wife when he was shot dead, she told reporters outside a hospital this week. Others slain included rabbis, a man shot while throwing bricks at one of the gunman, and a married couple who were killed when they tried to tackle one shooter as he got out of his car to begin the attack.

At Matilda's funeral, a rabbi read a tribute from teachers at the 10-year-old's school, who described her as "our little ray of sunshine."

Matilda, who had been delighted to win a national literacy prized two days before she died, "had an incredible gift to bring joy to those around her," her school's tribute said.

Grief overflowed as the coffin was carried out of the hall. Around the mourners, bumblebee balloons bobbed in the afternoon breeze, a reference to her family nickname Matilda Bee.

Mourners and reporters alike were handed stickers featuring a smiling cartoon bumblebee holding a menorah. Above the image was Matilda's name printed in purple, her favorite color.

"I don't want to sound selfish," Slavin said. "But I and many others are thinking, this could have been my child."

Key findings of an AP analysis examining federal prosecutions of protesters

By RYAN J. FOLEY, CLAIRE RUSH, JAIMIE DING, CHRISTINE FERNANDO and MICHAEL BIESECKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department has launched a months-long effort to prosecute people accused of assaulting or hindering federal officers while protesting President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown and military deployments. Attorney General Pam Bondi has vowed such offenders will face "severe consequences."

In a review of scores of criminal prosecutions brought by federal prosecutors, The Associated Press found that the Justice Department has struggled to deliver on Bondi's pledge.

An analysis of 166 federal criminal cases brought since May against people in four Democratic-led cities at the epicenter of demonstrations found that aggressive charging decisions and rhetoric painting defendants as domestic terrorists have frequently failed to hold up in court.

"It's clear from this data that the government is being extremely aggressive and charging for things that ordinarily wouldn't be charged at all," said Mary McCord, a former federal prosecutor who is the director of Georgetown University Law Center's Institute for Constitutional Advocacy. "They appear to want to chill people from protesting against the administration's mass deportation plans."

Here are some key findings from the AP's analysis:

Dozens of felonies evaporated

Of 100 people initially charged with felony assaults on federal agents, 55 saw their charges reduced to misdemeanors, or dismissed.

Sometimes prosecutors failed to win grand jury indictments required to prosecute someone on a felony, the AP found. Videos and testimony called into question some of the initial allegations, resulting in prosecutors downgrading offenses.

In dozens of cases, officers suffered minor or no injuries, undercutting a key component of the felony assault charge that requires the potential for serious bodily harm.

One of the cases was against Dana Briggs, a 70-year-old Air Force veteran charged in September with assault after a protest in Chicago. After video footage emerged of federal agents knocking Briggs to the ground, prosecutors dropped a case they had already reduced to a misdemeanor.

Another case dropped by prosecutors was against 28-year-old Lucy Shepherd, who was charged with felony assault after she batted away the arm of a federal officer who was attempting to clear a crowd

outside Portland's Immigration and Customs Enforcement facility. Her lawyers argued a video of her arrest showed she brushed aside an officer with "too little force to have been intended to inflict any kind of injury."

A Justice Department spokesperson said it will continue to seek the most serious available charges against those alleged to have put federal agents in harm's way.

"We will not tolerate any violence directed toward our brave law enforcement officials who are working tirelessly to keep Americans safe," said Natalie Baldassarre, a DOJ spokesperson.

Despite rhetoric, antifa rarely mentioned in court

The administration has deployed — or sought to deploy — troops to the four cities where AP examined the criminal cases: Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, Portland and Chicago. Trump and his administration have sought to justify the military deployments, in part, by painting immigration protesters as "antifa," which the president has sought to designate as a "domestic terrorist organization."

Short for "anti-fascists," antifa is an umbrella term for far-left-leaning protesters who confront or resist white supremacists, sometimes clashing with law enforcement.

The AP's review found a handful of references to "antifa" in court records in the cases it reviewed. The review found no case in which federal authorities officially accused a protester of being a "domestic terrorist" or part of an organized effort to attack federal agents.

Prosecutors have lost every trial

Experts said they were surprised the Justice Department took five misdemeanor cases to trial, given that such trials eat up resources. They were further shocked that DOJ lost all those trials.

"When the DOJ tries to take a swing at someone, they should hit 99.9% of the time. And that's not happening," said Ronald Chapman II, a defense attorney who practices extensively in federal court.

The highest-profile loss involved Sean Charles Dunn, a Washington, D.C., man who tossed a Subway-style sandwich at a Border Patrol agent he had berated as a "fascist." Dunn was acquitted Nov. 6 after a two-day trial.

In Los Angeles, 32-year-old Katherine Carreño was acquitted on a misdemeanor assault charge stemming from an August protest outside a federal building.

Prosecutors had alleged she ignored an officer's commands to move out of the way of a government vehicle and "raised her hand and brought it down in a slapping/chopping motion" onto the officer's arm.

Social media video shown to jurors raised doubts about that narrative, showing an officer striding toward Carreño and pushing her back.

More than 50 cases are pending

Prosecutors have secured felony indictments against 58 people, some of whom were initially charged with misdemeanors. They are accused of assaulting federal officers in several ways, including by hurling rocks and projectiles, punching or kicking them and shooting them with paintballs. None have yet to go to trial.

From the start of Trump's second term through Nov. 24, the Department of Homeland Security says there have been 238 assaults on ICE personnel nationwide. The agency declined to provide its list or details about how it defines assaults.

"Rioters and other violent criminals have threatened our law enforcement officers, thrown rocks, bottles, and fireworks at them, slashed the tires of their vehicles, rammed them, ambushed them, and even shot at them," said Department of Homeland Security Assistant Secretary Tricia McLaughlin.

DOJ vowed to punish those who disrupt Trump's immigration crackdown. Dozens of cases have crumbled

By MICHAEL BIESECKER, JAIMIE DING, CHRISTINE FERNADO, CLAIRE RUSH and RYAN J. FOLEY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The federal agent described her wounds as "boo-boos."

Nevertheless, the Justice Department aggressively pursued the alleged perpetrator. They jailed Sidney Lori Reid on a charge of felony assault, accusing her of injuring the agent during a July protest of President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown in Washington, D.C.

When grand jurors thrice declined to indict the 44-year-old on the felony, prosecutors tried Reid on a

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misdemeanor.

Body camera footage played at trial revealed that Reid had not intentionally struck the agent. Instead, the agent had scratched her hand on a wall while assisting another agent who had shoved Reid and told her to "shut the f--- up" and "mind her own business."

It took jurors less than two hours to acquit the animal hospital worker.

"It seemed like my life was just going to be taken away from me," said Reid, who spent two days in jail and worried she would lose her new job and apartment. "It broke my heart because this is supposed to be a good and fair country and I did not see anything surrounding my case that was good or fair at all for anybody."

Reid's case was part of the Justice Department's months-long effort to prosecute people accused of assaulting or hindering federal officers while protesting Trump's immigration crackdown and military deployments. Attorney General Pam Bondi has ordered prosecutors to charge those accused of assaulting officers "with the highest provable offense available under the law." In a recent statement, Bondi pledged that offenders will face "severe consequences."

The Justice Department has struggled to deliver on that commitment, however. In examining 166 federal criminal cases brought since May against people in four Democratic-led cities at the epicenter of demonstrations, The Associated Press found:

— Of the 100 people initially charged with felony assaults on federal agents, 55 saw their charges reduced to misdemeanors, or dismissed outright. At least 23 pleaded guilty, most of them to reduced charges in deals with prosecutors that resulted in little or no jail time.

— More than 40% of the cases involved relatively minor misdemeanor charges, a figure that appears to undermine Trump's claims that many of those accused are domestic terrorists.

— All five defendants, including Reid, who went to trial so far were acquitted.

— Prosecutors have successfully secured felony indictments against at least 58 people, some initially charged with misdemeanors. Those people have been accused of an assortment of assaults that include throwing rocks at federal vehicles, and punching or kicking officers. Those cases are awaiting trial.

Several factors help explain the mixed record. Sometimes prosecutors have failed to win grand jury indictments required to prosecute someone on a felony. In other instances, videos and testimony have called into question the initial allegations, resulting in prosecutors downgrading offenses. In dozens of cases, officers suffered only minor injuries, or no injuries at all, undercutting a key component of the felony assault charge that requires the potential for serious bodily harm.

Felonies carry stiff sentences, often years in prison. A misdemeanor conviction, on the other hand, typically results in no jail time or only a few weeks or months behind bars.

Former prosecutors and law professors said the AP's analysis raises questions about how the Justice Department has prosecuted protesters.

"It's clear from this data that the government is being extremely aggressive and charging for things that ordinarily wouldn't be charged at all," said Mary McCord, a former federal prosecutor who is the director of Georgetown University Law Center's Institute for Constitutional Advocacy. "The other thing that is missing here from the way the federal government appears to be looking at these protests is there seems to be no respect for First Amendment rights. They appear to want to chill people from protesting against the administration's mass deportation plans."

Randall Eliason, a former federal prosecutor and former adjunct professor at the George Washington University Law School, said Justice Department officials could be working on other cases instead of "minor, minor misdemeanors."

"Many of these cases also show how the rhetoric on Twitter and in press releases and statements is not surviving the courtroom," he said. "What that tells you is that the Trump administration is hoping to send a message and chill future protests, not pursue serious criminal cases that need to be prosecuted."

The Justice Department said it will continue to seek the most serious available charges against those alleged to have put federal agents in harm's way.

"We will not tolerate any violence directed toward our brave law enforcement officials who are working tirelessly to keep Americans safe," said Natalie Baldassarre, a department spokesperson. "Those who attack law enforcement will be held fully accountable for their actions, despite the best efforts of activist

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liberal judges who would rather see violent criminals walk free.”

From the start of Trump’s second term through Nov. 24, the Department of Homeland Security says there have been 238 assaults on Immigration and Customs Enforcement personnel nationwide, up from 19 during the same period last year. The agency declined to provide its list or provide details about how it defines assaults.

The assaults have occurred amid a pair of shootings targeting immigration detention facilities in Texas and the deadly attack on National Guard troops in Washington by a former Afghan soldier who had worked for the CIA.

The specter of antifa

The administration has deployed — or sought to deploy — troops to the four cities where AP examined the criminal cases: Washington, D.C, Los Angeles, Portland and Chicago. Judges have blocked the deployments in Portland and Chicago, citing a lack of credible evidence there is any organized rebellion and finding that Trump administration officials had often exaggerated or lied about threats posed by protesters. A district judge and appeals court have gone back and forth over whether Trump must give control of the troops in California back to the state.

Trump and his administration have sought to justify the military deployments, in part, by painting immigration protesters as “antifa,” which the president has sought to designate as “domestic terrorist organization.”

“President Trump will not turn a blind-eye to the sustained campaign of violence destroying American cities perpetrated by leftists and those who enable them,” said Abigail Jackson, a White House spokeswoman.

Short for “anti-fascists,” antifa is an umbrella term for far-left-leaning protesters who confront or resist neo-Nazis and white supremacists, sometimes clashing with law enforcement.

The AP’s review found only a handful of references to “antifa” in court records for any of the 166 cases it reviewed. Federal prosecutors wrote in court papers that a defendant in Portland was someone who “claims a loose association with Antifa.” In another case, an FBI agent wrote in an affidavit that conservative influencers had described a protester as an “Antifa helper or agitator.”

The AP found no case in which federal authorities officially accused a protester of being a “domestic terrorist” or part of an organized effort to attack federal agents.

In affidavits for many of the Portland cases, federal agents referred to so-called “black bloc” protesters who wear all black clothing but did not use the word “antifa” to describe them.

In at least one press release, DHS has alleged a protester was a suspected member of antifa. That person was arrested outside a Chicago-area ICE facility in October while allegedly carrying a firearm. He has not yet been charged with a crime, court records show.

Five people pleaded guilty last month to terrorism-related offenses stemming from a July 4 shooting that wounded a police officer outside an immigration detention center near Dallas. Prosecutors in that case accused the defendants of being part of an antifa cell. It was not included in AP’s analysis because it did not occur in one of the four cities where Trump has sought to deploy troops.

“Rioters and other violent criminals have threatened our law enforcement officers, thrown rocks, bottles, and fireworks at them, slashed the tires of their vehicles, rammed them, ambushed them, and even shot at them,” said DHS Assistant Secretary Tricia McLaughlin.

Evaporating Felonies

The AP’s analysis showed that dozens of people charged with felonies have seen their offenses reduced to misdemeanors.

Among them was Dana Briggs, a 70-year-old Air Force veteran who was charged in September with assault after a protest in Chicago. Prosecutors first downgraded the charge to a misdemeanor. After video footage emerged of federal agents knocking Briggs to the ground, prosecutors dropped the case. Prosecutors declined to say why they dismissed it.

In Portland, 28-year-old Lucy Shepherd was charged in November with felony assault after she batted away the arm of a federal officer who was attempting to clear a crowd outside the city’s ICE facility. Her lawyers argued in court filings that a video of her arrest proved there had not been an assault. The video, they wrote, showed she brushed aside an officer with “too little force to have been intended to inflict any kind of injury on the officer whatsoever.” Prosecutors dropped the case.

