

Groton Daily Independent

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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.



Saturday, Dec. 20

G Wrestling @ Border Brawl (Ashley, ND), 9 a.m.
MVP Titan Invite Boys Wrestling at Plankington, 9 a.m.

Boys Wrestling @ Sioux Valley Cossack, 10 a.m.
Santa Day at 111 N Main, 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.

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1440

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

New England Shooter

Police said yesterday they found the body of the suspected gunman behind Saturday's Brown University shooting and the killing days later of MIT physics professor Nuno FG Loureiro.

Authorities identified the gunman as 48-year-old Claudio Neves Valente, a former Brown University graduate student last known to be living in Miami, Florida. Police did not publicly identify a motive as of this writing. Valente had attended the same university in Portugal as the slain MIT professor. He had also studied physics at Brown University from 2001 to 2003, when he took a leave of absence. Until yesterday, police had not publicly identified a connection between the attacks. Valente was discovered dead by suicide in a storage unit in Salem, New Hampshire.

Loureiro had researched magnetic fields in the universe.

Epstein Deadline Arrives

Democrats on the House Oversight Committee released roughly 70 photos from Jeffrey Epstein's estate yesterday, one day before the Justice Department's deadline today to disclose a separate trove of "Epstein files" under the new Epstein Files Transparency Act.

The photos, from a batch of 95,000 the committee received last week, include passports, text messages, and private gatherings with public figures, as well as phrases from the book "Lolita"—which covers child sex abuse—written on parts of a woman's body. The photos are not timestamped and do not implicate anyone. Republicans have accused Democrats of selectively publishing the photos to shape a misleading narrative.

The act, signed by President Donald Trump in November, orders the DOJ to post all Epstein- and Ghislaine Maxwell-related materials in a publicly searchable database. Agencies may redact limited details to protect victim safety, privacy, or national security, but cannot withhold information for political or personal reasons.

Foreign Comet Flyby

Interstellar comet 3I/ATLAS made its closest approach to Earth at approximately 1 am ET this morning, offering a rare glimpse at an object from beyond our solar system.

First spotted in July, 3I/ATLAS has been traveling roughly 137,000 mph and is the third-ever interstellar object observed in the Milky Way; the first two were spotted in 2017 and 2019. Last month, NASA confirmed 3I/ATLAS is a comet, dismissing speculation that it is alien technology. As 3I/ATLAS came within roughly 170 million miles of Earth, today was astronomers' best opportunity to gather data on the comet before it exits our solar system in the mid-2030s. A recent study found the 0.3- to 3.5-mile-wide comet is full of carbon dioxide, suggesting it originates in an environment with more radiation than our solar system.

Separately, the year's last major meteor shower peaks Sunday into Monday and will be visible until Dec. 26 in the Northern Hemisphere.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

College Football Playoff begins tonight, with Alabama versus Oklahoma at 8 pm ET.

YouTuber-turned-boxer Jake Paul to fight two-time heavyweight champion Anthony Joshua at 8 pm ET on Netflix.

Former NASCAR driver Greg Biffle, his wife, and their two children are among those killed in a North Carolina business jet plane crash.

Tennessee governor pardons Jelly Roll, whose convictions include robbery and drug felonies; country star says pardon will make it easier for him to travel internationally for concerts and Christian missionary work.

Science & Technology

Federal regulators unanimously agree to let data centers siphon energy directly from power plants—a decision celebrated by several technology companies but criticized by some consumer advocates.

Experimental drug successfully fights toxic peptides that appear to drive several of the earliest brain changes associated with Alzheimer's disease in a mouse model, suggesting a new strategy to prevent—significantly delay—the disease.

Researchers create first scientifically validated personality test framework for AI chatbots, supporting the notion that models display human-like traits and that these traits can be manipulated with prompting.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +0.8%, Dow +0.1%, Nasdaq +1.4%).

Consumer price index rose 2.7% year over year in November, down from 3% rise in September—the last month of available data.

TikTok signs deal to sell US entity to joint US venture controlled by investor group including Oracle, private equity firm Silver Lake, and Abu Dhabi's MGX; agreement to close Jan. 22.

Trump Media to merge with Alphabet-backed fusion energy company TAE Technologies in an over \$6B all-stock deal.

Hogan Lovells to merge with Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft, creating fifth-largest global law firm by revenue at \$3.6B.

Politics & World Affairs

Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. announces proposed rules to cut Medicaid and Medicare funding to hospitals providing gender-related medical care to minors.

President Donald Trump orders the Justice Department to fast-track reclassifying marijuana as a Schedule III substance.

Pope Leo XIV appoints little-known Bishop Ronald Hicks from his Illinois hometown to succeed Cardinal Timothy Dolan in leading the New York diocese, the US' second-largest by population after Los Angeles.

Kennedy Center board, including members selected by President Donald Trump, votes to rename the center the "Trump-Kennedy Center".

White House installs plaques in the complex mocking former Presidents Joe Biden, Barack Obama.

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Groton Angel Tree Thanks You All



This year, I am especially thankful for good health and for a surgery that went well. I am also deeply grateful for the Christmas season and the opportunity to give back to our community by providing gifts for families in need. It brings me great joy and peace knowing that children will be able to experience the best Christmas possible.

I have been part of this mission since 2007, and it continues to be one of the most meaningful and rewarding things I do. Each year, I tell my family I don't need anything under the tree—I simply want other children to have a joyful Christmas. I would really like to thank the people for the donations and help with making this the best Christmas for the children again. Thanks to Lori's Pharmacy and City Hall for hosting the Angel Tree this year.

I am also thankful for my family, my friends, and especially for my new granddaughter this year. Wishing everyone a Merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

Tina Kosel From the Angel Tree

GT on
Groton Area Tigers Groton, SD

GDILIVE
YouTube

A production of the
Groton Daily Independent

For more info: GDILIVE.COM

Elementary Christmas Program
Fri., Dec. 19, 1 p.m.

GT on
Groton Area Tigers Groton, SD

GDILIVE
YouTube

A production of the
Groton Daily Independent

For more info: GDILIVE.COM

GBB at West Central
Fri., Dec. 19, 6:30

GT on
Groton Area Tigers Groton, SD

GDILIVE
YouTube

A production of the
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For more info: GDILIVE.COM

BBB at West Central
Fri., Dec. 19, 8:00

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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!**

Northern splits at MSU Moorhead as women fall at buzzer, men roll to decisive win

MOORHEAD, Minn. – It was a night of contrasting finishes for Northern State at MSU Moorhead, as the Wolves women suffered a heartbreaking one-point loss while the men turned in their most complete performance of the season with a convincing road victory.

The Northern State women came up just short in a 77-76 setback to MSU Moorhead after Grace Massaquoi converted two free throws with under five seconds remaining. Northern had led late, taking a 65-58 advantage with just over six minutes to play following a pair of free throws from Izzy Moore, but the Dragons clawed back into the contest.

Terryn Johnson later tied the game at 75-75 before Moore knocked down a free throw to give Northern a one-point edge with seven seconds left. Moments later, Massaquoi was fouled and calmly sank both shots at the line to seal the win for the Dragons. Northern finished the night shooting 50 percent from the field and 76.7 percent from the free-throw line.

Moore delivered a standout performance for the Wolves, pouring in 39 points to go along with four rebounds and two assists, while shooting efficiently from all areas of the floor. Morgan Fiedler added 11 points and Megan Counts chipped in 10 points and six rebounds. Lily Klein led Northern on the glass with seven rebounds, while also contributing eight points.

In the men's contest, Northern State responded with authority, rolling to a 76-52 win over MSU Moorhead for its first 20-plus point victory of the season and its first win in Moorhead since 2023. Despite a tightly contested first half that featured nine lead changes, Northern carried a 31-26 edge into the break before overwhelming the Dragons in the second half, outscoring them 45-26.

The Wolves shot 52.9 percent from the floor and knocked down 12 three-pointers, while holding MSU Moorhead to just 30.5 percent shooting overall. Northern also dominated the rebounding battle, 41-27, and dished out 17 assists in the win.

Joshua Book led the way with 19 points, seven rebounds and seven assists, while Nelson Reynolds provided a spark off the bench with 15 points, including five three-pointers. Simon Akena added 14 points and a team-high eight rebounds, and Ty Rogers rounded out the double-figure scorers with 12 points as four Wolves reached double digits.

Up next, both Northern squads head to Minnesota Crookston on Saturday. The women are scheduled for a 3:30 p.m. tip, while the men will close out the 2025 portion of their schedule with a 1:30 p.m. start against the Golden Eagles.

Moody County Fatal Crash

What: Vehicle/pedestrian fatal crash

Where: 480th Avenue and 232nd Street, one mile south of Flandreau, SD

When: 10:05 p.m., Wednesday, Dec. 17, 2025

Driver 1: 55-year-old female from Ruthton, MN, no injuries

Vehicle 1: 2012 Ford Escape

Seat belt Used: Yes

Pedestrian 1: 25-year-old female from Wentworth, SD, fatal injuries

Pedestrian 2: 34-year-old male from Springfield, SD, fatal injuries

Moody County, S.D.- Two pedestrians died in a single vehicle crash Wednesday evening one mile south of Flandreau, SD.

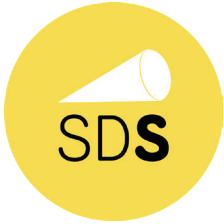
The names of the persons involved have not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver of a 2012 Ford Escape was traveling south on 480th Avenue. As the vehicle approached the intersection with 232nd Street, they came upon two pedestrians walking in the southbound lane, colliding with both.

Both pedestrians were pronounced deceased at the scene. The driver was not injured.

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

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



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

State tallies \$43,000 in trooper overtime costs during Operation Prairie Thunder

BY: JOHN HULT

The South Dakota Department of Public Safety says a saturation patrol initiative has had a minimal impact on the Highway Patrol's budget.

Operation Prairie Thunder, announced in July by Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden, has put additional state troopers in cities across South Dakota on eight occasions.

Last week, the state said it had jailed 75 people on drug charges during two sets of patrols in the cities of Yankton, Huron and Belle Fourche. Earlier patrols had focused on the city of Sioux Falls.

Brad Reiners, spokesman for the Highway Patrol, told South Dakota Searchlight the state logged \$43,000 worth of overtime hours for troopers during the days the patrols took place.

"There are minimal lodging, travel, and fuel costs as well," Reiners wrote in an email, adding that those expenses were covered by the Highway Patrol's operational budget.

He also said troopers would have logged some overtime hours during the saturation patrol time frames even if those patrols had not taken place.

He declined to say how many additional troopers were involved in each patrol, or to offer the total annual overtime budget for the agency. He wrote that the overtime budget is "complex," because "there are several accounts from which overtime may be drawn." The Highway Patrol's total budget for the current fiscal year is about \$45 million.

The budget impact of saturation patrols extends beyond the Highway Patrol.

Minnehaha County Public Defender Traci Smith told South Dakota Searchlight she has not broken down the exact number of additional cases her office now has as a result of the patrols, but that "the increase we felt was anecdotally due to the higher number of arrests during those times."

Smith also wrote that she had recently asked the Minnehaha County Commission for a \$190,000 budget supplement. The commission approved her request on Tuesday.

The Nov. 21 letter requesting that money did not mention Operation Prairie Thunder, but pointed more generally to "unanticipated operational needs and workload-driven expenses" and a "sustained increase in felony, drug, and violent-offense cases."

Immigration connection

During the saturation patrols, state troopers are questioning people they suspect of being in the U.S. without documentation, facilitated in part by a cooperation agreement inked between the agency and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement this year.

Such questioning, some of which results in detainment for ICE, takes place during regular traffic stops. The mayor and a state representative from Huron, one of South Dakota's most diverse cities per capita, told Searchlight that the troopers' presence in town sparked fears of ICE immigration crackdowns.

The state does not publicly announce the dates for its patrols in advance, but the city of Brookings posted a press release late last week announcing that Operation Prairie Thunder patrols would take place in the city from Wednesday through Friday, and that "the city of Brookings will not be participating in these operations."

Brookings Mayor Ope Neimeyer told The Dakota Scout newspaper that the release was meant to "inform

our citizens.”

Josie Harms, a spokeswoman for Rhoden, declined to say on Tuesday if anything had changed in terms of the Highway Patrol’s plans for Brookings.

“For security reasons, we are not going to comment on operational specifics,” she wrote in a statement. “It’s unfortunate that the city of Brookings would jeopardize an anti-crime operation and put the safety of our officers at risk by publishing this information. In South Dakota, we enforce the rule of law.”

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.

South Dakota state economist says sluggish farm economy has held back sales tax revenues

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

SIoux FALLS — South Dakota’s State Economist Derek Johnson told the state Banking Commission on Wednesday that a sluggish farm economy, driven by lower soybean, corn and wheat prices, has been a major factor holding down recent state sales tax collections.

Johnson, with the Bureau of Finance and Management, said sales tax collections tied to farm equipment fell more than 20% in fiscal year 2025 compared with the prior year. He said collections on farm equipment have continued to slide in the current 2026 fiscal year, down year-to-date by about 16%.

Johnson framed the impact of falling crop prices as outsized for an agriculture-dependent state.

“We know that in an ag-state like South Dakota, it bleeds into so many parts of the economy,” he said.

Johnson shared the news two weeks after Gov. Larry Rhoden said in his budget address that overall sales tax revenue declined in fiscal year 2025 for only the third time in 30 years, by 0.6%. Sales tax revenues for fiscal year 2026, which ends June 30, are up over 4% so far.

Johnson said the most recent month’s tax collections on farm equipment were higher than the same month a year earlier. That’s the first year-over-year improvement in roughly two years.

Beyond agriculture, Johnson told the commission South Dakota’s labor market remains tight, with the nation’s lowest unemployment rate of 2% and roughly three job openings for every unemployed person. He said the state is seeing a cooling housing market compared with the pandemic-era surge.

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

Shutdown-delayed analysis shows rising unemployment in half the states; South Dakota has lowest rate

BY: TIM HENDERSON

September unemployment rates rose in 25 states and fell in 21 compared with last year, the government reported Dec. 11 in a shutdown-delayed analysis.

The largest increase compared with September 2024 was in Oregon, where the rate rose from 4.2% to 5.2%, followed by the District of Columbia, increasing from 5.3% to 6.2% and Delaware, up from 3.6% to 4.5%.

The largest drops were in Indiana, down from 4.4% to 3.7%, Illinois (5.0% to 4.4%) and Kentucky (5.3% to 4.7%).

Nationally unemployment rose to 4.4% from 4.1% last year and the number of unemployed people looking for work increased from 6.9 million to 7.6 million. September saw a better-than-expected increase

of 119,000 in payroll jobs compared to August, after a loss of 4,000 in August.

There will be no October national employment report because the shutdown interrupted information collection. A November national report is scheduled for release Dec. 16. The state report for September had been delayed from its usual release date in October.

An alternative national jobs estimate for November, from private payroll processor ADP, showed a net loss of 32,000 jobs and bigger losses for small businesses with less than 50 employees, where jobs were down by 120,000 for the month. Professional services, tech and manufacturing had the largest losses

The lowest unemployment rate was in South Dakota, at 2%. There, a labor shortage is driving up hiring costs for state agencies and projects. The highest was 6.2% in the District of Columbia, reflecting the Trump administration's federal layoffs.

Other high unemployment rates were reported in California (5.6%), Nevada (5.3%), New Jersey and Oregon (5.2%), and Michigan (5.1%).

The state-by-state unemployment report was delayed by the 43-day federal shutdown, which lasted until Nov. 12.

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

SD's Rep. Johnson votes yes as US House passes bill to remove gray wolf protections

BY: JACOB FISCHLER

The U.S. House on Thursday passed, 211-204, a bill to remove Endangered Species Act protections for the gray wolf outside Alaska.

The bill, sponsored by Colorado Republican Lauren Boebert, would direct the Interior secretary to reissue a 2020 rule removing ESA protections that delisted wolves other than the Mexican wolf in the lower 48 states, while stipulating it could not be challenged in court.

The rule from President Donald Trump's first administration was struck down by a federal court in 2022.

Five Democrats voted for the bill and four Republicans voted against it. The measure was considered during the chamber's last vote series before a two-week break, and 18 members did not vote.

Sen. Ron Johnson, a Wisconsin Republican, has sponsored a companion bill in that chamber. The measure faces an uphill road in the Senate, where passage of partisan bills is rarer due to the 60-vote threshold for most legislation.

The bill would remove gray wolves from the ESA list, even though they have not reached population figures that the Fish and Wildlife Service has said would indicate full recovery.

Rep. Donald S. Beyer, a Democrat from Virginia, said it would be reasonable to adjust population thresholds, but that congressionally mandated delisting was unwise and illegal.

"This bill fails to recognize the status of gray wolves today, taking us back to an outdated rulemaking that didn't hold up in court," Beyer said on the House floor Thursday.

House Natural Resources Committee ranking Democrat Jared Huffman of California said the bill set a "troubling" precedent by blocking judicial review.

"It tells the American people they no longer have the right to challenge unlawful government actions," he said. "The ESA is simple and effective. It ensures decisions are grounded in science — that's the heart of it — and this bill throws that principle out the window."

Several Republicans on the Natural Resources Committee spoke in favor of the bill, saying it would delegate wolf management to states.

In a statement, Natural Resources Chairman Bruce Westerman, an Arkansas Republican, said the gray wolf has been "fully recovered" for two decades.

"States are more than capable of managing thriving wolf populations. This legislation restores a common-

sense, science-based approach to wolf management, returning decision-making to states," he said.

Republicans also argued the bill would protect livestock and humans.

Rep. Pete Stauber showed a photo from his district in Ely, Minnesota, of a wolf in a school parking lot. "Because of the gray wolf's listing status, nothing could be done to protect the lives of the students there," the Republican said. "The broken ESA is putting my constituents' lives at risk."

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

Trump health agency proposes rules to limit gender-affirming care for youth

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump's administration took major steps Thursday in a campaign to block minors' access to gender-affirming care nationwide.

Under two proposed new rules from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, hospitals would be barred from providing gender transition treatment for children as a condition of participating in Medicare and Medicaid programs, and Medicaid funding would be prohibited from being used to fund such care for minors.

As most hospitals receive Medicare and Medicaid funding, the rules would essentially have the effect of a nationwide ban if they are finalized.

The announcement came a day after the U.S. House passed a bill that would impose federal criminal penalties for gender-affirming care for minors and hours before it advanced a separate measure that would prohibit Medicaid funding for gender transition treatment for minors.

The proposed regulations, which will next undergo a period of public comments, are certain to draw legal challenges.

The efforts build on Trump's executive order in January that restricted access to gender-affirming care for kids.

More than half of states already have laws or policies aimed at limiting youth access to gender-affirming care, according to the nonpartisan health research organization KFF.

Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and CMS Administrator Dr. Mehmet Oz announced the proposals alongside several other health officials at a press conference at HHS headquarters in Washington, D.C.

The room featured a handful of GOP members of Congress. At least two Republican state attorneys general — Ken Paxton of Texas and Todd Rokita of Indiana — were also in attendance.

At the press conference, Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Dr. Marty Makary said the FDA is also sending "warning letters" to 12 breast binder manufacturers and sellers for "illegal marketing of breast binders for children for the purposes of treating gender dysphoria."

Breast binders are used to flatten tissue in the chest.

Kennedy said his agency's Office for Civil Rights is moving to "reverse the Biden administration's attempt to include gender dysphoria within the definition of disability."

House passes anti-transgender bills

The proposed rules are part of the Trump administration's broader anti-trans agenda.

Trump has signed executive orders that make it the "policy of the United States to recognize two sexes, male and female," aimed to bar openly transgender service members from the U.S. military, and sought to prohibit trans athletes from competing on women's sports teams consistent with their gender identity.

Meanwhile, efforts at the congressional level to restrict youth access to gender-affirming care face a

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dismal path in the Senate, where any legislation would likely need the backing of at least 60 senators to advance past the filibuster.

The House passed a measure Wednesday night, 216-211, that would subject medical professionals to up to 10 years in prison for providing gender-affirming care for minors.

Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, who sponsored the legislation, called its passage a "win for children all over America," in a social media post Wednesday.

It's likely the last legislative achievement for the Georgia Republican, who is resigning from Congress in early January.

Four Republicans voted against the measure: Reps. Gabe Evans of Colorado, Brian Fitzpatrick of Pennsylvania, Mike Kennedy of Utah and Mike Lawler of New York.

Three Democrats voted with the GOP to back the bill: Reps. Henry Cuellar and Vicente Gonzalez of Texas and Don Davis of North Carolina.

The House also passed a measure Thursday, 215-201, from Texas GOP Rep. Dan Crenshaw and Greene that aims to prohibit "Medicaid funding for gender transition procedures for minors."

Cuellar, Gonzalez and Davis also backed the GOP-led bill, along with fellow Democratic Rep. Marie Glueckert Perez of Washington state.

'Cruel and unconstitutional attacks'

Kelley Robinson, president of the Human Rights Campaign, an LGBTQ+ advocacy group, blasted the administration's proposals, saying they "would put Donald Trump and RFK Jr. in those doctor's offices, ripping health care decisions from the hands of families and putting it in the grips of the anti-LGBTQ+ fringe."

Robinson also emphasized that the rules are "proposals, not binding law," and called on community members, health care providers, administrators and allies to "be vocal in pushing back by sharing the ways these proposals would be devastating to their families and the healthcare community at large."

The American Civil Liberties Union also condemned the administration's proposals and vowed to challenge the efforts in court.

Chase Strangio, co-director of the ACLU's LGBTQ & HIV Rights Project, dubbed the proposals "cruel and unconstitutional attacks on the rights of transgender youth and their families."

Strangio said the proposals would "force doctors to choose between their ethical obligations to their patients and the threat of losing federal funding" and "uproot families who have already fled state-level bans, leaving them with nowhere to turn for the care they need to survive and thrive."

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.

Trump signs order to loosen federal restrictions on marijuana, but it's still illegal

BY: JACOB FISCHLER

President Donald Trump signed an executive order Thursday to loosen federal restrictions on marijuana, which Trump said reflected the drug's potential medical benefits while discouraging recreational use.

The order moves cannabis from Schedule I to Schedule III on the Federal Drug Administration's list of controlled substances. Schedule I, the most restrictive category under federal law, indicates a high likelihood of abuse and no accepted medical value.

Trump said the move reflected that cannabis could have medicinal value, even if abuse was still possible.

The order "doesn't legalize marijuana in any way, shape or form and in no way sanctions its use as a recreational drug," Trump said. "Just as the prescription painkillers may have legitimate uses, but can also do irreversible damage ... it's never safe to use powerful controlled substances in recreational matters."

Still, the order marks a major step in the decades-long liberalization of cannabis policy.

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Since 2012, when Washington and Colorado voters legalized personal marijuana use, 22 other states have legalized at least some form of recreational use. Only 10 states still restrict both medicinal and recreational use.

In a statement, Colorado Gov. Jared Polis, a Democrat, praised Trump while calling for further reforms to bring federal law into harmony with states where the drug is legal.

"I thank the President and am pleased that they are finally taking this step to begin the process to re-schedule," Polis wrote. "Colorado's cannabis industry is the gold standard ensuring that products are safe and regulated. It's good to see the federal government finally following suit, but it's frustrating it's taken this long and there is much more to do for a full descheduling,"

President Joe Biden started the process for rescheduling the drug last year.

Medical angle

A group of administration officials and medical doctors flanked Trump during the Oval Office signing, with some speaking to the potential medical benefits of marijuana, including as an alternative to highly addictive opioid painkillers.

"The facts compel the federal government to recognize that marijuana can be legitimate in terms of medical applications when carefully administered," Trump said.

Researching the potential benefits of marijuana is nearly impossible because of the tight restrictions on Schedule I substances, advocates have argued.

Removing cannabis from Schedule I would help ease those restrictions, Trump said.

"This reclassification order will make it far easier to conduct marijuana-related medical research, allowing us to study benefits, potential dangers and future treatments," he said. "It's going to have a tremendously positive impact."

In addition to researchers, the split between federal law and the legal landscape in many states has created challenges for the industry, users and law enforcement, among others.

For example, the unusual position of state-legal businesses in a federally banned industry means they cannot use certain tax provisions, access some banking instruments or transport their product across state lines.

In a lengthy statement, Paul Armentano, the deputy director of leading marijuana legalization organization National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws, offered qualified praise for the move, saying it "validates the experience" of patients who have used marijuana to treat chronic pain and other conditions.

"This directive certainly marks a long overdue change in direction," Armentano said. "But while such a move potentially provides some benefits to patients, and veterans especially, it still falls well short of the changes necessary to bring federal marijuana policy into the 21st century. Specifically, rescheduling fails to harmonize federal marijuana policy with the cannabis laws of most states."

The reclassification could provide tax relief to many marijuana businesses, he added.

GOP senators opposed move

Many Republicans in Congress remain opposed to legalizing marijuana.

In a letter dated Wednesday, 24 Senate Republicans urged Trump not to reclassify marijuana, which they said had a high likelihood of abuse and no medical value.

Allowing marijuana businesses to take advantage of federal tax deductions would give them a tax break of as much as \$2.3 billion, allowing them to increase marketing efforts and expand into additional states, the lawmakers wrote. The benefits of economic growth would be outweighed by the costs of accidents, "not to mention the moral costs of marijuana advertising that could reach kids," they wrote.

"In light of the documented dangers of marijuana, facilitating the growth of the marijuana industry is at odds with growing our economy and encouraging healthy lifestyles for Americans," the GOP senators wrote. "We urge you to continue your strong leadership of our country and our economy, and to turn away from marijuana rescheduling."

North Carolina's Ted Budd led the letter, which was also signed by John Barrasso and Cynthia Lummis of Wyoming, Tom Cotton of Arkansas, Shelley Moore Capito of West Virginia, James Lankford of Oklahoma, Roger Marshall of Kansas, Pete Ricketts of Nebraska, Tommy Tuberville of Alabama, John Cornyn of Texas, Marsha Blackburn and Bill Hagerty of Tennessee, Jim Banks of Indiana, Ron Johnson of Wisconsin, Mike Crapo and Jim Risch of Idaho, Rick Scott of Florida, Kevin Cramer of North Dakota, Cindy Hyde-Smith of Mississippi, Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, Dave McCormick of Pennsylvania and Mitch McConnell of Kentucky.