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The office of the U.S. attorney for Oregon declined to comment.

Prosecutors are not required to disclose why they sought to downgrade a charge, and much of that process is cloaked in secrecy. Legal experts said prosecutors typically take such action when they learn the evidence is weaker than expected or uncover facts that do not support a felony charge.

Court records showed that prosecutors have secured felony indictments against people who are accused of assaulting federal officers and agents in a host of ways. They have been accused of hurling rocks and projectiles at officers, punching or kicking them and shooting them with paintballs.

How a case dissolved

Marimar Martinez, a 30-year-old teaching assistant at a Montessori school, was arrested and charged in October with a felony, accusing her of trying to use her car to ram into a Border Patrol agent in a south-west Chicago neighborhood. A DHS press release asserted that she and the driver of another car involved in the incident were "domestic terrorists."

In court papers, an FBI agent alleged that Martinez and the other driver were "aggressively" driving and chasing a Border Patrol vehicle.

When Border Patrol agents got out of their vehicle, the FBI agent wrote, Martinez drove at one of the agents. The agent was forced to open fire, the agent alleged, striking Martinez at least five times. She was treated at a hospital and released. Inside Martinez's car, authorities recovered a loaded firearm, the agent wrote.

DHS noted in a press release that Martinez had been armed with a "semi-automatic weapon." Martinez and a 21-year-old man were charged with assaulting a federal officer with her vehicle, which was classified as a dangerous weapon. They faced up to 20 years in prison.

Then the case fell apart.

It turned out Martinez legally owned the gun, and her attorneys contended that video footage — from security cameras and body cameras worn by Border Patrol officers — undermined the official narrative. The videos showed a Border Patrol agent steering his vehicle into Martinez's truck, rather than the other way around, her attorney said. Text messages showed the federal agent bragging about his marksmanship after the shooting.

"I fired 5 rounds and she had 7 holes," read a text message that the agent, Charles Exum, sent to colleagues. "Put that in your book boys." Twenty-four hours after the shooting, Exum texted, "Cool, I'm up for another round."

Federal prosecutors last month dismissed all charges against Martinez and the other driver. Martinez's attorney celebrated the move but emphasized that his client's "life is changed forever" due to her physical injuries, trauma and long-term impacts of being publicly branded a "domestic terrorist."

"They call this 'Operation Midway Blitz,' but I call it 'Operation Midway Bust' because this and every case that has come out of this has fallen apart," said the lawyer, Christopher Parente.

Joseph D. Fitzpatrick, an assistant U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, said prosecutors are constantly evaluating evidence to ensure "the interests of justice are served in each and every case."

Legal experts said dropping cases or reducing charges are not straightforward victories for the accused.

They noted that defendants have to hire lawyers and may face significant legal expenses. They may also be held in jail for days or weeks, potentially losing jobs and seeing their families disrupted.

Lost at trial

Former federal prosecutors and defense attorneys said they were surprised that the Justice Department took at least five misdemeanor cases to trial. Such trials eat up resources, and those convicted frequently receive little jail time. The experts said they were also shocked DOJ lost all five cases at trial, a sign that the cases were particularly weak.

"When the DOJ tries to take a swing at someone, they should hit 99.9% of the time. And that's not happening," said Ronald W. Chapman II, a defense attorney with extensive experience in the federal courts.

The highest-profile loss involved Sean Charles Dunn, a Washington, D.C., man who tossed a Subway-style sandwich at a Border Patrol agent he had berated as a "fascist." Dunn was acquitted Nov. 6 after a two-day trial.

Katherine Carreño was arrested in August on a felony assault charge, accused of striking a federal officer in Los Angeles. The 32-year-old was protesting with a group outside the downtown federal building

when DHS security officers asked them to move out of the way of a vehicle that was trying to enter a gate, according to a criminal complaint.

Carreño, a paralegal, said it was one of many times she had gone to demonstrate in front of the federal complex where immigrants were being detained.

An officer gave "two loud commands to move back," which all protesters did except Carreño, the complaint alleged. The officer pushed her away from the vehicle, and Carreño "raised her hand and brought it down in a slapping/chopping motion" onto the officer's arm. She did this twice before being detained, the complaint said.

Prosecutors reduced the charge to a misdemeanor and took her to trial.

Social media video shown to jurors showed an officer striding toward Carreño and pushing her back. She was not standing in front of the vehicle but to the right and slightly forward of it. The video did not show whether Carreño hit the officer.

The officer said she did not push Carreño. Some jurors, pointing to the video evidence, said they disagreed. It took them just under five hours to reach their verdict — not guilty.

Investigators seek older video that might show the Brown campus shooter days before the attack

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI and LEAH WILLINGHAM Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — Authorities searching for a shooter who attacked students Saturday at Brown University are asking for tips from people who might have video of the shooter potentially casing the area the week before.

Authorities have released several videos from the day of the attack, which left two students dead and nine wounded, showing the person they're seeking on streets just off campus. The person is wearing a mask or has their head turned in the footage.

"I believe that this is probably the most intense investigation going on right now in this nation" Providence's police chief, Col. Oscar Perez, said at a Wednesday news conference. He said witness accounts of the shooter match the person in the videos.

While Brown has 1,200 cameras on campus, the attack was in an older classroom that has "fewer, if any" cameras, Rhode Island Attorney General Peter Neronha said. Investigators believe the shooter used a door that faces a residential street.

President Donald Trump accused the Ivy League school of being unprepared. He posted Wednesday on Truth Social: "Why did Brown University have so few Security Cameras? There can be no excuse for that. In the modern age, it just doesn't get worse!!!"

Where the investigation stands

Investigators have described the person they're seeking as about 5 feet, 8 inches (173 centimeters) tall and stocky, but they've given no indication that they are close to zeroing in on their identity.

Motive also remain a mystery, though Perez said investigators haven't found evidence to suggest someone was targeted.

Authorities have been canvassing nearby neighborhoods and have received hundreds of tips.

Providence police on Wednesday released a new photo of a separate individual who they said was in "proximity of the person of interest" and asked the public to help identify that person.

Felipe Rodriguez, a retired New York Police Department detective sergeant and adjunct professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, said it is very rare for authorities to make this kind of plea during a criminal investigation.

"They are grasping at straws," he said.

Neronha said it wouldn't help the investigation to release video of fleeing students and other footage from the attack.

Perez declined to say how many witnesses police had spoken to or how many people were in the classroom during the attack. He said his department is hoping more students with information will come forward.

But many students have already gone home. After the shooting, the remaining classes and exams before

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winter break were canceled.

Meanwhile, Boston-area police are searching for the person who killed a Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor earlier this week. That professor was attacked at home, and the FBI said it had no reason to think the two attacks were linked.

Brown said early-decision admission offers that were delayed after the shooting will be released Wednesday evening.

Campus security under scrutiny

The attack and shooter's escape have raised questions about campus security.

Paxson said Brown has two security systems. One, which is activated in emergencies, sent out text messages, phone calls and emails that reached 20,000 people. The other features three sirens across the campus and was not activated Saturday. Paxson said doing so would have caused people to rush into buildings, including where the shooter was.

Brown's website says the sirens can be used when there is a shooter, but Paxson said it depends on circumstances such as location.

There have also been questions about the investigation and why no one is in custody.

Katherine Schweit, retired FBI agent and mass shooting expert, said typically in these types of targeted, public attacks, shooters kill themselves or authorities kill them or arrest them where they attack, but when shooters get away the search can take time. She pointed to the 2013 Boston Marathon bombers and the Army reservist who opened fire in Maine in 2023.

"The best they can do is what they do now, which is continue to press together all of the facts they have as fast as they can," she said. "And really the best hope for solutions is going to come from the public."

Rodriguez said it's clear shooters are learning from others who were caught.

"Most of the time an active shooter is going to go in, and he's going to try to commit what we call maximum carnage, maximum damage," he said. "And at this point, they're actually trying to get away. And they're actually evading police with an effective methodology, which I haven't seen before."

A city on edge

Providence remained tense Wednesday. Additional police were at schools to reassure worried parents. Some afterschool activities and field trips were canceled.

Hundreds of residents have signed up for a city text alert service since the shooting, officials said.

Brown cautioned people against accusing others online of having any link to the attack. Speculation led to a student's identifying information being posted online, the university said.

Honoring victims

About 200 people honored the victims Tuesday at a campus church service.

The shooter killed Ella Cook, a 19-year-old sophomore from Alabama who was very involved in her church and served as vice president of the Brown College Republicans; and MukhammadAziz Umurzokov, an 18-year-old freshman from Virginia whose family immigrated to the U.S. from Uzbekistan and who hoped to go to medical school.

Mayor Brett Smiley said Wednesday that a third wounded student had been discharged, leaving five still hospitalized in stable condition and one in critical condition.

US government admits role in causing helicopter-plane collision that killed 67 in Washington

By JOSH FUNK AP Transportation Writer

The U.S. government admitted Wednesday that the actions of an air traffic controller and Army helicopter pilot played a role in causing a collision last January between an airliner and a Black Hawk near the nation's capital, killing 67 people.

It was the deadliest plane crash on American soil in more than two decades.

The official response to the first lawsuit filed by one of the victims' families said that the government is liable in the crash partly because the air traffic controller violated visual separation procedures that night. Plus, the filing said, the Army helicopter pilots' "failure to maintain vigilance so as to see and avoid" the

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airline jet makes the government liable.

But the filing suggested that others, including the pilots of the jet and the airlines, may also have played a role. The lawsuit also blamed American Airlines and its regional partner, PSA Airlines, for roles in the crash, but those airlines have filed motions to dismiss.

And the government denied that any air traffic controllers or officials at the Federal Aviation Administration or Army were negligent.

At least 28 bodies were pulled from the icy waters of the Potomac River after the helicopter collided with the American Airlines regional jet while it was landing at Ronald Reagan National Airport in northern Virginia, just across the river from Washington, D.C., officials said. The plane carried 60 passengers and four crew members, and three soldiers were aboard the helicopter.

Attorney says loss of life was needless

Robert Clifford, one of the attorneys for the family of victim Casey Crafton, said the government admitted "the Army's responsibility for the needless loss of life" and the FAA's failure to follow air traffic control procedures while "rightfully" acknowledging others -- American Airlines and PSA Airlines -- also contributed to the deaths.

The families of the victims "remain deeply saddened and anchored in the grief caused by this tragic loss of life," he said.

The government's lawyers said in the filing that "the United States admits that it owed a duty of care to plaintiffs, which it breached, thereby proximately causing the tragic accident."

An American spokesman declined to comment on the filing, but in the airline's motion to dismiss, American said "plaintiffs' proper legal recourse is not against American. It is against the United States government ... The Court should therefore dismiss American from this lawsuit." The airline said that since the crash it has focused on supporting the families of the victims.

The lawsuit had accused the airlines of not doing enough to mitigate the risks of flying so close to helicopters around Washington, D.C., and not adequately training their pilots to handle it.

Investigators highlight contributing factors

The National Transportation Safety Board will release its report on the cause of the crash early next year, but investigators have already highlighted a number of factors that contributed, including the helicopter flying 78 feet higher (24 meters) than the 200-foot (61-meter) limit on a route that allowed only scant separation between planes landing on Reagan's secondary runway and helicopters passing below. Plus, the NTSB said, the FAA failed to recognize the dangers around the busy airport even after 85 near misses in the three years before the crash.

The government admitted in its filing that the United States "was on notice of certain near-miss events between its Army-operated Black Hawk helicopters and aircraft traffic transiting in and around helicopter routes 1 and 4" around Washington.

Before the collision, the controller twice asked the helicopter pilots whether they had the jet in sight, and the pilots said they did and asked for visual separation approval so they could use their own eyes to maintain distance. FAA officials acknowledged at the NTSB's investigative hearings that the controllers at Reagan had become overly reliant on the use of visual separation. That's a practice the agency has since ended.

Witnesses told the NTSB that they have serious questions about how well the helicopter crew could spot the plane while wearing night vision goggles and whether the pilots were even looking in the right spot.

Investigators have said the helicopter pilots might not have realized how high they were because the barometric altimeter they were relying on was reading 80 to 100 feet (24 to 30 meters) lower than the altitude registered by the flight data recorder.

Swift admission

The crash victims included a group of elite young figure skaters, their parents and coaches who had just attended a competition in Wichita, Kansas, and four union steamfitters from the Washington area.

Retired pilot Richard J. Levy, an aviation litigation expert witness, said the government's admission of some responsibility less than a year after the crash is unusual, especially considering the amount of money that could be involved in the case.

"They would not have done that if there was a doubt in their mind about anything the controller did or

that the Army did," said Levy.

Trump gives a partisan prime-time address insisting the economy is stronger than many voters feel

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump delivered a politically charged speech Wednesday carried live in prime time on network television, seeking to pin the blame for economic challenges on Democrats while announcing he is sending a \$1,776 bonus check to U.S. troops for Christmas.

The remarks came as the nation is preparing to settle down to celebrate the holidays, yet Trump was focused more on divisions within the country than a sense of unity. His speech was a rehash of his recent messaging that has so far been unable to calm public anxiety about the cost of groceries, housing, utilities and other basic goods.

Trump has promised an economic boom, yet inflation has stayed elevated and the job market has weakened sharply in the wake of his import taxes. Trump suggested that his tariffs — which are partly responsible for boosting consumer prices — would fund a new "warrior dividend" for 1.45 million military members, a payment that could ease some of the financial strains for many households. The amount of \$1,776 was a reference to next year's 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

"The checks are already on the way," he said of the expenditure, which would total roughly \$2.6 billion.

Presidential addresses to the nation carried on network television are traditionally less partisan than rally speeches, but Trump gave a condensed version of his usual political remarks.

Flanked by two Christmas trees with a portrait of George Washington behind him in the White House's Diplomatic Reception Room, Trump sought to pin any worries about the economy on his predecessor, Joe Biden.

"Eleven months ago, I inherited a mess, and I'm fixing it," Trump said. "We're poised for an economic boom, the likes of which the world has never seen."

Trump seeking to stop the slump in his approval ratings

His holiday wishes came at a crucial time as he tries to rebuild his steadily eroding popularity. Public polling shows most U.S. adults are frustrated with his handling of the economy as inflation picked up after his tariffs raised prices and hiring slowed.

In 2026, Trump and his party face a referendum on their leadership as the nation heads into the midterm elections that will decide control of the House and the Senate.

The White House remarks were a chance for Trump to try to regain some momentum after Republican losses in this year's elections raised questions about the durability of his coalition. He openly leaned into the politics despite television networks' past reluctance to broadcast presidential addresses loaded with campaign-style rhetoric.

For example, in September 2022, networks declined to give the Biden White House a prime-time slot for a speech the then-president gave about democracy because it was viewed as too political.

Trump spoke at a rapid-fire clip with a tone that bordered at times on anger. He responded to the public frustration this year over the economy by making even bolder promises on growth next year, saying that mortgage rates would be coming down and that he "would announce some of the most aggressive housing reform plans in American history."

Trump brought charts with him to make the case that the economy is on an upward trajectory. He made claims about incomes growing, inflation easing and investment dollars pouring into the country as foreign leaders, he claimed, have assured him that "we're the hottest country anywhere in the world," a statement he has frequently repeated at public events.

If the argument seemed familiar, that's because it has echoes of the case that Biden made about the U.S. economy with little success. He, too, in the face of inflation pointed to the enviable rate of U.S. economic growth compared to other nations.

The public sees the economy differently from Trump

The hard math internalized by the public paints a more complicated picture of an economy that has some stability but few reasons to inspire much public confidence.

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The stock market is up, gasoline prices are down and tech companies are placing large bets on the development of artificial intelligence.

But inflation that had been descending after spiking to a four-decade high in 2022 under Biden has reaccelerated after Trump announced his tariffs in April.

The consumer price index is increasing at an annual rate of 3%, up from 2.3% in April.

The affordability squeeze is also coming from a softening job market. Monthly job gains have averaged a paltry 17,000 since April's "Liberation Day," when Trump announced import taxes that he later suspended and then readjusted several months later.

The unemployment rate has climbed from 4% in January to 4.6%.

Trump said that investment commitments for new factories will boost manufacturing jobs and that consumer activity will improve dramatically as people receive increased tax refunds next year.

While emphasizing the economy, he also faces challenges on other policy fronts.

Trump's mass deportations of immigrants have proved unpopular even as he is viewed favorably for halting crossings along the U.S. border with Mexico. The public has generally been unmoved by his globe-trotting efforts to end conflicts and his attacks on suspected drug boats near Venezuela.

Trump sought to blame Democrats for the likely increase in health insurance premiums as the subsidies tied to the 2010 Affordable Care Act are expiring. Democratic lawmakers and some Republicans have sought to address that issue, but Trump has pushed back and suggested instead that payments should go directly to the buyers of health insurance instead of the companies. The president has yet to commit to a specific legislative fix.

After his speech ended and the video was no longer being broadcast, Trump turned to his gathered aides and asked them how his address to the nation went. The aides assured him it was great.

Trump then indicated that White House chief of staff Susie Wiles had told him he needed to address the nation. After some back and forth, he asked Wiles how he had done.

"I told you 20 minutes and you were 20 minutes on the dot," Wiles said.

FBI Deputy Director Dan Bongino says he plans to resign next month as bureau's No 2 official

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — FBI Deputy Director Dan Bongino said Wednesday that he will resign from the bureau next month, ending a brief and tumultuous tenure in which he clashed with the Justice Department over the handling of the Jeffrey Epstein files and was forced to reconcile the realities of his law enforcement job with provocative claims he made in his prior role as a popular podcast host.

The departure would be among the highest-profile resignations of the Trump administration, coming as the firing of career agents has contributed to upheaval at the FBI and as Director Kash Patel faces continued criticism over his use of a government plane for personal purposes and social media posts about active investigations.

Bongino announced his departure, which had been expected, in a post on X in which he said he was grateful for the "opportunity to serve with purpose." He did not say precisely when in January he would leave or reveal his future plans, but President Donald Trump, in response to a question earlier in the day about Bongino's fate, said: "Dan did a great job. I think he wants to go back to his show."

In a social media post, Patel called Bongino "the best partner I could've asked for in helping restore this FBI." He said Bongino "had not only completed his mission — he far exceeded it. We will miss him but I'm thankful he accepted the call to serve. Our country is better and safer for it."

Bongino was always an unconventional pick for the No. 2 job at the FBI, a position that historically has entailed oversight of the bureau's day-to-day operations and has been typically held by a career agent. Though he had previously worked as a New York City police officer and Secret Service agent, neither he nor Patel had any experience at the FBI before being picked for their jobs. But both came in pledging overhauls to an FBI they insisted had been weaponized against Trump.

Bongino was installed in the role in March by Trump after years as a conservative podcast host, where

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he used his platform to repeatedly rail against FBI leadership and to promote conspiracy theories related to the Epstein sex-trafficking case and pipe bombs discovered in Washington on Jan. 6, 2021.

Once in the job, he used social media to communicate directly to Trump supporters restless over a perceived lack of action by the new FBI leadership to address their concerns. He reassured them the FBI under his watch was giving renewed attention to issues like the pipe bomb case, the leak of a draft Supreme Court opinion in 2022 and the discovery of cocaine in the White House during the Biden administration.

Yet he struggled to placate elements of Trump's base who expected him to quickly deliver the FBI reforms he had long said were needed and to uncover the truths he claimed had been hidden by the federal government.

On the Epstein case, for instance, he had previously challenged the official ruling that the wealthy financier had taken his own life in a New York jail soon after his 2019 arrest. But after his arrival in the bureau, he said in a Fox News interview: "I've seen the whole file. He killed himself."

Bongino had separately speculated as recently as last year that the pipe bombs placed on the eve of the Jan. 6 Capitol riot were either an "inside job" or the work of a "connected anti-Trump insider" and said the truth was shielded by a "massive cover-up." He was confronted with those same comments when the FBI earlier this month arrested a 30-year-old Virginia man with no evident connection to the federal government, prompting skepticism from some that investigators had actually arrested the right person.

"I was paid in the past, Sean, for my opinions, that's clear," Bongino said in a Fox News interview with Sean Hannity. "And one day, I'll be back in that space but that's not what I'm paid for now. I'm paid to be your deputy director, and we base investigations on facts."

Questions about Bongino's future had lingered for months, particular after a tense exchange at the White House last July with Attorney General Pam Bondi following the abrupt announcement by the FBI and Justice Department that they would not be releasing any additional records from the Epstein investigation.

After that encounter, Bongino, normally active on social media, went silent from his FBI account for several days. Far-right activist Laura Loomer, who is close to Trump, posted on X at the time that she was told that Bongino was "seriously thinking about resigning" and had taken the day off to contemplate his future.

In August, the Trump administration took the unusual step of adding a co-deputy director, former Missouri Attorney General Andrew Bailey.

Bondi on Wednesday joined in the tributes, posting on X that Americans were safer because of Bongino's service. "Thank you, Dan," she wrote.

Jack Smith tells lawmakers his team developed 'proof beyond a reasonable doubt' against Trump

By ERIC TUCKER and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former Justice Department special counsel Jack Smith told lawmakers in a closed-door interview Wednesday that his team of investigators "developed proof beyond a reasonable doubt" that President Donald Trump had criminally conspired to overturn the results of the 2020 election, according to portions of his opening statement obtained by The Associated Press.

Smith also said investigators had accrued "powerful evidence" Trump broke the law by hoarding classified documents from his first term as president at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach, Florida, and by obstructing government efforts to recover the records.

"I made my decisions in the investigation without regard to President Trump's political association, activities, beliefs, or candidacy in the 2024 presidential election," Smith said. "We took actions based on what the facts and the law required — the very lesson I learned early in my career as a prosecutor."

He said that if asked whether he would "prosecute a former president based on the same facts today, I would do so regardless of whether the president was a Republican or Democrat."

The day-long deposition before the House Judiciary Committee gave lawmakers of both parties their first chance, albeit in private, to question Smith for hours about investigations into Trump that resulted in criminal cases between the Republican president's first and second terms. Smith was subpoenaed by the Republican-led committee for testimony and documents as part of a GOP investigation into the Trump inquiries during the administration of Democratic President Joe Biden.

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The former special counsel cooperated with the congressional demand, though his lawyers noted that he had volunteered more than a month before the subpoena was issued to answer questions publicly before the committee — an overture they said was rebuffed by Republicans. Trump had told reporters that he supported the idea of an open hearing.

“Testifying before this committee, Jack is showing tremendous courage in light of the remarkable and unprecedented retribution campaign against him by this administration and this White House,” Smith lawyer Lanny Breuer told reporters. “Let’s be clear: Jack Smith, a career prosecutor, conducted this investigation based on the facts and based on the law and nothing more.”

Smith was appointed in 2022 to oversee Justice Department investigations into Trump’s efforts to reverse his 2020 loss to Biden and Trump’s hoarding of classified documents at Mar-a-Lago. Smith’s team filed charges in both investigations but abandoned the cases after Trump was elected to the White House last year, citing Justice Department legal opinions that say a sitting president cannot be indicted.

Multiple prior Justice Department special counsels, including Robert Mueller, have testified publicly but Smith was summoned for just a private interview. Several Democrats who emerged from Smith’s interview said they could understand why Republicans did not want an open hearing based on the damaging testimony about Trump they said Smith offered.

The committee’s top Democrat, Rep. Jamie Raskin of Maryland, said the Republican majority “made an excellent decision” in not allowing Smith to testify publicly “because had he done so, it would have been absolutely devastating to the president and all the president’s men involved in the insurrectionary activities” of the Capitol riot on Jan. 6, 2021.

“Jack Smith has just spent several hours schooling the Judiciary Committee on the professional responsibilities of a prosecutor and the ethical duties of a prosecutor,” Raskin said.

Democrats are demanding that Smith’s testimony be made public, along with his full report on the investigation. A volume on the classified documents investigation has yet to be released.

“The American people should hear for themselves,” said Rep. Dan Goldman, D-N.Y.

The committee chairman, Republican Rep. Jim Jordan of Ohio, told reporters, “I think we’ve learned some interesting things.” He declined to discuss what was said in the room, but reiterated his position about the investigations.

“It’s political,” he said.

Smith’s interview unfolded against the backdrop of a broader retribution campaign by the Trump administration against former officials involved in investigating Trump and his allies. The Office of Special Counsel, an independent political watchdog, said in August that it was investigating Smith, and the White House issued a presidential memorandum this year aimed at suspending security clearances of lawyers at the law firm that provided legal services to Smith.

The deposition also comes as Republicans in Congress, aided by current FBI leadership, look to discredit the investigations into Trump through the release of emails and other documents that sometimes lack complete context.

In recent weeks, they have seized on revelations that Smith’s team, as part of its investigation, had analyzed the phone records of select GOP lawmakers from a several-day period around the Capitol insurrection, when pro-Trump rioters stormed the building to try to halt the certification of Trump’s election loss to Biden.

The phone records reviewed by prosecutors included information about the incoming and outgoing phone numbers and the length of the call but not the contents of the conversations. Smith told lawmakers Wednesday that the records were properly subpoenaed, “were relevant to complete a comprehensive investigation” and were related to calls Trump made urging lawmakers to delay certification of the election.

On Tuesday, Republican Sen. Chuck Grassley of Iowa, chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, released a batch of internal FBI emails leading up to the August 2022 search of Mar-a-Lago. In one message, written weeks before the search, an agent wrote that the FBI’s Washington field office did not believe probable cause existed to search the property for classified records.

But Republicans who trumpeted the emails as proof that the Biden Justice Department was out to get Trump omitted the fact that agents who later searched the property reported finding boxes of classified, even top-secret, documents. In addition, the then-head of the Washington field office has testified to

lawmakers that by the time of the search, the FBI believed probable cause existed to do it.

4 Republicans defy Speaker Johnson to force House vote on extending ACA subsidies

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Four centrist Republicans broke with Speaker Mike Johnson on Wednesday and signed onto a Democratic-led petition that will force a House vote on extending for three years an enhanced pandemic-era subsidy that lowers health insurance costs for millions of Americans.