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

John F. Kennedy Center to be renamed the Trump-Kennedy Center, White House says

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA

WASHINGTON — The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, a prestigious cultural hub in the nation's capital, will be renamed the Trump-Kennedy Center, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt announced Thursday.

The renaming comes after President Donald Trump named himself chair of the board in February in a major shake-up. He later fired the Kennedy Center president as well as board members appointed by President Joe Biden before appointing his own members.

Leavitt said the board unanimously approved the name change. However, a federal statute appears to prohibit the renaming of portions of the center, which is considered a living memorial to Kennedy.

"After December 2, 1983, no additional memorials or plaques in the nature of memorials shall be designated or installed in the public areas of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts," according to the U.S. code.

Congress likely would need to change the law for the center to be renamed officially.

The Kennedy Center was renamed in 1964 to honor President John F. Kennedy, who was assassinated.

Leavitt said the renaming was "because of the unbelievable work President Trump has done over the last year in saving the building. Not only from the standpoint of its reconstruction, but also financially, and its reputation."

"Congratulations to President Donald J. Trump, and likewise, congratulations to President Kennedy, because this will be a truly great team long into the future!," she wrote.

Since the president's takeover of the center, major artists and performers have canceled performances or boycotted performing. The artist Issa Rae, and the musical "Hamilton" will no longer perform at the center and dozens of cast members of "Les Misérables" refused to perform for Trump officials earlier this year.

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

Judges hear case on requiring immigrants without legal status to register and carry documents

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA

WASHINGTON — A panel of appellate judges seemed skeptical during Thursday oral arguments that the Trump administration erred in relying on a decades-old statute to require millions of noncitizens to register with the federal government and carry documentation.

But they did take issue with the paperwork required of immigrants without legal status as well as the

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consequences for those who fail to register, and questioned if the practice violated due process and self-incrimination rights.

In February, Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem announced the agency would enforce a rule under the Immigration and Nationality Act that requires all immigrants in the country without legal status to register with the agency or risk fines or potential jail time.

A federal court in April sided with the Trump administration, allowing the registration requirement to go through.

The suit, brought by immigration rights advocates, does not challenge the statute from 1940 requiring those without legal status to register, but instead the process used by DHS in rolling out the policy without a proper notice and comment period. The suit also challenges a penalty for not filling out paperwork, as the form is only in English and can only be accessed with an internet connection.

Administration position

Arguing on behalf of the Trump administration, Kartik N. Venguswamy from the U.S. Attorney's Office said a notice and comment period is not needed because the form is just procedural and a new rule is not created.

He added that the rule does not cause irreparable harm, because any harm is from outside forces, such as immigration enforcement or deportation that could follow registration with the federal government.

Judges Patricia A. Millett, Gregory G. Katsas and J. Michelle Childs heard the case in the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. Former President Barack Obama nominated Millett; President Donald Trump nominated Katsas in his first term; and former President Joe Biden nominated Childs.

The judges raised concerns with the form itself, including one question that requires the noncitizen to report any crimes they have committed, regardless of whether they were charged or convicted.

That wades into violation of the 5th Amendment's protections against self incrimination, one judge said. "That's asking you to confess to things that no government authority is aware of," Millett said of the final rule. "And it's a big step toward the 5th Amendment."

The Migration Policy Institute, a non-partisan immigration think tank, estimated that between 2.2 million and 3.2 million immigrants will have to register. The registration requirement could be a powerful tool in the Trump administration's efforts to carry out mass deportations.

Rule has gone unenforced

Michelle Lapointe, arguing on behalf of the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights, said the federal government has not enforced the rule for nearly 80 years.

The registration requirement is authorized under a wartime act known as the Alien Registration Act of 1940 that was first used in World War II. It was rarely used after that, but briefly in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

During that time, any noncitizen males older than 16 who hailed from 25 countries with a Muslim majority had to register with the federal government. But the program led to no terrorism convictions and was eventually dissolved in 2016.

Lapointe said because the rule would apply to as many as 3 million immigrants without legal status, a notice and comment period must occur. Under the rule, immigrants 14 and older who are required to register will need to carry registration documents at all times or risk potential prison terms or fines of up to \$5,000.

"It is solely for the process of deportation," Lapointe said.

As the Trump administration continues with its immigration crackdown, federal immigration officials could carry out their plans for mass deportations by having easy access to records of immigrants unlawfully in the country.

But Childs seemed skeptical that the federal government couldn't use the statute, because it's on the

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books.

Katsas also said the rule is not new — the government has just decided not to enforce it since 1940.

“It seems like a more fair account” that the government is ending a long policy of not enforcing a rule that, on its face, “covers all aliens,” he said.

But Katsas said the “rule does expand the category of information and that’s new.”

That category of information includes the requirement to detail to the federal government any crime the individual has committed, which Lapointe argued would violate 5th Amendment rights.

Registration form debated

Childs and Millett questioned the roll-out of the form, the fact that it’s only accessible online and in English, and the penalty for not registering with the federal government.

“These are forms regulating a community ... where English is not their native language,” Millett said.

Venguswamy said the forms were in English because “English is the language of the United States government at this point.”

Earlier this year, Trump signed an executive order directing federal agencies to adopt English as the official language, including paperwork.

Millett asked Venguswamy if it’s the government’s position that an immigrant who doesn’t understand English will not be charged or issued a penalty for failing to register.

“I’m not in a position to speak to whether or not that is the position the government will take,” Venguswamy said.

Millett then asked why a proper notice and comment period is not needed for a new process, even if it’s not creating a new statute.

She gave Venguswamy an example of the IRS not changing the tax code, but issuing a new tax form for taxpayers to fill out.

“We’re gonna issue new tax forms, for everyone to fill out their taxes, we’re not creating tax obligations, just new forms in Ancient Biblical Greek,” Millett said.

She asked Venguswamy if a proper notice and comment period would be needed for those new tax forms.

He said it would not, because it’s a change in procedure, not a change to the rule.

“Wow,” Millett said. “We can all be criminally prosecuted for not filling out our taxes unless we can find the five people in the United States who know how to speak Ancient Biblical Greek.”

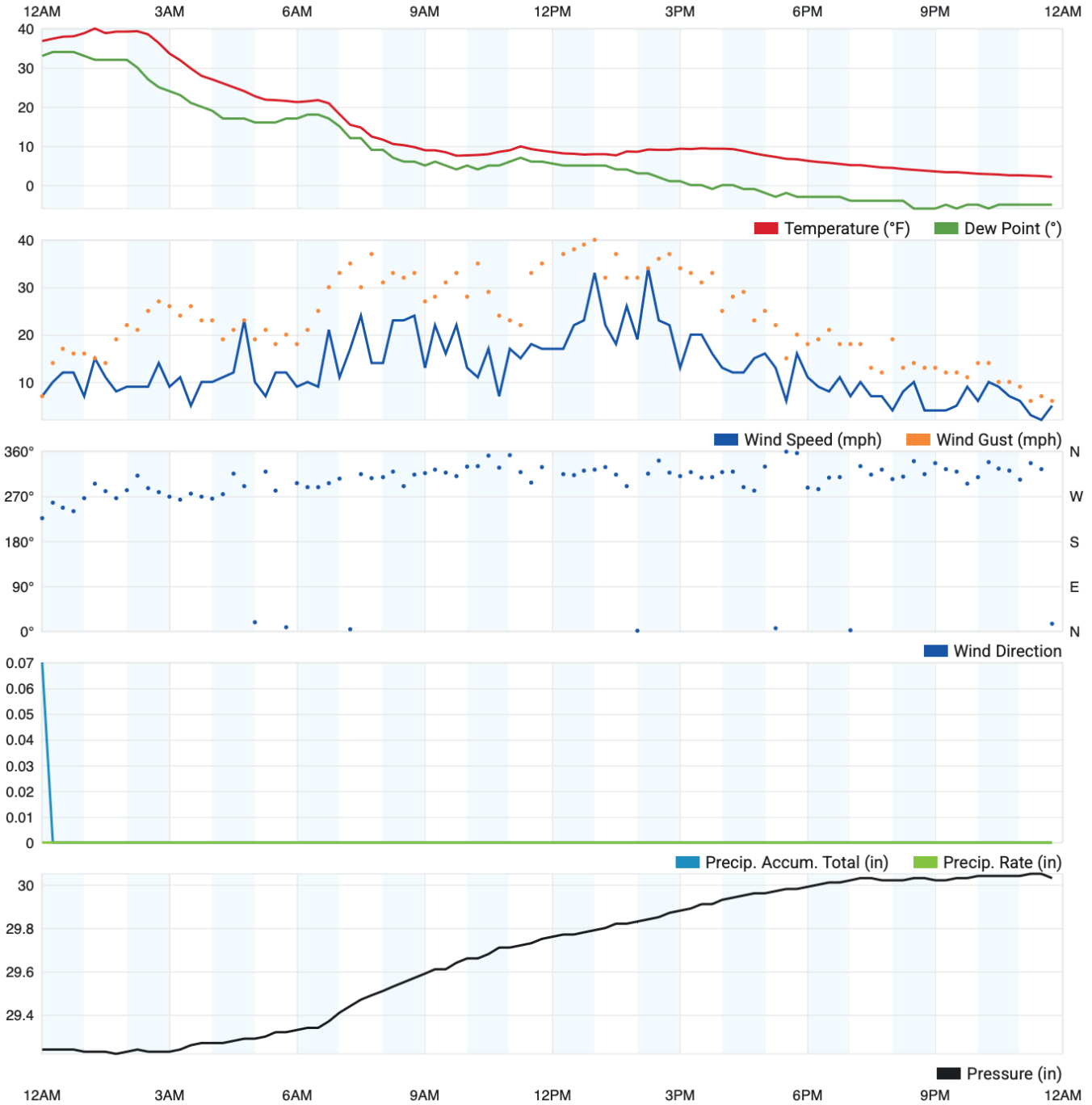
Ariana covers the nation’s capital for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include immigration, congressional policy and legal challenges with a focus on how those policies impact the lives of immigrants and migrants coming to the U.S.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

December 18, 2025



Broton Daily Independent

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Today



High: 27 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Tonight



Low: 18 °F

Slight Chance
Wintry Mix
then Slight
Chance Snow

Saturday



High: 24 °F ↓

Sunny

Saturday Night



Low: 3 °F

Mostly Clear

Sunday



High: 26 °F

Mostly Sunny



Two Rounds of Light Wintry Weather Today - Tonight

December 19, 2025
4:26 AM

● Round One

- This morning and early afternoon.
- Along and north of Highway 12.
- There is a 15 to 25% chance of freezing rain, sleet, and snow.
- Minor ice accumulation.

● Round Two

- Best after 6 pm, CST.
- There is 15 to 35% chance of freezing rain and snow.
- Light glaze of ice possible mainly over the Sisseton Hills into west central Minnesota.

Weather Forecast

	12/19 Fri											12/20 Sat									
	8am	9am	10am	11am	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	7pm	8pm	9pm	10pm	11pm	12am	1am	2am	3am	4am
Aberdeen	0%	0%	5%	10%	10%	10%	5%	5%	5%	10%	15%	15%	20%	20%	25%	20%	20%	5%	5%	0%	0%
Britton	0%	5%	5%	10%	25%	20%	15%	5%	5%	15%	20%	25%	25%	30%	30%	30%	15%	10%	0%	0%	
Chamberlain	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	
Clark	0%	0%	0%	5%	5%	10%	0%	5%	5%	5%	10%	5%	5%	5%	10%	15%	15%	20%	10%	5%	5%
Eagle Butte	0%	5%	5%	0%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	10%	10%	20%	20%	10%	10%	5%	5%	0%	0%
Eureka	5%	5%	20%	25%	15%	10%	5%	5%	5%	10%	10%	20%	20%	20%	25%	20%	10%	5%	5%	0%	0%
Gettysburg	5%	5%	10%	10%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	10%	10%	10%	20%	20%	15%	10%	5%	5%	5%
McIntosh	20%	25%	20%	10%	5%	5%	10%	5%	5%	5%	20%	20%	15%	10%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	
Milbank	0%	0%	0%	5%	5%	10%	10%	5%	0%	5%	5%	10%	20%	15%	20%	25%	20%	25%	15%	5%	5%
Miller	0%	0%	5%	5%	5%	0%	0%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	5%
Mobridge	0%	10%	15%	15%	10%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	20%	20%	20%	20%	15%	10%	5%	0%	0%	0%	
Murdo	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	5%	5%	5%	5%	10%	5%	5%	5%	5%
Pierre	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	10%	15%	10%	10%	5%	10%
Redfield	0%	0%	0%	5%	10%	5%	0%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	10%	15%	20%	15%	10%	5%	5%	5%
Sisseton	0%	0%	5%	10%	15%	20%	15%	5%	5%	5%	5%	15%	30%	20%	25%	35%	30%	20%	5%	0%	0%
Watertown	0%	0%	0%	5%	5%	5%	5%	0%	0%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	10%	20%	10%	15%	15%	5%	5%
Webster	0%	0%	5%	5%	10%	15%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	10%	10%	15%	25%	25%	25%	10%	5%	5%
Wheaton	0%	0%	5%	10%	15%	20%	20%	10%	5%	0%	5%	20%	35%	30%	30%	30%	40%	25%	10%	0%	0%