The stunning move came the same day that House Republican leaders pushed to passage a health care bill that does not address the soaring monthly premiums that millions of people will soon endure. Those premium hikes will occur because the tax credits for those who buy insurance through the Affordable Care Act expire at year's end.

The developments set the stage for a renewed intraparty clash over health care in January, something Republican leaders had been working hard to avoid.

The moderate Republicans were able to force the issue by signing a petition, led by Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York, to vote on a bill that would extend the ACA subsidies for three years.

Republican Reps. Brian Fitzpatrick, Robert Bresnahan and Ryan Mackenzie, all from Pennsylvania, and Mike Lawler of New York signed on Wednesday morning, pushing it to the magic number of 218. A vote on the subsidy bill could come as soon as January under House rules.

"Unfortunately, it is House leadership themselves that have forced this outcome," Fitzpatrick said in a statement.

Johnson told reporters Wednesday that "I have not lost control of the House" and he noted that Republicans have a razor-thin majority that allows a small number of members to employ procedures that would not usually be successful in getting around leadership.

"These are not normal times," said Johnson, R-La.

Origins of a Republican revolt

The revolt against GOP leadership came after days of talks centered on the health care subsidies.

Johnson had discussed allowing more politically vulnerable GOP lawmakers a chance to vote on bills that would temporarily extend the subsidies while also adding changes such as income caps for beneficiaries. But after days of discussions, the leadership sided with the more conservative wing of the party's conference, which has assailed the subsidies as propping up a failed ACA program, which is widely known as "Obamacare."

House Republicans pushed ahead Wednesday on a 100-plus-page health care package without the subsidies. Instead, the measure focused on long-sought GOP proposals designed to expand insurance coverage options for small businesses and the self-employed. The bill passed on a mostly party-line vote of 216-211. Rep. Thomas Massie, R-Ky., joined with Democrats in voting against the measure.

Fitzpatrick and Lawler tried to add a temporary extension of the subsidies to the bill, but were denied.

"Our only request was a floor vote on this compromise, so that the American People's voice could be heard on this issue. That request was rejected. Then, at the request of House leadership I, along with my colleagues, filed multiple amendments, and testified at length to those amendments," Fitzpatrick said. "House leadership then decided to reject every single one of these amendments."

"As I've stated many times before, the only policy that is worse than a clean three-year extension without any reforms, is a policy of complete expiration without any bridge," Fitzpatrick said.

Lawler, in a social media post, similarly said that "the failure of leadership" to permit a vote had left him with "no choice" but to sign the petition.

"I don't like them. It's not the way it's supposed to work," Johnson said of the discharge petitions.

Jeffries, for several weeks, had called on Republicans to sign his discharge petition. He particularly challenged Republicans in competitive congressional districts to join the effort if they really wanted to prevent steep premium increases for their constituents.

"Our position from the very beginning was that we are standing on the right side of the American people

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who want to see the Affordable Care Act tax credits extended, and we're appreciative that we now have the bipartisan coalition to get that done," Jeffries said.

The GOP holds a 220-213 majority in the House, which means defections from just a sliver of the conference can upend leadership's plans. Johnson has been able to negotiate that challenge largely by making accommodations to the more conservative wing of his conference. This time, it was the moderates who revolted.

The defectors largely represent districts that Democrats have targeted in their bid to retake the majority, with Democrats promising to make health insurance costs a central issue in next year's midterms.

Lawmakers turn to discharge petitions to show support for an action and potentially force a vote on the House floor, but they are rarely successful. This year has proven an exception. The vote requiring the Department of Justice to release the Jeffrey Epstein files occurred after Reps. Ro Khanna, D-Calif., and Massie introduced a petition to force a vote on the Epstein Files Transparency Act. The signature effort was backed by all House Democrats and four Republicans.

It was a long battle to get 218 signatures, but once the magic number was reached, lawmakers in both chambers voted overwhelmingly for the bill.

Path ahead is uncertain

Even if the Democrats' subsidy bill were to pass the House in January, which is far from assured, it would face an arduous climb in the Republican-led Senate.

Republicans last week voted down a three-year extension of the subsidies and proposed an alternative that also failed. But in an encouraging sign for Democrats, four Republican senators crossed party lines to support their proposal.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., argued against the Democratic extension as "an attempt to disguise the real impact of Obamacare's spiraling health care costs."

Sen. Thom Tillis, R-N.C., said he viewed the House developments Wednesday as a positive for generating a compromise that both parties could support.

"If we're not talking, we're not making progress. This continues the discussion," Tillis said.

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer of New York said that the 218th signature for the Democrats' bill showed that the demand from the American people for an extension is undeniable, but "the damage has now been done, no matter what happens."

"Because at this point, Republicans have made it impossible to prevent many Americans from paying more on their monthly premiums on January 1st. And Republicans can't even say they tried to stop it," Schumer said.

Trump pays respects to 2 Iowa National Guardsmen and interpreter killed in Syria as they return home

By MICHELLE L. PRICE and DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

DOVER AIR FORCE BASE, Del. (AP) — President Donald Trump paid his respects Wednesday to two Iowa National Guard members and a U.S. civilian interpreter who were killed in an attack in the Syrian desert, joining their grieving families as their remains were brought back to the country they served.

Trump met privately with the families at Dover Air Force Base in Delaware before he joined top military officials and other dignitaries on the tarmac for the dignified transfer, a solemn and largely silent ritual honoring U.S. service members killed in action.

The guardsmen killed in Syria on Saturday were Sgt. Edgar Brian Torres-Tovar, 25, of Des Moines, and Sgt. William Nathaniel Howard, 29, of Marshalltown, according to the U.S. Army. Both were members of the 1st Squadron, 113th Cavalry Regiment, and have been hailed as heroes by the Iowa National Guard. Their remains will be taken to Iowa.

Ayad Mansoor Sakat, of Macomb, Michigan, a U.S. civilian working as an interpreter, was also killed. He will be laid to rest in Michigan this weekend.

The families of all three victims were at Dover for the return of their remains, alongside Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds, members of Iowa's congressional delegation and leaders of the Iowa National Guard.

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The slain National Guard members were among hundreds of U.S. troops deployed in eastern Syria as part of a coalition fighting the Islamic State group.

Returning to Joint Base Andrews after the transfer, Trump said it was a "beautiful event for three great people. And they're now looking down and their parents and wives and all of the people that were there were, I mean, were devastated but great people, great people."

The return of service member remains

Trump observed several dignified transfers at Dover in his first term and has said it was "the toughest thing I have to do" as president.

There is no formal role for a president at a dignified transfer other than to watch in silence, keeping all thoughts to himself for the moment. There is no speaking by any of the politicians and other dignitaries who attend, with the only words coming from the military officials who direct the highly choreographed transfers.

Trump, wearing an overcoat against the chill and brisk wind, joined the other attendees in a salute that was held as each of the American flag-draped transfer cases was carried from the belly of a hulking C-17 military cargo plane and loaded into a dark, unmarked van nearby.

He gazed straight ahead as each case passed in front of him, though he turned to look after the first one was placed inside the vehicle. The remains were taken to the on-base mortuary for processing before they are released to the families.

At the start of the transfer, Trump and Gen. Dan Caine, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, joined several others from the military at the open rear of the cargo plane, where all but Trump bowed their heads. The president looked inside the plane. Trump then stood alongside Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth when the group joined the official party.

Before Trump joined the others, White House chief of staff Susie Wiles, who flew up with Trump, dabbed her eyes with a tissue.

Iowa National Guard members hailed as heroes

Howard's stepfather, Jeffrey Bunn, has said Howard "loved what he was doing and would be the first in and last out." He said Howard had wanted to be a soldier since he was a boy. Howard's brother, a staff sergeant in the Iowa National Guard, was escorting him back to Iowa.

Torres-Tovar was remembered as a "very positive" family-oriented person who always put others first, according to fellow Guard members who were deployed with him and issued a statement to the local TV broadcast station WOI.

Dina Qiryaqoz, the daughter of the civilian interpreter, said Wednesday in a statement that her father worked for the U.S. Army during the invasion of Iraq from 2003 to 2007. Sakat is survived by his wife and four adult children.

The interpreter was from Bakhdida, Iraq, a small Catholic village southeast of Mosul, and the family immigrated to the U.S. in 2007 on a special visa, Qiryaqoz said. At the time of his death, Sakat was employed as an independent contractor for Virginia-based Valiant Integrated Services.

Qiryaqoz said she and two of her siblings met with Trump and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth privately Wednesday. She described the meeting as comforting and assuring, with both strongly condemning the attack and expressing gratitude for her father's service.

"He seemed like he really cared about my dad and the other soldiers that were unfortunately killed during this attack," she said of Trump in an interview.

Trump's reaction to the attack in Syria

Trump has vowed retaliation, and the Pentagon's chief spokesperson, Sean Parnell, has said the attack is under active investigation. The U.S. military said the gunman was killed in the attack.

Before this attack, the most recent instance of U.S. service members being killed in action was in January 2024, when three American troops died in a drone attack in Jordan.

Saturday's deadly attack followed a rapprochement between the U.S. and Syria, bringing the former pariah state into a U.S.-led coalition fighting the Islamic State group.

Trump has forged a relationship with interim Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa, the onetime leader of an Islamic insurgent group who led the ouster of former President Bashar Assad. The leaders met at the

White House last month.

Trump said Monday that the attack had nothing to do with the Syrian leader, who Trump said was "devastated by what happened."

During his first term, Trump visited Dover in 2017 to honor a U.S. Navy SEAL killed during a raid in Yemen, in 2019 for two Army officers whose helicopter crashed in Afghanistan, and in 2020 for two Army soldiers killed in Afghanistan when a person dressed in an Afghan army uniform opened fire.

Rob and Michele Reiner's son appears in court on murder charges while siblings speak of their loss

By ANDREW DALTON and CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Nick Reiner made his first court appearance Wednesday in Los Angeles on two counts of first-degree murder in the killing of his parents, actor-director Rob Reiner and his wife Michele Singer Reiner, while the couple's other two children made their first public statement on their crushing loss.

Nick Reiner, 32, did not enter a plea as he appeared from behind glass in a custody area in the large Los Angeles courtroom where newly charged defendants are arraigned. He was in shackles and wearing a blue, padded suicide prevention smock used in jail.

His arraignment was postponed until Jan. 7 at his attorney's request. He spoke only to say "yes, your honor" to agree to the date. He is being held without bail.

Jake and Romy Reiner talk about their 'unimaginable pain'

His older brother Jake Reiner and younger sister Romy Reiner released their statement through a family spokesperson.

"Words cannot even begin to describe the unimaginable pain we are experiencing every moment of the day," they said. "The horrific and devastating loss of our parents, Rob and Michele Reiner, is something that no one should ever experience. They weren't just our parents; they were our best friends."

The brother and sister said they are "grateful for the outpouring of condolences, kindness, and support we have received not only from family and friends but people from all walks of life. We now ask for respect and privacy, for speculation to be tempered with compassion and humanity, and for our parents to be remembered for the incredible lives they lived and the love they gave."

Medical Examiner says 'sharp force injuries' killed couple

Also Wednesday, the LA County Medical Examiner listed the primary cause of death for both Rob and Michele Reiner as "multiple sharp force injuries" as the office released its investigators' initial findings.

The office said more investigation is needed before further details will be revealed, but the bodies can now be released to the family.

The cause of death was consistent with police describing the couple as having stab wounds.

Nick Reiner's attorney urges caution

After the court hearing, Nick Reiner's attorney, Alan Jackson, called the case "a devastating tragedy that has befallen the Reiner family." He said the proceedings will be very complex and asked that the circumstances be met "not with a rush to judgment, not with jumping to conclusions."

Jackson declined to answer shouted questions from dozens of reporters surrounding him and has not addressed the guilt or innocence of his client.

Nick Reiner was charged Tuesday with killing Rob Reiner, 78, and Michele Singer Reiner, 70.

They were killed sometime in the early morning hours of Sunday, the District Attorney's Office said. They were found dead late in the afternoon in their home in the upscale Brentwood neighborhood on the west side of Los Angeles, authorities said.

Nick Reiner did not resist when he was arrested hours later in the Exposition Park area near the University of Southern California, about 14 miles (22.5 kilometers) from the crime scene, police said.

The two counts of first-degree murder come with special circumstances of multiple murders and an allegation that the defendant used a dangerous weapon, a knife. The additions could mean a greater sentence.

District Attorney Nathan Hochman said at a Tuesday news conference that his office has not yet decided whether to seek the death penalty.

Meg Ryan and others remember the Reiners

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Rob Reiner was the Emmy-winning star of the sitcom "All in the Family" who went on to direct films including "Stand by Me," "The Princess Bride," and "When Harry Met Sally ...," whose star Meg Ryan paid tribute to the Reiners on Wednesday.

"Thank you, Rob and Michelle, for the way you believe in true love, in fairy tales, and in laughter. Thank you for your faith in the best in people, and for your profound love of our country," Ryan said in an Instagram post. "I have to believe that their story will not end with this impossible tragedy."

Rob Reiner met Michele Singer Reiner during the shooting of the classic rom-com, and he said the meeting inspired him to change the film to have a happy ending.