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

A weak system moving across the region may bring two rounds of light wintry weather today and tonight. The first round will bring a 15-25% chance of freezing rain, sleet, and snow, mainly along and north of Highway 12. Round two this evening will bring a 15-35% chance of freezing rain and snow. A light glaze of ice is possible mainly over the Sisseton Hills into west central Minnesota.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 40 °F at 1:18 AM

Low Temp: 2 °F at 11:20 PM

Wind: 43 mph at 11:57 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 57 in 1893

Record Low: -29 in 1916

Average High: 27

Average Low: 7

Average Precip in Dec.: 0.36

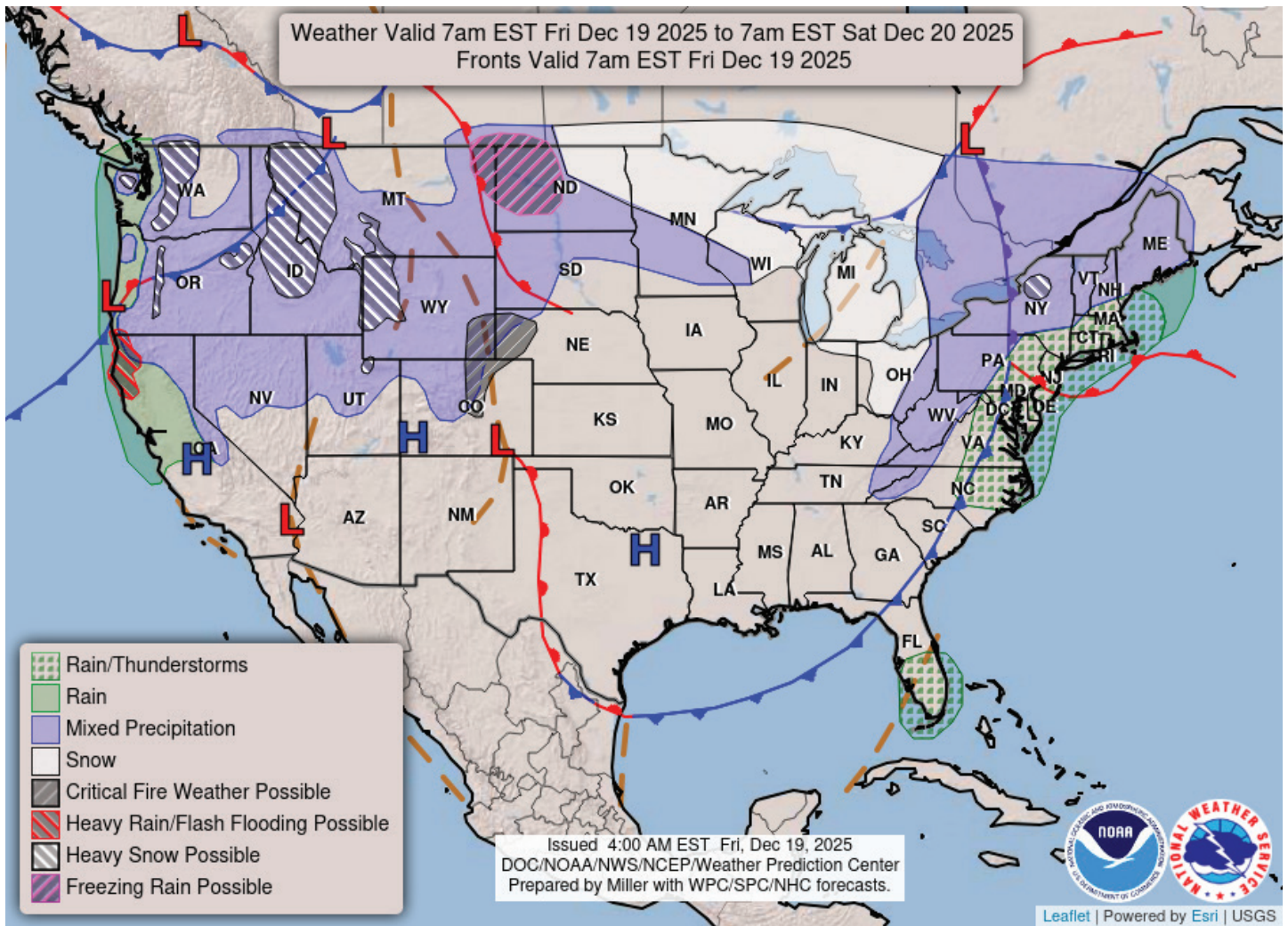
Precip to date in Dec.: 0.67

Average Precip to date: 21.57

Precip Year to Date: 25.48

Sunset Tonight: 4:50 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:08 am



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Today in Weather History

December 19, 1968: Snow and near-blizzard conditions existed across west-central Minnesota, with 5 to 7 inches of new snow reported. Heavier snowfall amounts were reported further to the southeast in Minnesota. Six inches of snow was reported in Artichoke Lake in Big Stone County.

December 19, 1990: Snow began to fall over the northwest part of Minnesota by early afternoon on the 19th, and fell heavily during the night into the early afternoon of the 20th, spreading over the entire northern 2/3 of the state and into some of northeastern South Dakota overnight. By mid-morning, a swath of snow of 6 inches or more was deposited over much of the northern half of the state, or north of a line from Elbow Lake to Garrison to near Two Harbors. In west-central Minnesota, Wheaton received 6 inches, Browns Valley received 4 inches, and Artichoke Lake received 3 inches. In South Dakota, Webster reported 8 inches, Britton reported 7 inches, Sisseton reported 5 inches, and Aberdeen reported 4 inches.

1777: George Washington led his hungry and weary from long marches men to Valley Forge on this day. The winds greeted the 12,000 Continentals as they prepared for the winter.

1924 — The Riverside Ranger Station in Yellowstone Park, WY, reported a low of 59 degrees below zero, a December record for the U.S. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1957 — A tornado, 200 yards in width, killed two persons along its 15-mile path from near Waldo to near Bueana Vista in southwestern Arkansas. People from one house were carried 250 yards, and cars were said to have been carried 600 yards. (The Weather Channel)

1967 — A record 83 inches of snow covered the ground at Flagstaff, AZ. The heavy snows inflicted great hardships on reservations. (David Ludlum)

1987 — Thunderstorms produced large hail and damaging winds in eastern Texas and the Lower Mississippi Valley. Thunderstorms produced wind gusts to 90 mph at Venus TX and Providence LA. Rain prevailed from the Southern Plains to the Middle Mississippi Valley. Small stream flooding was reported around Columbia MO. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — Low pressure and a trailing cold front in the central U.S. brought snow and high winds to parts of the Rocky Mountain Region. Winds in Colorado gusted to 67 mph at La Junta. Thunderstorms along the same cold front produced wind gusts to 65 mph at Kansas City MO. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 — High winds and heavy snow plagued the northern and central Rockies. Snowfall totals in Montana ranged up to 12 inches at Lincoln, and wind gusts in Colorado reached 97 mph at Squaw Mountain. Twelve cities in the north central U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date, including Dickinson ND with a reading of 26 degrees below zero. Bismarck ND was the cold spot in the nation with a morning low of 35 degrees below zero. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2008 — A snow and ice storm on December 19 affected parts of the U.S. Midwest. Over 220,000 homes and businesses across Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio were left without electric services. No fatalities were reported (Reuters).

2009 — Snowfall totals from 1 to 2 feet were commonplace in what will go down as one of the biggest snowstorms in history on the East Coast and the first of four snowstorms for the Mid-Atlantic during the winter of 2009-10. The 15 inches of snow measured at Reagan International Airport on Dec. 19th was the third-highest daily snowfall on any calendar day at Washington, DC, since snowfall records began in 1884. The total storm snowfall of 16.4 inches on Dec 18-19 2009 marks the 6th highest two-day snowfall record for Washington, DC putting it just below the second President's Day storm in 2003 and ahead of the Jan 1996 storm.

Learning From Adversity

In every moment of pain, the Lord provides the grace we need in order to endure..

2 Corinthians 12:7-10: 7 or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

What should we do with our pain when God doesn't remove it? How can He be a God of love and yet not come to our aid?

Today's passage gives us insight into a painful event in Paul's life. We don't know what the "thorn in the flesh" was, but his account of what he learned through that experience is an amazing example of three things God teaches us through adversity:

God is sovereign over the situation. Ultimately, He is the one who allowed the difficulty and the one with the power to end it.

God prioritizes the spiritual. Paul wanted physical relief, but the Lord was working for his spiritual good. Whatever God allows to afflict believers is designed to protect them from sin, produce holiness, and equip them for faithful service.

God's grace is sufficient. The Lord gave Paul both the grace to endure and strength in his weakness.

Once we understand the Lord's sovereignty, priorities, and sufficiency, we can respond to our afflictions as Paul did—with gladness (James 1:2-3). When Christ's strength is perfected in us, we can be content in whatever difficulties God allows in our life. The Lord's unwillingness to give us relief is not neglect. Rather, it is evidence of His surpassing love, which seeks our eternal good.

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 DRAW: 17 Hrs 16 Mins 20 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 DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 31 Mins 20 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.18.25

2 9 24 25 44 15

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 46 Mins 21 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.17.25

17 19 20 27 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$135,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 46 Mins 21 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

12.17.25

24 43 65 66 68 3

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 15 Mins 20 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 DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 15 Mins 20 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Roncalli 44, Warner 38
Bon Homme 46, Emery 37
Centerville 51, Avon 23
Chester 51, McCook Central-Montrose 37
Colman-Egan 62, Dell Rapids St Mary's 46
Corsica/Stickney 38, Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 31
Crazy Horse 60, Tiospaye Topa 21
Dakota Valley 64, Sioux City, West, Iowa 8
Deubrook 74, Oldham-Ramona-Rutland 24
Dupree 40, Tiospa Zina 36
Elk Point-Jefferson 55, Sioux Falls Christian 23
Ethan 70, James Valley Christian School 17
Flandreau 61, Beresford 59
Gayville-Volin High School 48, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 19
Highmore-Harrold 60, Gettysburg 42
Hill City 45, New Underwood 37
Lakota Tech 64, Omaha Nation, Neb. 59
Lennox 58, Madison 21
Leola-Frederick High School 35, Aberdeen Christian 20
Lower Brule 74, Oelrichs 49
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 40, Miller 34
Parkston 60, Chamberlain 12
Philip 60, Stanley County 15
Rapid City Christian 59, White River 18
Sioux Falls Washington 64, Harrisburg 48
Sioux Valley 81, Baltic 21
Tea 53, Brookings 35
Vermillion 61, Ponca, Neb. 47
Wagner 64, Tripp-Delmont-Armour 34
Wakpala 51, Takini 11
Wessington Springs 51, Platte-Geddes 32

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

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Christian 70, Leola-Frederick High School 62
Andes Central/Dakota Christian 54, Gayville-Volin High School 32
Baltic 64, Sioux Valley 61
Brandon Valley 63, Sioux Falls Jefferson 58
Centerville 64, Avon 55
Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 58, Rapid City Christian 48, OT
Crazy Horse 88, Takini 36
Emery 59, Bon Homme 44
Ethan 72, James Valley Christian School 52
Faith 36, Bison 34

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Flandreau 57, Beresford 43
Freeman 62, Canistota 31
Harding County 65, Beach, N.D. 61
Hill City 75, New Underwood 58
Lennox 67, Madison 44
Mahpiya Lúta Red Cloud 60, Todd County 46
Marty 69, Oelrichs 22
McCook Central-Montrose 71, Chester 57
Miller 43, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 38
Mitchell Christian 35, Kimball-White Lake 27
Omaha Nation, Neb. 60, Lower Brule 49
Parkston 57, Chamberlain 40
Pine Ridge 71, Dupree 39
Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 46, Corsica/Stickney 38
Sioux Falls Christian 80, Elk Point-Jefferson 27
Stanley County 74, Philip 33
Tiospaye Topa 59, Santee, Neb. 29
Wagner 62, Tripp-Delmont-Armour 47
Wakpala 52, Tiospa Zina 43
Wall 78, Little Wound 70
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=
Sisseton vs. Richland, N.D., ppd.

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

Man suspected in Brown University shooting and MIT professor's killing is found dead, officials say

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI, ALANNA DURKIN RICHER, ERIC TUCKER and HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press

A frantic search for the suspect in last weekend's mass shooting at Brown University ended at a New Hampshire storage facility where authorities discovered the man dead inside and then revealed he also was suspected of killing a Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor.

Claudio Neves Valente, 48, a former Brown student and Portuguese national, was found dead Thursday night from a self-inflicted gunshot wound, said Col. Oscar Perez, the Providence police chief.

Investigators believe he is responsible for fatally shooting two students and wounding nine other people in a Brown lecture hall last Saturday, then killing MIT professor Nuno F.G. Loureiro two days later at his home in the Boston suburbs, nearly 50 miles (80 kilometers) from Providence. Perez said as far as investigators know, Neves Valente acted alone.

Brown University President Christina Paxson said Neves Valente was enrolled there as a graduate student studying physics from the fall of 2000 to the spring of 2001.

"He has no current affiliation with the university," she said.

Neves Valente and Loureiro previously attended the same academic program at a university in Portugal between 1995 and 2000, U.S. attorney for Massachusetts Leah B. Foley said. Loureiro graduated from the physics program at Instituto Superior Técnico, Portugal's premier engineering school, in 2000, according to his MIT faculty page. The same year, Neves Valente was let go from a position at the Lisbon university, according to an archive of a termination notice from the school's then-president in February 2000.

Neves Valente had come to Brown on a student visa. He eventually obtained legal permanent residence status in September 2017, Foley said. It was not immediately clear where he was between taking a leave of absence from the school in 2001 and getting the visa in 2017. His last known residence was in Miami.

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After officials revealed the suspect's identity, President Donald Trump suspended the green card lottery program that allowed Neves Valente to stay in the United States.

There are still "a lot of unknowns" in regard to motive, Rhode Island Attorney General Peter Neronha said. "We don't know why now, why Brown, why these students and why this classroom," he said.

Tip helps investigators connect the dots

The FBI previously said it knew of no links between the Rhode Island and Massachusetts shootings.

Police credited a person who had several encounters with Neves Valente for providing a crucial tip that led authorities to him.

After police shared security video of a person of interest, the witness — known only as "John" in a Providence police affidavit — recognized him and posted his suspicions on the social media forum Reddit. Reddit users urged him to tell the FBI, and John said he did.

John said he had encountered Neves Valente hours earlier in the bathroom of the engineering building where the shooting occurred and noticed he was wearing inappropriate clothing for the weather, according to the affidavit. He again bumped into Neves Valente a couple blocks away and saw him suddenly turn away from a Nissan sedan when he saw John.

"When you do crack it, you crack it. And that person led us to the car, which led us to the name," Neronha said.

His tip pointed investigators to a Nissan Sentra with Florida plates. That enabled Providence police to tap into a network of more than 70 street cameras operated around the city by surveillance company Flock Safety. Those cameras track license plates and other vehicle details.

After leaving Rhode Island, Providence officials said Neves Valente stuck a Maine license plate over his rental car's plate to help conceal his identity.

Investigators found footage of Neves Valente entering an apartment building near Loureiro's in a Boston suburb. About an hour later, Neves Valente was seen entering the Salem, New Hampshire, storage facility where he was found dead, Foley said. He had with him a satchel and two firearms, Neronha said.

Victims include renowned physicist, political organizer and aspiring doctor

Loureiro, a 47-year-old physicist and fusion scientist, had 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 scientist from Viseu, Portugal, had been working to explain the physics behind astronomical phenomena such as solar flares.

The two Brown students killed during a study session for final exams were 19-year-old sophomore Ella Cook and 18-year-old freshman Mukhammad Aziz Umurzokov. Cook was active in her Alabama church and served as vice president of the Brown College Republicans. Umurzokov's family immigrated to the U.S. from Uzbekistan when he was a child, and he aspired to be a doctor.

As for the wounded, three had been discharged and six were in stable condition Thursday, officials said.

Although Brown officials say there are 1,200 cameras on campus, the attack happened in an older part of the engineering building that has few, if any, cameras. And investigators believe the shooter entered and left through a door that faces a residential street bordering campus, which might explain why the cameras Brown does have didn't capture footage of the person.

EU leaders agree on 90 billion euro loan to Ukraine after a plan to use Russian assets unravels

By LORNE COOK and ANGELA CHARLTON Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — European Union leaders agreed on Friday to provide a massive interest-free loan to Ukraine to meet its military and economic needs for the next two years, but they failed to bridge differences with Belgium that would have allowed them to use frozen Russian assets to raise the funds.

After almost four years of war, the International Monetary Fund estimates that Ukraine will need 137 billion euros (\$161 billion) in 2026 and 2027. The government in Kyiv is on the verge of bankruptcy, and desperately needs the money by spring.

The plan had been to use some of the 210 billion euros (\$246 billion) worth of Russian assets that are

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frozen in Europe, mostly in Belgium.

The leaders worked deep into Thursday night to reassure Belgium that they would protect it from any Russian retaliation if it backed the "reparations loan" plan, but as the talks bogged down the leaders eventually opted to borrow the money on capital markets.

"We have a deal. Decision to provide 90 billion euros (\$106 billion) of support to Ukraine for 2026-27 approved. We committed, we delivered," EU Council President António Costa said in a post on social media.

Not all countries agreed to the loan package. Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic refuse to support Ukraine and opposed it, but a deal was reached in which they did not block the package and were promised protection from any financial fallout.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who is Russian President Vladimir Putin's closest ally in Europe and describes himself as a peacemaker, said "I would not like a European Union in war."

"To give money means war," said Orbán. He also described the rejected plan to use the frozen Russian assets as a "dead end."

French President Emmanuel Macron said the deal was a major advance, saying that borrowing on capital markets "was the most realistic and practical way" to fund Ukraine and its war efforts.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz also hailed the decision.

"The financial package for Ukraine has been finalized," Merz said in a statement, noting that "Ukraine is granted a zero-interest loan."

"These funds are sufficient to cover the military and budgetary needs of Ukraine for the two years to come," Merz added. He said the frozen assets will remain blocked until Russia has paid war reparations to Ukraine. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said that would cost over 600 billion euros (\$700 billion).

"If Russia does not pay reparations we will — in full accordance with international law — make use of Russian immobilized assets for paying back the loan," Merz said.

Zelenskyy, who traveled to Brussels for a summit that took place during fiery protests by farmers angry about a proposed trade deal with five South American countries, had appealed for a quick decision to keep Ukraine afloat in the new year.

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk warned early on Thursday that it would be a case of sending "either money today or blood tomorrow" to help Ukraine.

The plan to use frozen Russian assets got bogged down as Belgian Prime Minister Bart De Wever rejected the scheme as legally risky, and warned that it could harm the business of Euroclear, the Brussels-based financial clearing house where 193 billion euros (\$226 billion) in frozen assets are held.

Belgium was rattled last Friday when Russia's Central Bank launched a lawsuit against Euroclear to prevent any loan being provided to Ukraine using its money, which is frozen under EU sanctions slapped on Moscow after its launched its full-scale war in 2022.

"For me, the reparations loan was not a good idea," De Wever told reporters after the meeting. "When we explained the text again, there were so many questions that I said, I told you so, I told you so. There are a lot of loose ends. And if you start pulling at the loose ends in the strings, the thing collapses."

"We avoided stepping into a precedent that risks undermining legal certainty worldwide. We safeguarded the principle that Europe respects law, even when it is hard, even when we are under pressure," he said, adding that the EU "delivered a strong political signal. Europe stands behind Ukraine."

Still, Costa said that the EU "reserves its right to make use of the immobilized assets to repay this loan."

How 1 anonymous tipster cracked the Brown University shooting case

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — Information from a tipster who had a strange encounter with another man on a sidewalk outside Brown University was key to police identifying the suspect they believe killed two students at the school and then two days later gunned down a Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor.

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Known only as "John" in a Providence police affidavit, the source is being hailed by investigators as the key figure who gave law enforcement the details needed to determine who was behind the Brown shooting, as well as the killing of a Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor who was shot in his Brookline home Monday.

Ever since a shooter unloaded more than 40 rounds inside a Brown engineering building, anxiety and frustration has plagued the Providence, Rhode Island, community as police appeared no closer to identifying the person.

Yet on the sixth day of the investigation, the case gathered steam, ending with police announcing late Thursday they had found the suspected gunman dead from a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

The tipster, John, was the reason why.

"He blew this case right open," said Rhode Island Attorney General Peter Neronha of the information provided by the individual that resulted in finding the gunman nearly 24 hours later.

"When you crack it, you crack it," he said.

According to police, John had several encounters with 48-year-old Claudio Neves Valente before Saturday's attack. As police posted images of a person of interest — now identified as Neves Valente — John began posting on the social media forum Reddit that he recognized the person and theorized that police should look into "possibly a rental" grey Nissan. Reddit users urged him to tell the FBI, and John said he did. The police affidavit said they learned about the tip on Dec. 16, three days after the shooting and a day after the tip line was created.

Up until that point, the police affidavit says officials had not connected a vehicle to the possible shooter.

That detail led them to get more video of a Nissan Sentra sedan with Florida plates and enabled Providence police officers to tap into a network of more than 70 street cameras operated around the city by surveillance company Flock Safety.

The affidavit says John gave investigators additional critical details: he encountered Neves Valente in the bathroom of the engineering building just hours before the attack, where John noted the suspect's clothing was "inappropriate and inadequate for the weather."

John also bumped into Neves Valente outside, mere blocks from the building, where John watched Neves Valente "suddenly" turn around from the Nissan when he saw John. What ensued was then a "game of cat and mouse," according to John's testimony — where the two would encounter each other and Neves Valente would run away.

At one point, John says he yelled out "Your car is back there, why are you circling the block?"

"The Suspect responded, 'I don't know you from nobody,' then Suspect repeatedly asked, 'Why are you harassing me?'" according to the affidavit.

John told police he eventually saw Neves Valente approach the Nissan sedan once more and decided to walk away.

"Respectfully, I have said all I have to say on the matter to the right people," John wrote on Reddit Wednesday night.

As of Thursday, it's unknown whether John will receive the \$50,000 reward the FBI had offered for information about the Brown shooting.

Ted Docks, special agent in charge of the FBI, said it was possible when asked by reporters.

"It would be logical to think that, absolutely, that individual would be entitled to that," he said.

Man suspected in Brown University shooting and MIT professor's killing is found dead, officials say

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI, ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

A frantic search for the suspect in last weekend's mass shooting at Brown University ended Thursday at a New Hampshire storage facility where authorities discovered the man dead inside and then revealed he also was suspected of killing a Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor.

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Claudio Neves Valente, 48, a former Brown student and Portuguese national, was found dead Thursday evening from a self-inflicted gunshot wound, said Col. Oscar Perez, the Providence police chief.

Investigators believe he is responsible for fatally shooting two students and wounding nine other people in a Brown University lecture hall last Saturday, then killing Portuguese MIT professor Nuno F.G. Loureiro two days later at his Brookline home, nearly 50 miles (80 kilometers) from Providence. Perez said as far as investigators know, Neves Valente acted alone.

Brown University President Christina Paxson said Neves Valente was enrolled there as a graduate student studying physics from the fall of 2000 to the spring of 2001.

"He has no current affiliation with the university," she said.

Neves Valente and Loureiro previously attended the same academic program at a university in Portugal between 1995 and 2000, U.S. attorney for Massachusetts Leah B. Foley said. Loureiro graduated from the physics program at Instituto Superior Técnico, Portugal's premier engineering school, in 2000, according to his MIT faculty page. The same year, Neves Valente was let go from a position at the Lisbon university, according to an archive of a termination notice from the school's then-president in February 2000.

Neves Valente had studied at Brown on a student visa. He eventually obtained legal permanent residence status in September 2017, Foley said. It was not immediately clear where he was between taking a leave of absence from the school in 2001 and getting the visa in 2017. His last known residence was in Miami.

After officials revealed the suspect's identity, President Donald Trump suspended the green card lottery program that allowed Neves Valente to stay in the United States.

There are still "a lot of unknowns" in regard to motive, Rhode Island Attorney General Peter Neronha said. "We don't know why now, why Brown, why these students and why this classroom," he said.

How the investigation has unfolded

Police credited a person who had several encounters with Neves Valente as providing the crucial tip that led to the shooter.

"When you do crack it, you crack it. And that person led us to the car, which led us to the name," Neronha said.

After police posted images of a person of interest, the witness recognized him and posted his suspicions on the social media forum Reddit.

But it took days before police say they interviewed him and only after publicizing a video where Neves Valente appeared to run away from the other man. The Reddit commenter didn't respond to questions from The Associated Press earlier week but returned to the forum on Wednesday night to say that he was just interviewed by investigators.

His tip gave investigators a key detail: a Nissan sedan with Florida plates. That enabled Providence police officers to tap into a network of more than 70 street cameras operated around the city by surveillance company Flock Safety. Those cameras track license plates and other vehicle details.

After leaving Rhode Island, Providence officials said Neves Valente stuck a Maine license plate over the rental car's plate to help conceal his identity.

Video footage showed Neves Valente entering an apartment building near Loureiro's in a Boston suburb. About an hour later, Neves Valente was seen entering the Salem, New Hampshire, storage facility where he was found dead, Foley said. He had with him a satchel and two firearms, Neronha said.

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. He had been working to explain the physics behind astronomical phenomena such as solar flares.

The FBI previously said it knew of no links between the two shootings.

Although Brown officials say there are 1,200 cameras on campus, the attack happened in an older part of the engineering building that has few, if any, cameras. And investigators believe the shooter entered and left through a door that faces a residential street bordering campus, which might explain why the cameras Brown does have didn't capture footage of the person.

What happened in past investigations?