Ryan's co-star Billy Crystal, a close friend of Rob Reiner for decades, was part of a group that also included Albert Brooks, Martin Short and Larry David that released a statement mourning and celebrating the couple Tuesday night.

"They were a special force together — dynamic, unselfish and inspiring," the statement said. "We were their friends, and we will miss them forever."

Rob Reiner has another daughter, Tracy Reiner, from his first marriage, to actor-director Penny Marshall.

The lawyers on the Reiner case

Nick Reiner's attorney Jackson is a high-profile defense attorney and former LA County prosecutor who represented Harvey Weinstein at his Los Angeles trial and Karen Read at her intensely followed trials in Massachusetts. He was a central figure in the HBO documentary on the Read case.

On the other side will be Deputy District Attorney Habib Balian, whose recent cases included the Menendez brothers' attempt at resentencing and the trial of Robert Durst.

Authorities have not said anything about a motive for the killings and would give few details when asked at the news conference.

Shooting of MIT professor Nuno Loureiro has police searching for a suspect

By MICHAEL CASEY Associated Press

BROOKLINE, Mass. (AP) — Police intensified their search Wednesday for a suspect in the killing of professor Nuno F.G. Loureiro at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, two days after he was shot to death at his home outside Boston.

Loureiro, a 47-year-old physicist and fusion scientist, was shot Monday night at his apartment in Brookline, Massachusetts. He died at a local hospital on Tuesday, the Norfolk District Attorney's Office said in a statement.

The prosecutor's office said the homicide investigation was "active and ongoing" as of early afternoon Wednesday and had no update — earlier they had said no suspects were in custody.

The investigation into the MIT professor's killing comes as Brown University, another prestigious institution just 50 miles (80 kilometers) away in Providence, Rhode Island, is reeling from an unsolved shooting that killed two students and wounded nine others Saturday. Investigators provided no indication Tuesday that they were any closer to zeroing in on the gunman's identity.

The FBI on Tuesday said it knew of no connection between the crimes.

Dozens of people gathered outside Loureiro's building Tuesday night, many with candles in hand, to honor the professor's life and support his family. Neighbors received paper notices attached to their doors with tape to place candles in their windows in Loureiro's honor. Some people cried and held each other, but most attendees were silent, their breath visible in the bracing cold. A few children rode scooters from their nearby homes to the gathering.

The killing happened when most MIT students were on winter break, and more than a dozen of them on the Cambridge campus on Wednesday didn't want to talk about it. Most said they didn't know him.

A 22-year-old student at Boston University who lives near Loureiro's apartment in Brookline told The Boston Globe she heard three loud noises Monday evening and feared it was gunfire. "I had never heard anything so loud, so I assumed they were gunshots," Liv Schachner was quoted as saying. "It's difficult to grasp. It just seems like it keeps happening."

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Loureiro, who was married, joined MIT in 2016 and was named last year to lead MIT's Plasma Science and Fusion Center, where he worked to advance clean energy technology and other research. The center, one of the school's largest labs, had more than 250 people working across seven buildings when he took the helm. He was a professor of physics and nuclear science and engineering.

He grew up in Viseu, in central Portugal, and studied in Lisbon before earning a doctorate in London, according to MIT. He was a researcher at an institute for nuclear fusion in Lisbon before joining MIT, the university said.

"He shone a bright light as a mentor, friend, teacher, colleague and leader, and was universally admired for his articulate, compassionate manner," Dennis Whyte, an engineering professor who previously led MIT's Plasma Science and Fusion Center, told a campus publication.

The president of MIT, Sally Kornbluth, said in a statement that the killing was a "shocking loss." The office of Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa also put out a condolence statement calling Loureiro's death "an irreparable loss for science and for all those with whom he worked and lived."

Loureiro had said he hoped his work would shape the future.

"It's not hyperbole to say MIT is where you go to find solutions to humanity's biggest problems," Loureiro said when he was named to lead the plasma science lab last year. "Fusion energy will change the course of human history."

Senate passes \$901 billion defense bill that pushes Hegseth for boat strike video

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate gave final passage Wednesday to an annual military policy bill that will authorize \$901 billion in defense programs while pressuring Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth to provide lawmakers with video of strikes on alleged drug boats in international water near Venezuela.

The annual National Defense Authorization Act, which raises troop pay by 3.8%, gained bipartisan backing as it moved through Congress. It passed the Senate on a 77-20 vote before lawmakers planned to leave Washington for a holiday break. Two Republicans — Sens. Rand Paul and Mike Lee — and 18 Democrats voted against the bill.

The White House has indicated that it is in line with President Donald Trump's national security priorities. However, the legislation, which ran over 3,000 pages, revealed some points of friction between Congress and the Pentagon as the Trump administration reorients its focus away from security in Europe and toward Central and South America.

The bill pushes back on recent moves by the Pentagon. It demands more information on boat strikes in the Caribbean, requires that the U.S. keep its troop levels in Europe at current levels and sends some military aid to Ukraine.

But overall, the bill represents a compromise between the parties. It implements many of Trump's executive orders and proposals on eliminating diversity and inclusion efforts in the military and grants emergency military powers at the U.S. border with Mexico. It also enhances congressional oversight of the Department of Defense, repeals several years-old war authorizations and seeks to overhaul how the Pentagon purchases weapons as the U.S. tries to outpace China in developing the next generation of military technology.

"We're about to pass, and the president will enthusiastically sign, the most sweeping upgrades to DoD's business practices in 60 years," said Sen. Roger Wicker, the Republican chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Still, the sprawling bill did face objections from both Democratic and Republican leadership on the Senate Commerce Committee and the head of the National Transportation Safety Board. That's because the legislation could allow military aircraft to obtain a waiver to operate without broadcasting their precise location, as an Army helicopter had done before a midair collision with an airliner over Washington, D.C., in January that killed 67 people.

To address those concerns, the Senate advanced a bill to require all military and civilian aircraft to

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broadcast their locations. Republican Sen. Ted Cruz, the chair of the Senate Commerce Committee, said the tragedy might have been avoided had the Black Hawk been broadcasting its location before the crash.

That bill will now go to the House, and Cruz said he's optimistic it could reach the president's desk as soon as next month. The White House supports the bill and is committed to helping get it passed, said an official who spoke on condition of anonymity ahead of the formal public statement on the bill.

Boat strike videos

Republicans and Democrats agreed to language in the defense bill that threatened to withhold a quarter of Hegseth's travel budget until he provided unedited video of the strikes, as well as the orders authorizing them, to the House and Senate Committees on Armed Services.

Hegseth was on Capitol Hill Tuesday ahead of the bill's passage to brief lawmakers on the U.S. military campaign in international water near Venezuela. The briefing elicited contrasting responses from many lawmakers, with Republicans largely backing the campaign and Democrats expressing concern about it and saying they had not received enough information.

The committees are investigating a Sept. 2 strike — the first of the campaign — that killed two people who had survived an initial attack on their boat. The Navy admiral who ordered the "double-tap" strike, Adm. Frank "Mitch" Bradley, also appeared before the committees shortly before the vote Wednesday in a classified briefing that also included video of the strike in question.

Several Republican senators emerged from the meeting backing Hegseth and his decision not to release the video publicly, but other GOP lawmakers stayed silent on their opinion of the strike.

Democrats are calling for part of the video to be released publicly and for every member of Congress to have access to the full footage.

"The American people absolutely need to see this video," said Sen. Richard Blumenthal, a Connecticut Democrat. "I think they would be shocked."

Congressional oversight

Lawmakers have been caught by surprise by the Trump administration several times in the last year, including by a move to pause intelligence sharing with Ukraine and a decision to reduce U.S. troop presence in NATO countries in eastern Europe. The defense legislation requires that Congress be kept in the loop on decisions like that going forward, as well as when top military brass are removed.

The Pentagon is also required, under the legislation, to keep at least 76,000 troops and major equipment stationed in Europe unless NATO allies are consulted and there is a determination that such a withdrawal is in U.S. interests. Around 80,000 to 100,000 U.S. troops are usually present on European soil. A similar requirement also keeps the number of U.S. troops stationed in South Korea at 28,500.

Lawmakers are also pushing back on some Pentagon decisions by authorizing \$400 million for each of the next two years to manufacture weapons to be sent to Ukraine.

Cuts to diversity and climate initiatives

Trump and Hegseth have made it a priority to purge the military of material and programs that address diversity, anti-racism or gender issues, and the defense bill would codify many of those changes. It will repeal diversity, equity and inclusion offices and trainings, including the position of chief diversity officer. Those cuts would save the Pentagon about \$40 million, according to the Republican-controlled House Armed Services Committee.

The U.S. military has long found that climate change is a threat to how it provides national security because weather-related disasters can destroy military bases and equipment. But the bill makes \$1.6 billion in cuts by eliminating climate-change related programs at the Pentagon.

Repeal of war authorizations and Syria sanctions

Congress is writing a closing chapter to the war in Iraq by repealing the authorization for the 2003 invasion. Now that Iraq is a strategic partner of the U.S., lawmakers in support of the provision say the repeal is crucial to prevent future abuses. The bill also repeals the 1991 authorization that sanctioned the U.S.-led Gulf War.

The rare, bipartisan moves to repeal the legal justifications for the conflicts signaled a potential appetite among lawmakers to reclaim some of Congress's war powers.

Imprisoned Jeffrey Epstein associate Ghislaine Maxwell seeks release, citing 'new evidence'

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Jeffrey Epstein's former girlfriend and longtime associate Ghislaine Maxwell asked a federal judge on Wednesday to set aside her sex trafficking conviction and free her from a 20-year prison sentence, saying "substantial new evidence" has emerged proving that constitutional violations spoiled her trial.

Maxwell maintained in a habeas petition she has promised to file since August that information that would have resulted in her exoneration at her 2021 trial was withheld and false testimony was presented to the jury.

She said the cumulative effect of the constitutional violations resulted in a "complete miscarriage of justice."

A habeas petition (or writ of habeas corpus petition) is a legal request for a court to review the legality of someone's detention, demanding that the custodian (like a prison official) bring the prisoner before a judge to justify the imprisonment, serving as a fundamental safeguard against unlawful confinement and arbitrary detention by ensuring due process. Filed by or on behalf of someone in custody, it challenges constitutional violations, such as ineffective legal counsel or unfair trials, and seeks release or other relief, often as a last resort after appeals are exhausted.

"Since the conclusion of her trial, substantial new evidence has emerged from related civil actions, Government disclosures, investigative reports, and documents demonstrating constitutional violations that undermined the fairness of her proceeding," the filing in Manhattan federal court said. "In the light of the full evidentiary record, no reasonable juror would have convicted her."

The filing came just two days before records in her case were scheduled to be released publicly as a result of President Donald Trump's signing of the Epstein Files Transparency Act. The law, signed after months of public and political pressure, requires the Justice Department to provide the public with Epstein-related records by Dec. 19.

Forced to act by the new transparency law, the Justice Department has said it plans to release 18 categories of investigative materials gathered in the massive sex trafficking probe, including search warrants, financial records, notes from interviews with victims, and data from electronic devices.

Epstein, a millionaire financier, was arrested in July 2019 on sex trafficking charges. A month later, he was found dead in his cell at a New York federal jail and the death was ruled a suicide. Maxwell, a British socialite, was arrested a year later and was convicted of sex trafficking in December 2021. She was interviewed by the Justice Department's second-in-command in July and was soon afterward moved from a federal prison in Florida to a prison camp in Texas.

After the Justice Department asked a New York federal judge to permit grand jury and discovery materials gathered prior to her trial to be released publicly, attorney David Markus wrote on her behalf that while Maxwell now "does not take a position" on unsealing documents from her case, doing so "would create undue prejudice so severe that it would foreclose the possibility of a fair retrial" if her habeas petition succeeds.

The records, Markus said, "contain untested and unproven allegations."

Last week, Judge Paul A. Engelmayer in Manhattan granted the Justice Department's request to publicly release the materials.

On Wednesday, U.S. Attorney Jay Clayton said during a news conference on another topic that he would follow the law and the judge's orders pertaining to the records.

Engelmayer, who along with other judges had previously rejected Justice Department unsealing requests before the transparency law was passed, said the materials "do not identify any person other than Epstein and Maxwell as having had sexual contact with a minor."

More drops for AI stocks drag Wall Street to its worst day in nearly a month

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — More drops for AI stocks dragged the U.S. market lower Wednesday, and Wall Street sank to its fourth straight loss.

The S&P 500 fell 1.2% for its worst day in nearly a month, though it's still not far from its all-time high set last week. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dipped 228 points, or 0.5%, and the Nasdaq composite dropped 1.8%.

Slightly more stocks rose within the S&P 500 than fell, but they got drowned out by the drops for companies in the artificial-intelligence industry.

Questions continue to dog the former superstars about whether their yearslong dominance of Wall Street meant their prices shot too high, as well as whether all the investment in AI will produce enough profit and productivity to prove worth the cost. Worries are also rising about the debt that some companies are taking on to pay for it all.

Broadcom dropped 4.5%, Oracle fell 5.4% and CoreWeave sank 7.1%. Nvidia, the chip company that's become Wall Street's most influential stock because of its tremendous size, fell 3.8% and was the day's heaviest weight on the S&P 500.