In such targeted and highly public attacks, the shooters typically kill themselves or are killed or arrested

by police, said Katherine Schweit, a retired FBI agent and expert on mass shootings. When they do get away, searches can take time.

In the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, it took investigators four days to catch up to the two brothers who carried it out. In a 2023 case, Army reservist Robert Card was found dead of an apparent suicide two days after he killed 18 people and wounded 13 others in Lewiston, Maine.

The man accused of killing conservative political figure Charlie Kirk in September turned himself in about a day and a half after the attack on Utah Valley University's campus. And Luigi Mangione, who has pleaded not guilty to murder charges in the killing of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson in Manhattan last year, was arrested five days later at a McDonald's in Pennsylvania.

What to know about the man authorities say fatally shot 2 Brown students and a MIT professor

By PATRICK WHITTLE and LEAH WILLINGHAM Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — Investigations into the Brown University mass shooting and the slaying of a Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor shifted Thursday when authorities discovered evidence they say indicates they were committed by the same man, who was then found dead from a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

The attacker at Brown killed two students and wounded nine others in an engineering building on Saturday. Some 50 miles (80 kilometers) away MIT professor Nuno F.G. Loureiro was killed Monday night in his home in the Boston suburb of Brookline.

The FBI had earlier said it knew of no links between the cases.

Here are some answers to questions about the attacks and investigations:

Suspected shooter attended Brown 25 years ago

Claudio Neves Valente, 48, a former Brown student and Portuguese national, was found dead in a New Hampshire storage facility after a six-day search that spanned several New England states.

Brown University President Christina Paxson said Neves Valente was enrolled at Brown from the fall of 2000 to the spring of 2001. He was admitted to the graduate school to study physics beginning in September 2000.

"He has no current affiliation with the university," she said.

Neves Valente had studied at Brown on a student visa. He eventually obtained legal permanent residence status in September 2017. His last known residence was in Miami.

There are still "a lot of unknowns" in regard to motive, Rhode Island Attorney General Peter Neronha said. "We don't know why now, why Brown, why these students and why this classroom," he said.

Attended the same university as Loureiro in Portugal

Loureiro, 47, who was married, joined MIT in 2016 and was named last year to lead the school's Plasma Science and Fusion Center, where he worked to advance clean energy technology and other research. The center, one of MIT'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.

Valente and Loureiro attended the same academic program at a university in Portugal between 1995 and 2000, Foley said. Loureiro graduated from the physics program at Instituto Superior Técnico, Portugal's premier engineering school, in 2000, according to his MIT faculty page.

The same year, Neves Valente was let go from a position at the Lisbon university, according to an archive of a termination notice from the school's then-president in February 2000.

Identifying a suspect

Authorities released several security videos of a person thought might have carried out the Brown attack. They showed the individual standing, walking and even running along the streets, but their face is masked or turned away in all of them.

Police say a witness then gave investigators a key tip: he saw someone who looked like the person of interest with a Nissan sedan displaying Florida plates. That enabled Providence police officers to tap into

a network of more than 70 street cameras operated around the city by surveillance company Flock Safety. Those cameras track license plates and other vehicle details.

After leaving Rhode Island for Massachusetts, Providence officials said the suspect stuck a Maine license plate over the rental car's plate to help conceal his identity.

Video footage showed Neves Valente entering an apartment building near Loureiro's. About an hour later, he was seen entering the New Hampshire storage facility where he was later found dead, Foley said.

Slain Brown students were a freshman and sophomore

The two students who were killed and the nine others wounded were studying for a final in a first-floor classroom in an older section of the engineering building when the shooter walked in and opened fire.

Those killed were 19-year-old sophomore Ella Cook and 18-year-old freshman MukhammadAziz Umurzokov. Cook, whose funeral is Monday, was active in her Alabama church and served as vice president of the Brown College Republicans. Umurzokov's family immigrated to the U.S. from Uzbekistan when he was a child, and he aspired to be a doctor.

As for the wounded, six were in stable condition Thursday, officials said. The other three were discharged.

Suspect's residency status

Neves Valiente gained permanent residency status through a green card lottery program, Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said in a post on X.

She said President Donald Trump ordered her to pause the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services program.

The diversity visa program makes up to 50,000 green cards available each year by lottery to people from countries that are little represented in the United States, many of them in Africa.

The lottery was created by Congress, and the move is almost certain to invite legal challenges.

Federal regulators to begin sifting through wreckage of North Carolina plane crash that killed 7

By ALLEN G. BREED and GARY D. ROBERTSON Associated Press

STATESVILLE, N.C. (AP) — Federal investigators on Friday will begin sifting through the wreckage of a business jet that crashed in North Carolina and killed all seven people aboard, including retired NASCAR driver Greg Biffle and his family.

The Cessna C550 erupted into a large fire when it hit the ground Thursday. It had departed Statesville Regional Airport, about 45 miles (72 kilometers) north of Charlotte, but soon crashed while trying to return and land, the North Carolina State Highway Patrol said.

Flight records show the plane was registered to a company run by Biffle. The cause of the crash wasn't immediately known, nor was the reason for the plane's return to the airport in drizzle and cloudy conditions.

Federal Aviation Administration records show Biffle was rated to fly helicopters and single and multi-engine planes. It wasn't clear if Biffle was piloting the plane at the time of the crash.

Biffle was on the plane with his wife, Cristina, and children Ryder, 5, and Emma, 14, according to the highway patrol and a family statement. Others on the plane were identified as Dennis Dutton, his son Jack, and Craig Wadsworth.

"Each of them meant everything to us, and their absence leaves an immeasurable void in our lives," the joint family statement said.

Biffle, 55, won more than 50 races across NASCAR's three circuits, including 19 at the Cup Series level. He also won the Trucks Series championship in 2000 and the Xfinity Series title in 2002.

NASCAR called Biffle "a beloved member of the NASCAR community, a fierce competitor, and a friend to so many."

"His passion for racing, his integrity, and his commitment to fans and fellow competitors alike made a lasting impact on the sport," NASCAR said.

The plane, bound for Florida, took off from the Statesville airport shortly after 10 a.m., according to tracking data posted by FlightAware.com.

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Golfers playing next to the airport were shocked as they witnessed the disaster, even dropping to the ground at the Lakewood Golf Club while the plane was overhead. The ninth hole was covered with debris.

"We were like, 'Oh my gosh! That's way too low,'" said Joshua Green of Mooresville. "It was scary."

A team from the National Transportation Safety Board headed to North Carolina on Thursday to investigate. The Federal Aviation Administration is also investigating.

The Cessna plane, built in 1981, is a popular mid-sized business jet with an excellent reputation, aviation safety expert Jeff Guzzetti said. It has two engines and typically seats six to eight passengers and two pilots.

In 2024, Biffle was honored for his humanitarian efforts after Hurricane Helene struck the U.S., even using his personal helicopter to deliver aid to flooded, remote western North Carolina.

"The last time I spoke with Cristina, just a couple of weeks ago, she reached out to ask how she could help with relief efforts in Jamaica. That's who the Biffles were," U.S. Rep. Richard Hudson, a Republican from North Carolina, said.

Wadsworth was Biffle's friend and helped him with odd jobs, including delivering supplies to places hit by Hurricane Helene, roommate Benito Howell said.

"He didn't know how to say no," Howell said of Wadsworth, who had worked for several NASCAR teams. "He loved everybody. He always tried to help everybody."

The joint family statement also spoke about Dutton and his son Jack, saying they were "deeply loved as well, and their loss is felt by all who knew them."

With 2025 almost over, there have been 1,331 U.S. crashes this year investigated by the NTSB, from two-seat planes to commercial aircraft, compared to a total of 1,482 in 2024.

Major air disasters around the world in 2025 include the plane-helicopter collision that killed 67 in Washington, the Air India crash that killed 260 in India, and a crash in Russia's Far East that claimed 48 lives. Fourteen people, including 11 on the ground, died in a UPS cargo plane crash in Kentucky.

Protesters storm offices of leading Bangladesh dailies after a 2024 uprising activist dies

By JULHAS ALAM Associated Press

DHAKA, Bangladesh (AP) — Angry protesters stormed the offices of Bangladesh's two leading newspapers late Thursday after the death of a prominent activist in last year's political uprising in Bangladesh. The crowds set fire to the buildings of the dailies, trapping journalists and other staff inside.

Hours later, the journalists and other staff were evacuated, and the fires were brought under control early Friday.

It was not clear why the protesters attacked the newspapers whose editors are known to be closely connected with the country's interim leader, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus. Protests were organized in recent months outside the offices of the dailies by Islamists who blamed the newspapers for their alleged link with India.

Sharif Osman Hadi, a spokesperson for the Inqilab Moncho culture group, died in hospital in Singapore early Thursday evening after a weeklong battle for his life.

He was shot on the streets of Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, last Friday while riding on a rickshaw. Two men on a motorbike followed Hadi and one shot him before they fled the scene. After days of treatment in Dhaka, Hadi was flown to Singapore in critical condition.

Authorities have said they identified the suspects and that the shooter had most probably fled to India — remarks that sparked a new diplomatic squabble with India and prompted New Delhi this week to summon Bangladesh's envoy to express its condemnation. Bangladesh also summoned the Indian envoy to Dhaka and sought clarification.

Hadi was a fierce critic of both neighboring India and former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, whose 15-year rule of Bangladesh ended in last year's uprising.

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The Inqilab Moncho group, formed after the ouster of Hasina last year, has been organizing street protests and campaigns denouncing Hasina and India. The country's Islamists and other Hasina opponents have blamed her government for being subservient to India during her rule.

Hadi had planned to run as an independent candidate in a major constituency in Dhaka in the next national elections which the country's interim government has announced for February.

Since Hasina's ouster, the Inqilab Moncho group has promoted anti-Indian sentiment in the Muslim-majority country. Hasina now lives in self-imposed exile in India.

Witnesses and media reports said hundreds of protesters took to the streets of Dhaka immediately after the news of Hadi's death, rallying on Shahbagh Square near the Dhaka University campus where many chanted slogans such as Allahu Akbar, or God is great in Arabic. There were also similar protests elsewhere in the country.

Later, a group of protesters gathered outside the head office of the country's leading Bengali-language Prothom Alo daily in Dhaka's Karwan Bazar area. They then surged into the building, vandalized it and set fire to it, according to online portals of various leading media outlets.

A few hundred yards away, another group of protesters pushed into the premises of the country's leading English-language Daily Star and set fire to the building, according to footage from Kaler Kantha, another mainstream newspaper.

Soldiers and paramilitary border guards deployed outside the two buildings but did not take any action to disperse the protesters. Security officials tried to convince them to leave peacefully as firefighters arrived at the scene outside the Daily Star building.

The blaze trapped the newspaper's staff working inside the building late Thursday. One of the Daily Star's journalists, Zyma Islam, wrote on Facebook that she was inside the building.

"I can't breathe anymore. There's too much smoke," she said.

By early Friday, the fire was brought under control.

Both dailies stopped updating their online editions after the attacks and they did not publish broadsheets on Friday.

The protesters Thursday night also targeted Chhayanaut, a leading cultural institution widely respected by liberals, in Dhaka's Dhanmondi neighborhood.

Dozens of protesters were still at Shahbagh Friday morning and vowed to continue the protests.

Hadi's body would be brought to Dhaka from Singapore on Friday evening, authorities said.

The attack on Hadi is still being investigated, but the shooting has set off tensions. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have recently expressed concerns over violations of human rights in Bangladesh.

Yunus, who took over three days after Hasina's ouster in August 2024, promised in a televised address to the nation late Thursday to punish Hadi's killers.

He announced that Saturday would be a day of mourning and urged the citizens to stay calm.

Yunus' critics and Hasina's former Awami League party have blamed the interim government for the rise of Islamists in Bangladesh, a parliamentary democracy with a history of political violence.

The interim government has banned all activities by Hasina's party, including its running in the February election. Last month, a Bangladesh court sentenced Hasina to death on charges of crimes against humanity involving the uprising.

On Wednesday, anti-India protesters attempted to march toward the Indian High Commission in Dhaka, prompting it to close its visa section. After Hasina's ouster India stopped issuing tourist visas to Bangladeshis, citing security concerns, but continued giving visas for medical treatment in India.

On Thursday, protesters in the southwestern city of Rajshahi tried to march toward the office of a regional Indian diplomat. Police stopped both marches.

Jury finds Judge Hannah Dugan guilty of obstruction for helping an immigrant evade federal agents

By TODD RICHMOND Associated Press

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MILWAUKEE (AP) — A jury found a Wisconsin judge accused of helping a Mexican immigrant dodge federal authorities guilty of obstruction Thursday, marking a victory for President Donald Trump as he continues his sweeping immigration crackdown across the country.

Federal prosecutors charged Milwaukee County Circuit Judge Hannah Dugan with obstruction, a felony, and concealing an individual to prevent arrest, a misdemeanor, in April. The jury acquitted her on the concealment count, but she still faces up to five years in prison on the obstruction count.

The jury returned the verdicts after deliberating for six hours. Dugan faces up to five years in prison when she's sentenced, but no date had been set as of late Thursday evening.