Power companies that jumped earlier in the year on expectations for stronger demand from electricity-sucking data centers also lost some of their shine. Constellation Energy fell 6.7%.

Only 17% of respondents in a survey of relatively big businesses by UBS said they're in production at scale with their AI projects. That could be "a reminder for tech investors to remain sober about the likely 2026 revenue growth uplift from AI products," according to UBS analysts, though the rate continues to rise.

Also on the losing end of Wall Street was Lennar, which sank 4.5% following a mixed profit report. The homebuilder delivered a weaker profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected, though its revenue topped expectations.

Executive Chairman Stuart Miller said that conditions remain challenging, with customers feeling less confident while looking for discounts and more affordable options. As a result, the company gave limited forecasts for its upcoming financial performance.

Progressive, meanwhile, fell 2% after the insurer based in Mayfield Village, Ohio, said that its net income for November fell 5% from its year-ago level.

On the winning side of Wall Street were oil companies, after President Donald Trump ordered a blockade of all "sanctioned oil tankers" into Venezuela. It's Trump's latest escalation against Venezuela, which may be sitting on more oil than any other country.

That sent the price of a barrel of benchmark U.S. crude higher by 1.2% to \$55.94. just a day after it sank to its lowest level since 2021. Brent crude, the international standard, climbed 1.3% to \$59.68 per barrel.

That in turn helped ConocoPhillips rise 4.6% and cut into its loss for the year so far, which came into the day at 8.5%. Devon Energy rallied 5.3%, and Exxon Mobil climbed 2.4%.

Oil prices had dropped through most of this year on expectations that companies are pumping more than enough crude to meet the world's demand.

Netflix added 0.2% after Warner Bros. Discovery's board said it still recommends shareholders approve a buyout offer from the streaming giant for its Warner Bros. business, rather than a competing hostile bid from Paramount Skydance for the entire company.

Warner Bros. Discovery fell 2.4%, while Paramount Skydance dropped 5.4%.

All told, the S&P 500 fell 78.83 points to 6,721.43. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dipped 228.29 to 47,885.97, and the Nasdaq composite dropped 418.14 to 22,693.32.

In the bond market, Treasury yields held relatively steady ahead of a report coming on Thursday that will show how bad inflation has been for U.S. consumers.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury held at 4.15%, where it was late Tuesday.

In stock markets abroad, indexes were mixed in Europe following a stronger finish in Asia.

South Korea's Kospi leaped 1.4% for one of the world's bigger gains and shaved its loss for the week so far down to 2.7%.

Warner Bros recommends investors reject Paramount's offer in favor of Netflix's

By WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Warner Bros. Discovery is recommending its shareholders reject an unsolicited buyout offer from Paramount Skydance in favor of a rival bid from Netflix it said will better serve their interests and the entertainment company's audiences.

The Warner board said in a letter to shareholders on Wednesday that Paramount's "inferior" offer carried "significant risks and costs," in large part because it relies heavily on borrowed money — whereas the Netflix offer is backed by a company worth more than \$400 billion.

Warner, which owns the Warner Bros. Pictures movie studio and HBO, agreed earlier this month to a cash-and-stock offer from Netflix valued at \$72 billion. As part of that deal, Warner would first spin off its cable TV assets, including CNN and Discovery. Days later, Paramount made a hostile, all-cash offer for all of Warner's properties valued at \$77.9 billion.

With the fate of marquee movie-making and streaming services on the line, a Warner deal with either company would face intense scrutiny from U.S. regulators.

Paramount has argued that its offer — coming from a smaller company — would face an easier road with regulators. Warner's board disputed that claim in its letter to shareholders, who ultimately have the power to decide which offer to accept.

Netflix offered Warner shareholders \$23.25 in cash, plus \$4.50 in Netflix shares, for each share of Warner. Paramount is offering \$30 in cash for each share of Warner.

Warner's stock price fell more than 2% Wednesday to \$28.21 per share. Shares of Paramount fell 5.4%, while those of Netflix rose 0.2%.

An acquisition by Netflix would be completed only after Warner finalizes its previously announced separation of its cable operations.

Paramount urged Warner shareholders on Wednesday to tell the company they prefer Paramount's "superior offer."

"We will continue to move forward to deliver this transaction, which is in the best interest of (Warner) shareholders, consumers, and the creative industries," Paramount CEO and Chairman David Ellison said.

Paramount has claimed it made six different bids that Warner leadership rejected before announcing its deal with Netflix on Dec. 5.

Critics of Netflix's deal say that combining the massive streaming company with Warner's HBO Max would give it overwhelming market dominance, whereas the Paramount+ streaming service is far smaller.

"This is something that we've heard for a long time — including when we started the streaming business," Netflix co-CEOs Greg Peters and Ted Sarandos said in a filing through Warner Bros. "Our stance then and now is the same — we see this as a win for the entertainment industry, not the end of it."

Warner shareholders have until Jan. 8 to vote on Paramount's offer.

Bids from both Netflix and Paramount have raised alarm for what they could mean for film and TV production. While Netflix has agreed to uphold Warner's contractual obligations for releasing films in theaters, critics fear the streaming giant will ultimately favor online releases. Paramount and Warner Bros. are two of the biggest studios left in Hollywood.

A combination of Paramount and Warner would bring CBS and CNN under the same roof. That could raise questions about news media consolidation and shifts in editorial control — as seen at CBS News leading up to and following Skydance's \$8 billion purchase of Paramount, which it completed in August.

President Donald Trump has been vocal about his plans to play a role in regulatory approval.

Trump has said Netflix's deal "could be a problem" because of the potential for an outsized control of the market. The Republican president has a close relationship with Oracle's billionaire founder Larry Ellison — the father of Paramount's CEO.

Affinity Partners, an investment firm run by Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, previously said it would invest in the Paramount deal. But on Tuesday, the firm announced it would be dropping out.

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The sovereign wealth funds of Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi and Qatar are backing Paramount's bid, a detail some analysts say should be drawing more scrutiny.

"The same U.S. officials and regulators who've sounded alarms about China's influence on TikTok should be crying foul here," said Mike Proulx, vice president and research director at Forrester, a market research company. "The stakes on (Warner's) fate are higher and wider-reaching than a single short-form video app."

Warner's board cited concern about the involvement of foreign investors in its letter to shareholders.

It also was critical of Paramount's decision to use an Ellison family trust to backstop the offer for Warner, which it said is not the same thing as a "full and unconditional financing commitment." The family trust lost billions in value this month after shares of Oracle tumbled on concerns it was spending too much on artificial intelligence.

The Oscars will move to YouTube in 2029, leaving longtime home of ABC

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

In a seismic shift for one of television's marquee events, the Academy Awards will depart ABC and begin streaming on YouTube beginning in 2029, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences announced Wednesday.

ABC will continue to broadcast the annual ceremony through 2028. That year will mark the 100th Oscars.

But starting in 2029, YouTube will retain global rights to streaming the Oscars through 2033. YouTube will effectively be the home to all things Oscars, including red-carpet coverage, the Governors Awards and the Oscar nominations announcement.

"We are thrilled to enter into a multifaceted global partnership with YouTube to be the future home of the Oscars and our year-round Academy programming," said academy chief executive Bill Kramer and academy president Lynette Howell Taylor. "The Academy is an international organization, and this partnership will allow us to expand access to the work of the Academy to the largest worldwide audience possible — which will be beneficial for our Academy members and the film community."

While major award shows have added streaming partnerships, the YouTube deal marks the first of the big four — the Oscars, Grammys, Emmys and Tonys — to completely jettison broadcast television. It puts one of the most watched non-NFL broadcasts in the hands of Google. YouTube boasts some 2 billion viewers.

The Academy Awards will stream for free worldwide on YouTube, in addition to YouTube TV subscribers. It will be available with audio tracks in many languages, in addition to closed captioning.

Financial terms were not disclosed.

"The Oscars are one of our essential cultural institutions, honoring excellence in storytelling and artistry," said Neal Mohan, chief executive of YouTube. "Partnering with the academy to bring this celebration of art and entertainment to viewers all over the world will inspire a new generation of creativity and film lovers while staying true to the Oscars' storied legacy."

The Walt Disney Co.-owned ABC has been the broadcast home to the Oscars for almost its entire history. NBC first televised the Oscars in 1953, but ABC picked up the rights in 1961. Aside from a period between 1971 and 1975, when NBC again aired the show, the Oscars have been on ABC.

"ABC has been the proud home to The Oscars for more than half a century," the network said in a statement. "We look forward to the next three telecasts, including the show's centennial celebration in 2028, and wish the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences continued success."

The 2025 Academy Awards were watched by 19.7 million viewers on ABC, a slight increase from the year before. That remains one of the biggest TV broadcasts of the year, though less than half of Oscar ratings at their peak. In 1999, more than 55 million watched James Cameron's "Titanic" win best picture.

The film academy, in choosing YouTube over other options such as Netflix or NBC Universal/Peacock, selected a platform with a wide-ranging and massive audience but one without as much of an established production infrastructure.

Still, more people — especially young people — watch YouTube than any other streaming platform. According to Nielsen, YouTube accounted for 12.9% of all television and streaming content consumed in November. Netflix ranked second with an 8.3% market share.

Israel fires mortar into Gaza residential area, wounding at least 10

By JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli troops fired a mortar shell over the ceasefire line into a Palestinian residential area in the Gaza Strip, in the latest incident to rock the tenuous ceasefire with Hamas. Health officials said at least 10 people were wounded, and the army said it was investigating.

The military said the mortar was fired during an operation in the area of the “Yellow Line,” which was drawn in the ceasefire agreement and divides the Israeli-held majority of Gaza from the rest of the territory.

The military did not say what troops were doing or whether they had crossed the line. It said the mortar had veered from its intended target, which it did not specify.

Fadel Naeem, director of Al-Ahli Hospital, said the hospital received 10 people wounded in the strike on central Gaza City, some critically.

It was not the first time since the ceasefire took effect on Oct. 10 that Israeli fire has caused Palestinian casualties outside the Yellow Line. Palestinian health officials have reported over 370 deaths from Israeli fire since the truce.

Israel has said it has opened fire in response to Hamas violations, and says most of those killed have been Hamas militants. But an Israeli military official, speaking on condition of anonymity in line with military protocol, said the army is aware of a number of incidents where civilians were killed, including young children and a family traveling in a van.

Palestinians say civilians have been killed in some cases because the line is poorly marked. Israeli troops have been laying down yellow blocks to delineate it, but in some areas the blocks have not yet been placed.

Ceasefire’s next phase

The Israel-Hamas ceasefire is struggling to reach its next phase, with both sides accusing each other of violations. The first phase involved the exchange of hostages for Palestinian prisoners. The second is supposed to involve the deployment of an international stabilization force, a technocratic governing body for Gaza, the disarmament of Hamas and further Israeli troop withdrawals from the territory.

The remains of one hostage, Ran Gvili, are still in Gaza, and the militants appear to be struggling to find it. Israel is demanding the return of Gvili’s remains before moving to the second phase.

Hamas is calling for more international pressure on Israel to open key border crossings, cease deadly strikes and allow more aid into the strip. Recently released Israeli military figures suggest it hasn’t met the ceasefire stipulation of allowing 600 trucks of aid into Gaza a day, though Israel disputes that finding.

Humanitarian groups say the lack of aid has had harsh effects on most of Gaza’s residents. Food remains scarce as the territory struggles to bounce back from famine, which affected parts of Gaza during the war.

The toll of war

The vast majority of Gaza’s 2 million people have been displaced. Most live in vast tent camps or among the shells of damaged buildings.

The initial Hamas-led Oct. 7, 2023, attack on southern Israel killed around 1,200 people and took 251 hostages. Almost all hostages or their remains have been returned in ceasefires or other deals.

Israel’s two-year campaign in Gaza has killed more than 70,660 Palestinians, roughly half of them women and children, according to the territory’s Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between militants and civilians in its count. The ministry, which operates under the Hamas-run government, is staffed by medical professionals and maintains detailed records viewed as generally reliable by the international community.

What to know about MIT professor Nuno Loureiro and the investigation into his shooting

By The Associated Press undefined

Authorities are searching for a suspect in the killing of Nuno F.G. Loureiro, a prominent physics professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology who was shot at his home near Boston. Loureiro, a married 47-year-old from Portugal, was shot Monday night and died Tuesday at a local hospital.

Authorities have not disclosed a possible motive, and no suspects were in custody as of Wednesday

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morning, the Norfolk District Attorney's Office said.

The shooting in Brookline, Massachusetts, comes days after a deadly attack at another prestigious school in the region, Brown University, where police also haven't identified the suspect who killed two students and wounded nine others. The FBI said it knows of no connection between the two crimes.

Finding solutions to the world's problems

Loureiro joined MIT in 2016 and was named last year to lead the school's Plasma Science and Fusion Center, one of its largest laboratories. The center has around 250 researchers working across seven buildings and focuses on advancing clean energy technology and other research.

The professor grew up in Viseu in central Portugal, studied in Lisbon and earned a doctorate in London, according to the university. Before moving to MIT, he worked at a nuclear fusion research institute in Lisbon.