The case inflamed tensions over Trump's immigration crackdown, with his administration branding Dugan an activist judge and Democrats countering that the administration was trying to make an example of Dugan to blunt judicial opposition to the operation.

Dugan and her attorneys left the courtroom, ducked into a side conference room and closed the door without speaking to reporters. Steve Biskupic, her lead attorney, later told reporters that he was disappointed with the ruling and didn't understand how the jury could have reached a split verdict since the elements of both charges were virtually the same.

U.S. Attorney Brad Schimel denied the case was political and urged people to accept the verdict peacefully. He said courthouse arrests are safer because people are screened for weapons and it isn't unfair for law enforcement to arrest wanted people in courthouses.

"Some have sought to make this about a larger political battle," Schimel said. "While this case is serious for all involved, it is ultimately about a single day, a single bad day, in a public courthouse. The defendant is certainly not evil. Nor is she a martyr for some greater cause."

U.S. Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche praised the verdict on X, saying nobody is above the law, even judges.

According to a court filings that include an FBI affidavit and a federal grand jury indictment, immigration authorities traveled to the Milwaukee County courthouse on April 18 after learning 31-year-old Eduardo Flores-Ruiz had reentered the country illegally and was scheduled to appear before Dugan for a hearing in a state battery case.

Dugan learned that agents were in the corridor outside her courtroom waiting for Flores-Ruiz. She left the courtroom to confront them, falsely telling them their administrative warrant for Flores-Ruiz wasn't sufficient grounds to arrest him and directing them to go to the chief judge's office.

While the agents were gone, she addressed Flores-Ruiz's case off the record, told his attorney that he could attend his next hearing via Zoom and led Flores-Ruiz and the attorney out a private jury door. Agents spotted Flores-Ruiz in the corridor, followed him outside and arrested him after a foot chase. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security announced in November he had been deported.

Prosecutors worked during Dugan's trial to show that she directed agents to the chief judge's office to create an opening for Flores-Ruiz to escape.

An FBI agent who led the investigation testified that after agents left the corridor, she immediately moved Flores-Ruiz's case to the top of her docket, told him that he could appear for his next hearing via Zoom and led him out the private door.

Prosecutors also played audio recordings from her courtroom in which she can be heard telling her court reporter that she'd take "the heat" for leading Flores-Ruiz out the back.

Her attorneys countered that she was trying to follow courthouse protocols that called for court employees to report any immigration agents to their supervisors and she didn't intentionally try to obstruct the arrest team.

In recorded message, Rob Reiner urged resiliency for Holocaust survivors at Hanukkah event

By MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

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JERUSALEM (AP) — In a video message recorded weeks before he was killed, Hollywood icon Rob Reiner urged Holocaust survivors participating in a Hanukkah ceremony on Thursday to “be resilient” during difficult times.

Reiner and his wife, Michele, were found stabbed to death Sunday at their home in Los Angeles, law enforcement officials said. Their 32-year-old son, Nick Reiner, has been charged with two counts of first-degree murder and is being held without bail.

Reiner, who was Jewish, recorded the message for the Hanukkah event in the beginning of October. He noted that his wife’s extended family was killed at Auschwitz during the Holocaust, giving the ceremony special meaning for him.

“We’re living in a time where what’s happening in our country is scary and reminiscent of what we’ve seen happen in the past, and we just hope that we can all survive this and that we can hold on to our democracy,” Reiner, who was an outspoken advocate for liberal causes, said in his message.

The video was broadcast as part of a virtual candle lighting ceremony honoring Holocaust survivors internationally on the fifth night of Hanukkah. The event is an initiative of the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, an organization that advocates for Holocaust survivors.

Around 100 Holocaust survivors gathered at the Western Wall in Jerusalem on Thursday afternoon for a candle-lighting ceremony.

In Hebrew, Hanukkah means “dedication,” and the holiday marks the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem in the second century B.C., after a small group of Jewish fighters liberated it from occupying foreign forces.

Jews celebrate the eight-day holiday, which this year began on Sunday, by lighting a nightly candle in honor of the tiny supply of ritually pure oil that they found in the Temple that lasted for eight nights, instead of just one.

Many Jewish communities are reeling from the attack on a Hanukkah event in Sydney, Australia, where 15 people were killed.

“Even in these difficult days, when antisemitism is rising and Jewish communities around the world are under attack — this very week on the first night of Hanukkah in Sydney, Australia — we draw strength and inspiration from you, the survivors, from your personal and collective resilience,” Greg Schneider, the executive vice president of the Claims Conference, told the group of survivors in Jerusalem.

In addition to Reiner, Barbra Streisand, Billy Crystal, Jason Alexander, Julianna Margulies, Debra Messing, Adam Arkin and Jamie Lee Curtis were among those who made prerecorded videos for the event. Journalists Wolf Blitzer and Dana Bash also recorded messages.

“If ever we needed to be resilient, it’s now,” Reiner said in his message. “Let’s be resilient.”

Reiner was a vocal critic of U.S. President Donald Trump, calling him in a 2017 interview with *Variety* “mentally unfit” to be president and “the single-most unqualified human being to ever assume the presidency of the United States.” In a shocking post after Reiner’s death, Trump suggested that Rob Reiner’s outspoken opposition was partially responsible for his murder.

Retired NASCAR driver Greg Biffle and family among 7 killed in North Carolina plane crash

By ALLEN G. BREED and GARY D. ROBERTSON Associated Press

STATESVILLE, N.C. (AP) — A business jet crashed Thursday while trying to return to a North Carolina airport shortly after takeoff, killing all seven people aboard, including retired NASCAR driver Greg Biffle and his family, authorities said.

The Cessna C550 erupted into a large fire when it hit the ground. It had departed Statesville Regional Airport, about 45 miles (72 kilometers) north of Charlotte, but soon crashed while trying to return and land, the North Carolina State Highway Patrol said.

Flight records show the plane was registered to a company run by Biffle. The cause of the crash wasn’t immediately known, nor was the reason for the plane’s return to the airport in drizzle and cloudy conditions.

Federal Aviation Administration records show Biffle was rated to fly helicopters and single and multi-engine planes. It wasn't clear if Biffle was piloting the plane at the time of the crash.

Biffle was on the plane with his wife, Cristina, and children Ryder, 5, and Emma, 14, according to the highway patrol and a family statement. Others on the plane were identified as Dennis Dutton, his son Jack, and Craig Wadsworth.

"Each of them meant everything to us, and their absence leaves an immeasurable void in our lives," the joint family statement said.

Biffle, 55, won more than 50 races across NASCAR's three circuits, including 19 at the Cup Series level. He also won the Trucks Series championship in 2000 and the Xfinity Series title in 2002.

NASCAR said it was devastated by the news.

"Greg was more than a champion driver; he was a beloved member of the NASCAR community, a fierce competitor, and a friend to so many," NASCAR said. "His passion for racing, his integrity, and his commitment to fans and fellow competitors alike made a lasting impact on the sport."

The plane, bound for Florida, took off from the Statesville airport shortly after 10 a.m., according to tracking data posted by FlightAware.com.

Golfers playing next to the airport were shocked as they witnessed the disaster, even dropping to the ground at the Lakewood Golf Club while the plane was overhead. The ninth hole was covered with debris.

"We were like, 'Oh my gosh! That's way too low,'" said Joshua Green of Mooresville. "It was scary."

The National Transportation Safety Board and the Federal Aviation Administration were investigating.

The Cessna plane, built in 1981, is a popular mid-sized business jet with an excellent reputation, aviation safety expert Jeff Guzzetti said. It has two engines and typically seats six to eight passengers and two pilots.

In 2024, Biffle was honored for his humanitarian efforts after Hurricane Helene struck the U.S., even using his personal helicopter to deliver aid to flooded, remote western North Carolina.

"The last time I spoke with Cristina, just a couple of weeks ago, she reached out to ask how she could help with relief efforts in Jamaica. That's who the Biffles were," U.S. Rep. Richard Hudson, a Republican from North Carolina, said.

Wadsworth was Biffle's friend and helped him with odd jobs, including delivering supplies to places hit by Hurricane Helene, roommate Benito Howell said.

"He didn't know how to say no," Howell said of Wadsworth, who had worked for several NASCAR teams. "He loved everybody. He always tried to help everybody."

The joint family statement also spoke about Dutton and his son Jack, saying they were "deeply loved as well, and their loss is felt by all who knew them."

With 2025 almost over, there have been 1,331 U.S. crashes this year investigated by the NTSB, from two-seat planes to commercial aircraft, compared to a total of 1,482 in 2024.

Major air disasters around the world in 2025 include the plane-helicopter collision that killed 67 in Washington, the Air India crash that killed 260 in India, and a crash in Russia's Far East that claimed 48 lives. Fourteen people, including 11 on the ground, died in a UPS cargo plane crash in Kentucky.

Trump's blockade of sanctioned Venezuelan oil raises new questions about legality

By BEN FINLEY, ERIC TUCKER, KEVIN FREKING and JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press
WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's "blockade" of sanctioned oil tankers off Venezuela's coast is raising new questions about the legality of his military campaign in Latin America, while fueling concerns that the U.S. could be edging closer to war.

The Trump administration says its blockade is narrowly tailored and not targeting civilians, which would be an illegal act of war. But some experts say seizing sanctioned oil tied to leader Nicolás Maduro could provoke a military response from Venezuela, engaging American forces in a new level of conflict that goes beyond their attacks on alleged drug boats.

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"My biggest fear is this is exactly how wars start and how conflicts escalate out of control," said Rep. Jason Crow, a Colorado Democrat who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan. "And there are no adults in the room with this administration, nor is there consultation with Congress. So I'm very worried."

Claire Finkelstein, a professor of national security law at the University of Pennsylvania, said the use of such an aggressive tactic without congressional authority stretches the bounds of international law and increasingly looks like a veiled attempt to trigger a Venezuelan response.

"The concern is that we are bootstrapping our way into armed conflict," Finkelstein said. "We're upping the ante in order to try to get them to engage in an act of aggression that would then justify an act of self-defense on our part."

Republicans largely are OK with the campaign

Trump has used the word "blockade" to describe his latest tactic in an escalating pressure campaign against Maduro, who has been charged with narcoterrorism in the U.S. and now has been accused of using oil profits to fund drug trafficking. While Trump said it only applies to vessels facing U.S. economic penalties, the move has sparked outrage among Democrats and mostly shrugs, if not cheers, from Republicans.

Rep. Michael McCaul, R-Texas, said Trump going after sanctioned oil tankers linked to Venezuela is no different from targeting Iranian oil.

"Just like with the Iranian shadow tankers, I have no problem with that," McCaul said. "They're circumventing sanctions."

The president has declared the U.S. is in "armed conflict" with drug cartels in an effort to reduce the flow of drugs to American communities. U.S. forces have attacked 28 alleged drug-smuggling boats and killed at least 104 people since early September. Trump has repeatedly promised that land strikes are next, while linking Maduro to the cartels.

The campaign has drawn scrutiny in Congress, particularly after it was revealed that U.S. forces killed two survivors of a boat attack with a follow-up strike. But Republicans so far have repeatedly declined to require congressional authorization for further military action in the region, blocking Democrats' war powers resolutions.

Sen. Roger Wicker, Republican chairman of the Senate Armed Service Committee, has essentially ended his panel's investigation into the Sept. 2 strike, saying Thursday that the entire campaign is being conducted "on sound legal advice."

Venezuela pushes back

Trump announced the blockade Tuesday, about a week after U.S. forces seized a sanctioned oil tanker off Venezuela's coast. The South American country has the world's largest proven oil reserves and relies heavily on the revenue to support its economy.

The U.S. has been imposing sanctions on Venezuela since 2005 over concerns about corruption as well as criminal and anti-democratic activities. The first Trump administration expanded the penalties to oil, prompting Maduro's government to rely on a shadow fleet of falsely flagged tankers to smuggle crude into global supply chains.

The state-owned oil company Petróleos de Venezuela S.A., or PDVSA, has been largely locked out of global oil markets by U.S. sanctions. It sells most of its exports at a steep discount on the black market in China.

Nicolás Maduro Guerra, Maduro's son and a lawmaker, on Thursday decried Trump's latest tactic and vowed to work with the private sector to limit any impact on the country's oil-dependent economy. He acknowledged that it won't be an easy task.

"We value peace and dialogue, but the reality right now is that we are being threatened by the most powerful army in the world, and that's not something to be taken lightly," Maduro Guerra said.

Pentagon prefers the term 'quarantine'

It wasn't immediately clear how the U.S. planned to enact Trump's order. But the Navy has 11 ships in the region and a wide complement of aircraft that can monitor marine traffic coming in and out of Venezuela.

Trump may be using the term "blockade," but the Pentagon says officials prefer "quarantine."

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A defense official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to outline internal reasoning about the policy, said a blockade, under international law, constitutes an act of war requiring formal declaration and enforcement against all incoming and outgoing traffic. A quarantine, however, is a selective, preventive security measure that targets specific, illegal activity.

Rep. Adam Smith, the ranking Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee, said he was unsure of the legality of Trump's blockade.

"They're blockading apparently the oil industry, not the entire country," said Smith, who represents parts of western Washington state. "How does that change things? I got to talk to some lawyers, but in general, a blockade is an act of war."