Loureiro studied the behavior of plasma and worked to explain the physics behind astronomical phenomena such as solar flares. His research, according to his obituary on MIT's news site, "involved the design of fusion devices that could harness the energy of fusing plasmas, bringing the dream of clean, near-limitless fusion power closer to reality."

"It's not hyperbole to say MIT is where you go to find solutions to humanity's biggest problems," Loureiro told the school's news site when he became head of the plasma lab. "Fusion energy will change the course of human history."

Sadness and shock over Loureiro's death

"He shone a bright light as a mentor, friend, teacher, colleague and leader, and was universally admired for his articulate, compassionate manner," Dennis Whyte, an engineering professor who previously led MIT's Plasma Science and Fusion Center, told a campus publication.

Deepto Chakrabarty, the William A. M. Burden professor in astrophysics and head of the Department of Physics, described him as a "champion for plasma physics," a valued colleague and an inspiring mentor to graduate students.

MIT President Sally Kornbluth said the "shocking loss for our community comes in a period of disturbing violence in many other places."

The Portuguese president's office also put out a condolence statement calling Loureiro's death "an irreparable loss for science and for all those with whom he worked and lived."

Killing comes amid search for Brown shooting suspect

The investigation into Loureiro's killing unfolds as Brown University, about 50 miles (80 kilometers) away in Providence, Rhode Island, continues to reel from Saturday's campus shooting. As the search for the suspect entered its fifth day Wednesday, authorities urged the public to review security or cellphone footage from the week before the attack, saying they believe the gunman may have cased the area beforehand.

What to know about bidding war between Netflix and Paramount for Warner Bros.

By MAE ANDERSON AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Warner Bros. is telling shareholders of the company that it believes a \$72 billion buyout offer from Netflix is superior, and to reject a hostile takeover bid from Paramount Skydance.

Paramount went hostile with its bid last week, asking shareholders to reject the deal with Netflix favored by the board of Warner Bros.

Paramount is offering \$30 per Warner share, or \$77.9 billion, to Netflix's \$27.75 per share.

A Warner Bros. merger with either company would alter the landscape in Hollywood and will face intense scrutiny from U.S. regulators as it would impact movie making, consumer streaming platforms and, in Paramount's case, a major source of news for millions of people.

The competing offers set the stage for combining some of the most beloved entertainment properties. Netflix's vast library includes "Stranger Things" and "Squid Game," while the much smaller Paramount owns its Hollywood studio and major TV networks like CBS and MTV. Both covet Warner, which owns Warner Bros. Pictures, HBO and the Harry Potter franchise.

"Whichever media company, if any, ultimately secures (Warner), controls the calculus of the streaming

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wars and so much more," said Mike Proulx, vice president and research director at research firm Forrester.

Both offers will face regulatory scrutiny, an issue President Donald Trump has already weighed in on.

Here's what to know about the three players and what the bids mean for the entertainment industry.

A look at the offers

CEO David Zaslav has been seeking offers for Warner Bros. Discovery since at least October, when he said the company might be open to selling all or parts of its business.

Paramount said Monday it had submitted six proposals to Warner over a 12 week period before its offer was rejected in favor of Netflix.

So Paramount decided to go straight to Warner shareholders with a bid it says is worth about \$79.9 billion, or \$30 per share in cash. Paramount, unlike Netflix, is also offering to buy the cable assets of Warner, and asking shareholders of the company to reject the Netflix bid.

Paramount CEO Larry Ellison said the offer is worth about \$18 billion more in cash than the competing cash-and-stock bid from Netflix.

The Paramount deal includes help from investors such as Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner and funds controlled by the governments of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, according to a regulatory filing.

Netflix is offering a combination of cash and stock valued at \$27.75 per Warner share. Its offer values Warner at \$72 billion, excluding debt, but it is not bidding on Warner-owned networks such as CNN and Discovery.

Before Paramount's bid, the Netflix deal was expected to close in the next 12 to 18 months, after Warner completes its previously announced separation of its cable operations.

Competing bids makes an eventual deal more likely

Matthew Dolgin, senior equity analyst at research firm Morningstar, said there are still many unknowns, including whether Netflix will now sweeten its bid.

But, he said, a competing offer makes it more likely that Warner will eventually be acquired.

"With Paramount now also being involved formally with an offer to shareholders, it's even more likely to us that Warner gets acquired, because it's no longer a single decision that may or may not hinge on regulatory approval," he said.

Shareholders have until Jan. 8, 2026, to vote on Paramount's tender offer.

Donald Trump weighed in earlier

Another wild card could be President Trump. He already weighed in on the deal, saying that the Netflix offer to buy Warner "could be a problem" because of the size of the potential size of the audience.

The Republican president said he will be involved in the decision about whether the federal government should approve the deal.

Paramount's CEO is the son of Oracle founder Larry Ellison, an ally of Trump. Federal regulators under Trump approved Paramount's \$8 billion merger with Skydance in July.

Regulatory scrutiny awaits either deal

On the Netflix offer, state or federal regulators could be most concerned about the massive size of a combined Netflix and Warner subscription service, said Morningstar's Dolgin. Netflix is already the world's largest streaming service.

That's less of a concern with the Paramount deal, because its streaming service is smaller and has as smaller international footprint than Netflix. But regulators may raise red flags over the combination of the Paramount and Warner film and television studios, because relatively few of those remain, Dolgin said.

A pattern of media acquisitions

As streaming platforms have matured, more media companies are seeking growth through acquisitions.

Warner Bros. Discovery itself was created in 2022 when U.S. telecom giant AT&T Inc. spun off and then combined its WarnerMedia operations with Discovery Inc.

In 2021, Amazon said it would buy MGM, the movie and TV studio behind James Bond, "Legally Blonde" and "Shark Tank." Disney bought Fox's entertainment service in 2019.

"Technology always faces this pattern of startups, lots of different players, legacy companies getting in on the action, and then ultimately lots of consolidation," said Forrester's Proulx. "And this is the state that we're in right now in the streaming wars saga, and in 2026 we'll see continued consolidation."

Myanmar declares a 'zero tolerance' policy for cyberscams. But the fraud goes on

By ERIKA KINETZ Associated Press

It looked like a turning point in the global fight against scams. Myanmar's military leadership, under growing international pressure, vowed to wipe out the industrial-scale cyberscam centers that have taken root in the country. They started by raiding and then bombing KK Park — a notorious compound that has become a symbol of impunity in the battle against one of the most lucrative criminal industries in the world.

It's too early to say whether KK Park will be abandoned, repurposed or rebuilt over time. But even if KK Park were to close, it's just one of around 30 scam compounds along Myanmar's border with Thailand — one indication that the crackdown may not turn out to be as deep or long-lasting as Myanmar's military rulers would like it to appear.

The Associated Press found that at least two scam compounds in the area continued to use Starlink to get online even after SpaceX announced it had cut off service. And there are other signs the scam industry is adapting fast: The physical damage to KK Park sent thousands of workers scattering to other scam companies in Myanmar and abroad, interviews with current and former scam center workers show. Telegram is popping with job ads for newly displaced workers. And work has continued uninterrupted at other scam centers in Myanmar, where people trafficked from around the world still wait to be rescued.

"Even if you destroy buildings, if you haven't arrested the heads of the transnational syndicates behind this, seized their wealth and put them in jail, it's not a real crackdown yet," said Jay Kritiya, the coordinator of the Civil Society Network for Human Trafficking Victim Assistance.

A turning point?

Myanmar state media announced the raid on KK Park on Oct. 20, which was followed by a weeklong demolition campaign. In November, Myanmar's military rulers pledged to "eradicate scam activities from their roots." State media broadcast images of wreckage and soldiers standing with dozens of seized Starlink terminals. They then went after Shwe Kokko, another notorious compound that's been in the crosshairs of U.S. authorities. SpaceX announced it cut off access to more than 2,500 Starlink units in Myanmar, where they have been widely used by scammers to get online. And Meta said this month it had taken down 2,000 Facebook accounts used by scammers in Myanmar.

It looked as if growing American pressure on foreign scam centers through sanctions, prosecutions and a new, high-level Scam Center Strike Force, was having swift impact as Myanmar prepares for national elections, which have been widely criticized as a sham effort to legitimize the army's 2021 seizure of power.

Myanmar has said the demolition at KK Park — and raids at additional scam sites — are meant to ensure that criminal activity never returns. This month the government created a high-level task force to enact what it calls a "zero tolerance" policy against scams. The state-run Global New Light of Myanmar on Dec. 15 devoted five full pages to coverage of a press conference showcasing what it described as the government's aggressive efforts to stop fraud, and characterized cyberscams as the work of foreign criminal networks that have taken root in lawless borderlands controlled by insurgents.

Government officials said that by Dec. 13, 413 buildings in KK Park had been "demolished" and the remaining 222 would be cleared as well. Detailed visual analysis of the first wave of demolition, which the government says is complete, shows that 31 structures were flattened. At least 78 more were partially damaged, according to the Center for Information Resilience (CIR), a London-based nonprofit focused on exposing human rights violations.

More than half the buildings were damaged by heavy machinery, which often left roofs, ceilings and layers between floors intact, said Guy Fufus, an investigator at Myanmar Witness, a CIR project. "There may be an intention to reconstruct and reuse these buildings," he said in an email.

New satellite imagery shows that most buildings in KK Park appeared wholly or partially intact on Dec. 4, even as demolition had spread to other sections of the compound. Once home to thousands of workers, many victims of human trafficking, the streets of KK Park appeared empty. Where all those people went — and what that portends for the future of a criminal industry the FBI says cost Americans more than \$16 billion last year — remain open questions.

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"This isn't just breaking windows and moving on. You can't come in and restart operations here at the same scale as before," said Eric Heintz, a global analyst at the International Justice Mission, a Washington, D.C.-based NGO, who reviewed satellite images of the damage. "But we don't know if that activity is just going to be displaced to other locations."

Myanmar's track record of lasting enforcement is poor. Raids in response to Chinese pressure earlier this year failed to contain the growth of scam compounds, according to C4ADS, a U.S.-based nonprofit that takes a data-driven approach to conflict analysis. Over 7,000 scam center workers were released as part of that purge, according to the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime, but the scams kept on running.

C4ADS examined satellite imagery of 21 known scam compounds in Myawaddy Township and found that 14 of them — including KK Park — had shown construction or expansion since January. Some solar panels also appeared — a step toward energy independence that could blunt the impact of crackdowns from neighboring Thailand, which has occasionally cut off power.

"This continued growth of scam compounds is emblematic of the junta's inability to rein in the industry within Myanmar," said Michael Di Girolamo, a C4ADS analyst focused on cybercrime.

Analysts say that some of the same people who led the raid on KK Park have profited from scams over the years. KK Park, like most scam compounds along the Thai border, operates under the protection of the Karen Border Guard Force — also known as the Karen National Army — an armed militia made up of ethnic Karen people who live in eastern Myanmar that is affiliated with the Myanmar military, according to U.S. and European government sanctions notices.

Jason Tower, a senior expert at the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, said the action at KK Park was a way for Myanmar's military leadership to relieve pressure, primarily from the U.S. and China, and continue to host highly lucrative criminal activity. "There's no real political will to crack down," he said.

A month after KK Park was raided, another scam center fell, far from the glare of government propaganda. On Nov. 21, forces of the Karen National Union, a rebel group opposed to Myanmar's military leadership, stormed a scam compound called Shunda Park in an area controlled by a pro-government militia.

"This looks much more like a real crackdown on crime," Tower said.

While Myanmar state television broadcast images of a steamroller crushing rows of scammers' computers, the Karen National Union gathered 604 mobile phones, bank cards, computers and other evidence from Shunda and handed them over to Thai authorities for investigation.

"The Myanmar military just destroys everything," KNU spokesperson Padoh Saw Taw Nee told AP. "It's clear they don't want people to know who is controlling it."

Requests for comment to a Myanmar military government spokesman went unanswered. But the Global New Light of Myanmar called claims that evidence was being destroyed "astonishing." All evidence was properly collected, the paper said, and would be "released as appropriate in future public statements."

Where did all the people go?

Since the raid on KK Park, the Thai military said around 1,500 people who worked there have made it out through official channels in Thailand — a fraction of the total workforce, estimated to be in the tens of thousands.

The whereabouts of the rest are unknown. Some followed company bosses to other locations, four workers who fled KK Park told AP. They spoke on condition of anonymity, fearing for their safety.

One Filipino worker said he and 20 others who jumped the fence at KK Park were picked up by government-allied forces and made it to Thailand. But five Ethiopians on his team stayed behind. "They wanted to go to another company," he explained. He said he overheard his boss, who was Chinese, talk about relocating the operation to Cambodia.

Another Filipina worker said her company relocated dozens of staff, computers and Wi-Fi equipment to a nearby compound called Huanya, to get the business targeting older American men with a gold investment scam back up and running as quickly as possible.

Telegram is awash with recruitment offers for displaced workers. One company seeking staff to target U.S. "clients" appeared to offer the option of working remotely from the town of Myawaddy. "No daily attendance or registration required," the notice read.

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A company seeking staff for “finding and chatting” with cryptocurrency clients said it would arrange direct flights from Yangon in Myanmar to Phnom Penh, Cambodia’s capital, for those with passports and “safe transportation by car” for those without. “Come quickly,” the announcement urged.

Still trapped, still using Starlink

More than 200 African workers from KK Park went to the nearby Apollo scam compound, according to a foreign woman trapped there.

Another 100 or so moved to a compound known as Hengsheng Park 4, according to an employee who says his bosses won’t let him leave even if he pays a ransom. He said KK workers stayed for a week and then moved on. “I heard that most of them went to Cambodia, Mauritius and Africa,” he said.

He said his company still uses Starlink to get online — three units stopped working after SpaceX announced the ban, but a fourth still functions.

Starlink is also still up and running at the Deko Park compound, 35 miles (56 kilometers) south of KK Park, according to a worker trapped there.

The Associated Press is withholding the names of all three for safety reasons. AP asked SpaceX for comment and provided the locations of both compounds, but the company did not reply.

The Myanmar government’s pledges to wipe out scams haven’t helped the man at Deko Park, whose legs bloomed with bruises from a beating, photos show. He sends pleas almost daily: “Is there any latest news?” he wrote in a recent text message to a woman who is trying to help him escape. “I really want to go.”

Putin warns that Russia will seek to extend its gains in Ukraine if peace talks fail

By The Associated Press undefined

Russian President Vladimir Putin warned Wednesday that Moscow will seek to extend its gains in Ukraine if Kyiv and its Western allies reject the Kremlin’s demands in peace talks.

U.S. President Donald Trump has unleashed an extensive diplomatic push to end nearly four years of fighting following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, but Washington’s efforts have run into sharply conflicting demands by Moscow and Kyiv.

Speaking at an annual meeting with top military officers, Putin said Moscow would prefer to achieve its goals and “eliminate the root causes of the conflict” by diplomatic means, but he added that “if the opposing side and its foreign patrons refuse to engage in substantive dialogue, Russia will achieve the liberation of its historical lands by military means.”

Putin was referring to Ukrainian territory seized by Russia — action widely condemned in the West as a violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty and an unprovoked act of aggression.

Putin claimed that “the Russian army has seized and is firmly holding strategic initiative all along the front line” and warned that Moscow will move to expand a “buffer security zone” alongside the Russian border.

“Our troops are different now, they are battle-hardened and there is no other such army in the world now,” he said.

Putin praised Russia’s growing military might and particularly noted the modernization of its atomic arsenal, including the new nuclear-capable intermediate range Oreshnik ballistic missile that he said will officially enter combat duty this month. Russia first tested a conventionally armed version of the Oreshnik to strike a Ukrainian factory in November 2024, and Putin has boasted that it’s impossible to intercept.

At the same time, he rejected European officials’ statements about Moscow’s purported plans to attack European nations as “lies and sheer nonsense ... driven by short-sighted personal or group political interests, not by the interests of their people.”

Sharply different demands by Moscow and Kyiv

Putin’s tough statements follow several rounds of talks this week between Ukrainian, American and European officials on a U.S.-drafted peace plan. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said after meeting with U.S. envoys in Berlin that the document could be finalized within days, after which U.S. envoys will present it to the Kremlin.

Putin wants all the areas in four key regions captured by his forces, as well as Crimea, which was illegally

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annexed in 2014, to be recognized as Russian territory. He also has demanded that Ukraine withdraw from some areas in eastern Ukraine that Moscow's forces have not captured yet.

The Kremlin also insists that Ukraine abandon its bid to join NATO and warns it won't accept the deployment of any troops from NATO members and will view them as "legitimate target."

Zelenskyy has expressed readiness to drop Ukraine's bid to join NATO if the U.S. and other Western nations give Kyiv security guarantees similar to those offered to NATO members. But Ukraine's preference remains NATO membership as the best security guarantee to prevent further Russian aggression.

At the same time, Zelenskyy has rejected Moscow's demands that it pull back its troops from other areas that Russia has not been able to take by force.

The Ukrainian leader described the draft peace plan discussed with the U.S. during talks in Berlin on Monday as "not perfect" but "very workable," noting that Kyiv and its allies were very close to a deal on "strong security guarantees." But he also emphasized that the key issue of control over territory remain unresolved and rejected the U.S. push for Ukraine to cede control over the eastern Donetsk region.

Putin on Wednesday again praised Trump's settlement efforts and seconded Trump's repeated claims that the war in Ukraine wouldn't have erupted under his watch. He charged that the previous U.S. administration and some of the European allies he contemptuously called "piglings" had vainly expected Russia's collapse.

The Russian leader said a dialogue with Europe "is unlikely to become possible with the current political elites, but in any case, it will be inevitable as we grow stronger if not with the current politicians, then with a change in political elites in Europe."

Russian military maps out for more gains

Reporting to Putin at Wednesday's military meeting, Defense Minister Andrei Belousov spelled out plans for further advances, saying the latest Russian advances in Donetsk have set the stage for a quick push into the Ukrainian-controlled part of the region.

Belousov also declared that Russian troops were preparing to drive Ukrainian forces from parts of the Zaporizhzhia region that Moscow also annexed in 2022 but never fully captured, as well as extend gains in neighboring Dnipropetrovsk.

"The key task for the next year is to preserve and accelerate the tempo of the offensive," he said.

Belousov spelled out plans for expanding Russian military capabilities, focusing on drones, jamming equipment and air defense assets.

Aerial attacks continue

As Russia continues its grinding advances in many sectors of the front, it also pummeled Ukraine with daily missile and drone strikes.

At least 26 people were injured by Russian glide bombs in Zaporizhzhia and its vicinity, according to regional administration head Ivan Fedorov. The attack damaged several residential buildings, as well as infrastructure and an educational facility.

At least 69 long-range drones were launched by Russia overnight, the Ukrainian air force said. Air defenses intercepted or jammed 29 drones in the morning, with the assault continuing during the day.

Russia's Defense Ministry said that air defenses downed 94 Ukrainian drones overnight.

In Russia's southern Krasnodar region, drones injured two people and damaged several private houses, according to regional emergency officials. In the southwestern Voronezh region, Gov. Alexander Gusev said drone fragments damaged a power line serving an infrastructure facility, causing a blaze that was quickly extinguished.

Saturn's moon Titan may not have a buried ocean as long suspected, new study suggests

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Saturn's giant moon Titan may not have a vast underground ocean after all. Titan instead may hold deep layers of ice and slush more akin to Earth's polar seas, with pockets of melted water where life could possibly survive and even thrive, scientists reported Wednesday.

The team led by researchers at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory challenged the decade-long assumption of a buried global ocean at Titan after taking a fresh look at observations made years ago by NASA's

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Cassini spacecraft around Saturn.

They stress that no one has found any signs of life at Titan, the solar system's second largest moon spanning 3,200 miles (5,150 kilometers) and brimming with lakes of liquid methane on its frosty surface.

But with the latest findings suggesting a slushy, near-melting environment, "there is strong justification for continued optimism regarding the potential for extraterrestrial life," said the University of Washington's Baptiste Journaux, who took part in the study published in the journal *Nature*.

As to what form of life that might be, possibly strictly microscopic, "nature has repeatedly demonstrated far greater creativity than the most imaginative scientists," he said in an email.

JPL's Flavio Petricca, the lead author, said Titan's ocean may have frozen in the past and is currently melting, or its hydrosphere might be evolving toward complete freezing.

Computer models suggest these layers of ice, slush and water extend to a depth of more than 340 miles (550 kilometers). The outer ice shell is thought to be about 100 miles (170 kilometers) deep, covering layers of slush and pools of water that could go down another 250 miles (400 kilometers). This water could be as warm as 68 degrees Fahrenheit (20 degrees Celsius).

Because Titan is tidally locked, the same side of the moon faces Saturn all the time, just like our own moon and Earth. Saturn's gravitational pull is so intense that it deforms the moon's surface, creating bulges as high as 30 feet (10 meters) when the two bodies are closest.

Through improved data processing, Petricca and his team managed to measure the timing between the peak gravitational tug and the rising of Titan's surface. If the moon held a wet ocean, the effect would be immediate, Petricca said, but a 15-hour gap was detected, indicating an interior of slushy ice with pockets of liquid water. Computer modeling of Titan's orientation in space supported their theory.

Sapienza University of Rome's Luciano Iess, whose previous studies using Cassini data indicated a hidden ocean at Titan, is not convinced by the latest findings.

While "certainly intriguing and will stimulate renewed discussion ... at present, the available evidence looks certainly not sufficient to exclude Titan from the family of ocean worlds," Iess said in an email.

NASA's planned Dragonfly mission — featuring a helicopter-type craft due to launch to Titan later this decade — is expected to provide more clarity on the moon's innards. Journaux is part of that team.

Saturn leads the solar system's moon inventory with 274. Jupiter's moon Ganymede is just a little larger than Titan, with a possible underground ocean. Other suspected water worlds include Saturn's Enceladus and Jupiter's Europa, both of which are believed to have geysers of water erupting from their frozen crusts.

Launched in 1997, Cassini reached Saturn in 2004, orbiting the ringed planet and flying past its moons until deliberately plunging through Saturn's atmosphere in 2017.

Louvre workers vote to extend a strike as the museum partially reopens

By THOMAS ADAMSON and SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Employees at the Louvre Museum voted to extend a strike that has disrupted operations at the world's most visited museum, though the venue partially opened Wednesday to allow visitors to enjoy its highlights.

The museum said visitors had access to a limited "masterpiece route" which includes Leonardo da Vinci's "Mona Lisa" and the Venus de Milo.

"Due to a strike, some rooms in the Louvre Museum are ... closed," it said on social media. "We apologize for any inconvenience."

Union workers are protesting chronic under-staffing, building deterioration and recent management decisions — pressures intensified by a brazen crown jewels heist in October that exposed serious security lapses.

The strike decision came during a morning general assembly, after workers adopted the walkout unanimously earlier this week. The museum was closed Tuesday for its weekly day off.

Culture Ministry officials held crisis talks with unions Monday and proposed to cancel a planned \$6.7 million cut in 2026 funding, open new recruitment for gallery guards and visitor services and increase staff

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compensation. Union officials said the measures fell short.

Louvre President Laurence des Cars was scheduled to appear before the Senate's culture committee Wednesday as lawmakers probe security failures at the museum.

Des Cars has acknowledged an "institutional failure" following the heist but has come under renewed scrutiny after admitting she only learned of a critical 2019 security audit after the robbery. France's Court of Auditors and a separate administrative inquiry have since criticized delays in implementing a long-promised security overhaul.

The Culture Ministry announced emergency anti-intrusion measures last month and assigned Philippe Jost, who oversaw the Notre Dame restoration, to help reorganize the museum. The move was widely seen as a sign of mounting pressure on Louvre leadership.

Today in History: December 18, Donald Trump impeached for the first time

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, Dec. 18, the 352nd day of 2025. There are 13 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Dec. 18, 2019, the U.S. House impeached President Donald Trump on two charges, sending his case to the Senate for trial (It was the first of two Trump impeachment trials that would end in acquittal). The articles of impeachment accused him of abuse of power to investigate Democratic rival Joe Biden before the 2020 election and obstructing Congress' investigation of the matter.

Also on this date:

In 1865, the 13th Amendment to the Constitution abolishing slavery was declared in effect by Secretary of State William H. Seward.

In 1892, Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky's ballet "The Nutcracker" publicly premiered in St. Petersburg, Russia; although now considered a classic, it received a generally negative reception from critics.

In 1916, the Battle of Verdun, World War I's longest at 10 months, ended between French and German forces; it led to nearly 1 million casualties.

In 1917, Congress proposed an amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibiting alcohol; the 18th Amendment was declared ratified in 1919 (Prohibition was repealed in 1933 by the 21st Amendment).

In 1957, the world's first commercial nuclear power plant, the Shippingport Atomic Power Station in Pennsylvania, began supplying electricity to customers. (It was taken out of service in 1982.)

In 1972, with peace talks stalled, the U.S. launched Operation Linebacker II, its heaviest bombing of North Vietnam in the Vietnam War. The operation lasted 11 days (an agreement known as the Paris Peace Accords was signed in January 1973).

In 2011, the last convoy of heavily armored U.S. troops left Iraq in the final moments of a nearly nine-year war.

In 2022, Argentina beat France 4-2 in a penalty shootout to claim a third World Cup, the first for star Lionel Messi.

In 2023, Pope Francis approved letting Catholic priests bless same-sex couples under certain conditions, a radical shift in policy that aimed to make the church more inclusive while maintaining its strict ban on gay marriage.

Today's Birthdays: Chef Jacques Pépin is 90. Rock musician Keith Richards is 82. Filmmaker Alan Rudolph is 82. Filmmaker Steven Spielberg is 79. Filmmaker Gillian Armstrong is 75. Actor Brad Pitt is 62. Singer Alejandro Sanz is 57. Tennis Hall of Famer Arantxa Sanchez Vicario is 54. Pop singer Sia is 50. Country singer-songwriter Randy Houser is 50. Actor Katie Holmes is 47. Singer Christina Aguilera is 45. MLB outfielder Ronald Acuña Jr. is 28. NFL quarterback Jayden Daniels is 25. Singer Billie Eilish is 24.