The U.S. has a long history of leveraging naval sieges to pressure lesser powers, especially in the 19th century era of "gunboat diplomacy," sometimes provoking them into taking action that triggers an even greater American response.

But in recent decades, as the architecture of international law has developed, successive U.S. administrations have been careful not to use such maritime shows of force because they are seen as punishing civilians — an illegal act of aggression outside of wartime.

During the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, President John F. Kennedy famously called his naval cordon to counter a real threat — weapons shipments from the Soviet Union — a "quarantine" not a blockade.

Mark Nevitt, an Emory University law professor and former Navy judge advocate general, said there is a legal basis for the U.S. to board and seize an already-sanctioned ship that is deemed to be stateless or is claiming two states.

But a blockade, he said, is a "wartime naval operation and maneuver" designed to block the access of vessels and aircraft of an enemy state.

"I think the blockade is predicated on a false legal pretense that we are at war with narcoterrorists," he said.

Nevitt added: "This seems to be almost like a junior varsity blockade, where they're trying to assert a wartime legal tool, a blockade, but only doing it selectively."

Geoffrey Corn, a Texas Tech law professor who previously served as the Army's senior adviser for law-of-war issues and has been critical of the Trump administration's boat strikes, said he was not convinced the blockade was intended to ratchet up the conflict with Venezuela.

Instead, he suggested it could be aimed at escalating the pressure on Maduro to give up power or encouraging his supporters to back away from him.

"You can look at it through the lens of, is this an administration trying to create a pretext for a broader conflict?" Corn said. "Or you can look at it as part of an overall campaign of pressuring the Maduro regime to step aside."

TikTok signs deal to form new US unit with investors, including Oracle, Silver Lake

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — TikTok has signed agreements with three major investors — Oracle, Silver Lake and MGX — to form a new TikTok U.S. joint venture, ensuring the popular social video platform can continue operating in the United States.

The deal is expected to close on Jan. 22, according to an internal memo seen by The Associated Press. In the communication, CEO Shou Zi Chew confirmed to employees that ByteDance and TikTok signed the binding agreements with the consortium.

"I want to take this opportunity to thank you for your continued dedication and tireless work. Your efforts keep us operating at the highest level and will ensure that TikTok continues to grow and thrive in the U.S. and around the world," Chew wrote in the memo to employees. "With these agreements in place, our focus must stay where it's always been—firmly on delivering for our users, creators, businesses and the global TikTok community."

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Half of the new TikTok U.S. joint venture will be owned by a group of investors — among them Oracle, Silver Lake and the Emirati investment firm MGX, who will each hold a 15% share. 19.9% of the new app will be held by ByteDance itself, and another 30.1% will be held by affiliates of existing ByteDance investors, according to the memo. The memo did not say who the other investors are and both TikTok and the White House declined to comment.

The U.S. venture will have a new, seven-member majority-American board of directors, the memo said. It will also be subject to terms that “protect Americans’ data and U.S. national security.”

U.S. user data will be stored locally in a system run by Oracle. The memo said U.S. users will continue “enjoying the same experience as today” and advertisers will continue to serve global audiences with no impact from the deal.

TikTok’s algorithm — the secret sauce that powers its addictive video feed — will be retrained on U.S. user data to “ensure the content feed is free from outside manipulation,” the memo said. The U.S. venture will also oversee content moderation and policies within the country.

American officials have previously warned that ByteDance’s algorithm is vulnerable to manipulation by Chinese authorities, who can use it to shape content on the platform in a way that’s difficult to detect.

The algorithm has been a central issue in the security debate over TikTok. China previously maintained the algorithm must remain under Chinese control by law. But the U.S. regulation passed with bipartisan support said any divestment of TikTok must mean the platform cuts ties — specifically the algorithm — with ByteDance.

The deal marks the end of years of uncertainty about the fate of the popular video-sharing platform in the United States. After wide bipartisan majorities in Congress passed — and President Joe Biden signed — a law that would ban TikTok in the U.S. if it did not find a new owner in the place of China’s ByteDance, the platform was set to go dark on the law’s January 2025 deadline. For a several hours, it did. But on his first day in office, President Donald Trump signed an executive order to keep it running while his administration tries to reach an agreement for the sale of the company.

Three more executive orders followed, as Trump, without a clear legal basis, continued to extend the deadline for a TikTok deal. The second was in April, when White House officials believed they were nearing a deal to spin off TikTok into a new company with U.S. ownership that fell apart after China backed out following Trump’s tariff announcement. The third came in June, then another in September, which Trump said would allow TikTok to continue operating in the United States in a way that meets national security concerns.

TikTok has more than 170 million users in the U.S. About 43% of U.S. adults under the age of 30 say they regularly get news from TikTok, higher than any other social media app including YouTube, Facebook and Instagram, according to a Pew Research Center report published this fall.

Shares of Oracle jumped \$9.07, or 5%, to \$189.10 in after-hours trading.

Trump administration moves to cut off transgender care for children

By ALI SWENSON, MATTHEW PERRONE and DEVI SHASTRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services on Thursday unveiled a series of regulatory actions designed to block access to gender-affirming care for minors, building on broader Trump administration restrictions targeting transgender Americans.

The sweeping proposals — the most significant moves this administration has taken so far to restrict the use of puberty blockers, hormone therapy and surgical interventions for transgender children — include cutting off federal Medicaid and Medicare funding from hospitals that provide gender-affirming care to children and prohibiting federal Medicaid dollars from being used to fund such procedures.

“This is not medicine, it is malpractice,” Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. said of gender-affirming procedures in a news conference on Thursday. “Sex-rejecting procedures rob children of their futures.”

Thursday’s announcements would imperil access in nearly two dozen states where drug treatments and

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surgical procedures remain legal and covered by Medicaid, which is funded by federal and state dollars. The proposals run counter to the recommendations of major U.S. medical societies. And advocates for transgender children strongly refuted the administration's claims about gender-affirming care, saying Thursday's moves would put lives at risk.

"The multitude of efforts we are seeing from federal legislators to strip transgender and nonbinary youth of the health care they need is deeply troubling," said Rodrigo Heng-Lehtinen, of The Trevor Project, a nonprofit suicide prevention organization for LGBTQ+ youth.

Proposed rules would threaten youth gender-affirming care in states where it remains legal

Medicaid programs in slightly less than half of states currently cover gender-affirming care. At least 27 states have adopted laws restricting or banning the care. The Supreme Court's recent decision upholding Tennessee's ban means most other state laws are likely to remain in place.

The proposals announced by Kennedy and his deputies are not final or legally binding. Officials must go through a lengthy rulemaking process, including periods of public comment and document rewrites, before the restrictions become permanent. They are also likely to face legal challenges.

But the proposed rules will likely further discourage health care providers from offering gender-affirming care to children and many hospitals have already ceased such care in anticipation of federal action.

Hannah Edwards, executive director of Transforming Families, a support organization for families of transgender youth in Minnesota, said she expects some patients will still be able to get care at private clinics that don't participate in Medicaid and Medicare.

But that won't be a solution for all kids seeking care.

Edwards has a 15-year-old transgender daughter and said that there's a growing sense of fear because of federal government actions, even in a state that's become a destination for families with transgender children.

"The conversation that constantly happens for my family personally is: Where is our red line when we need to flee the country?" she said.

Nearly all U.S. hospitals care for patients enrolled in Medicare and Medicaid, the federal government's largest health plans that cover seniors, people with disabilities and low-income Americans. Losing access to those payments would imperil most U.S. hospitals and medical providers.

The same funding restrictions would apply to a smaller health plan, the State Children's Health Insurance Program, when it comes to care for people under the age of 19, according to a federal notice posted Thursday morning.

"This sets a very dangerous precedent for all areas of health care, if the government can cherry-pick one area of medicine to use to withhold necessary funding from entire groups of people," said Dr. Scott Leibowitz, a psychiatrist and board member for the World Professional Association for Transgender Health. The group develops standards of care for transgender patients globally.

Kennedy also announced Thursday that the HHS Office of Civil Rights will propose a rule excluding gender dysphoria from the definition of a disability. Gender dysphoria is a formal medical diagnosis that describes the distress felt when someone's gender expression does not match their sex assigned at birth.

Young people who persistently experience gender dysphoria are first evaluated by a team of professionals. Some may try a social transition, involving changing a hairstyle or pronouns. Some may later also receive hormone-blocking drugs that delay puberty, followed by testosterone or estrogen to bring about the desired physical changes sought by patients. Surgery is rare for minors.

Moves contradict advice from medical organizations and transgender advocates

Dr. Mehmet Oz, the administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, on Thursday called transgender treatments "a Band-Aid on a much deeper pathology," and suggested children with gender dysphoria are "confused, lost and need help."

Polling shows many Americans agree with the administration's view. An Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research survey conducted in May found that about half of U.S. adults approved of how Trump was handling transgender issues.

Chloe Cole, a conservative activist known for speaking about her gender-transition reversal, spoke at the news conference to express appreciation. She said cries for help from her and others in her situation, "have finally been heard."

But the approach contradicts the recommendations of most major U.S. medical organizations, including the American Medical Association, which has urged states not to restrict transgender care and services. The American Academy of Pediatrics called on HHS to reverse course Thursday, saying "children and families will bear the consequences."

"These rules are a baseless intrusion into the patient-physician relationship. Patients, their families, and their physicians—not politicians or government officials—should be the ones to make decisions together about what care is best for them," said Dr. Susan Kressly, AAP president.

Actions build on a larger effort to restrict transgender rights

The announcements build on a wave of actions President Donald Trump, his administration and Republicans in Congress have taken to target the rights of transgender people nationwide.

On his first day in office, Trump signed an executive order that declared the federal government would recognize only two immutable sexes: male and female. He also has signed orders barring transgender athletes from participating in girls' and women's sports and cutting federal spending for transition-related care, which prompted Thursday's announcement.

On Wednesday, a bill that would open transgender health care providers to prison time if they treat people under the age of 18 passed the U.S. House and heads to the Senate. On Thursday, House lawmakers passed a different bill intended to ban Medicaid coverage for gender-affirming care for children.

Hurricane-force wind downs power lines, fans wildfires in Colorado with more on way

By MEAD GRUVER Associated Press

FORT COLLINS, Colo. (AP) — Crews were mopping up Thursday but still bracing for more after hurricane-force wind downed power lines and fanned wildfires along the Colorado Front Range and onto the Great Plains.

Wind that in places topped 100 mph (160 kph) late Wednesday arrived after Xcel Energy protectively cut off power through much of its eastern Colorado service areas. The goal was to prevent downed lines from starting fires — and power lines were indeed blown down in several areas.

By Thursday afternoon, power was about 60% restored to the almost 700 miles (1,100 kilometers) of power lines the utility de-energized. Some 37,000 Xcel customers on the Front Range and into the Rocky Mountains were still without power.

Another round of outages was expected Friday, however, with a forecast for even stronger winds over a longer period.

While crews worked to restore power to customers already affected, even longer outages were likely Friday, the head of Xcel Energy-Colorado cautioned in a news conference.

"The power will not come back on the moment the wind event ends because we have to inspect the lines," said the utility's president, Robert Kenney.

In central Denver, the power was out overnight, furniture was blown off apartment balconies, at least one apartment window was blown out and the ground was littered with blown-down branches Thursday.

Winds on Wednesday afternoon and into Thursday fanned wildfires of still-undetermined cause in eastern Colorado, burning at least 14,000 acres (5,700 hectares) in Yuma County, local emergency management officials said in a Facebook post.

A grass fire on the south side of Cheyenne, Wyoming, prompted a neighborhood's evacuation for several hours Wednesday evening. No structures burned, however.

Powerful gusts Thursday prompted closures of Interstates 25 and 80 in southeastern Wyoming to light-weight, high-profile vehicles though not other traffic. Unladen tractor-trailers whose drivers ignore such warnings are often seen blown over on the windy state's highways, prompting jokes that the trucks are

just taking a rest.

"If your commercial hauler is in need of a good night's sleep we would highly recommend the windblown plains of I-80, I-25, or I-90," the Wyoming Highway Patrol joked on Facebook, adding: "For the low, low cost of a Driving on Closed Roads Citation (\$1,000+)."

High winds and red flag fire warnings were in effect, meanwhile, across much of Kansas on Thursday. Blowing dust reduced visibility so much that a stretch of Interstate 70 near the state's western line with Colorado closed, the Kansas Department of Transportation said in a news release.

The release urged motorists to consider delaying non-essential travel.

In the Pacific Northwest, heavy rain continued falling along with snow in the mountains. Rivers in Washington had fallen since recent flooding inundated communities, damaged roads and prompted more than 600 rescues.

Parts of southern Oregon and northern California including the San Francisco Bay area were expected to see several inches (centimeters) of rain and strong winds Friday and into the weekend.

Then on Christmas Eve, a Pineapple Express, a stronger atmospheric river that originates in the tropics near Hawaii, could arrive in northern California. The forecast brought hope to ski resort operators that much anticipated precipitation will extend into the Sierra Nevada, where very little snow has fallen this season.

Elsewhere, a blizzard was bringing as much as 8 inches (20 centimeters) of snow to northern North Dakota and Minnesota before it heads into Wisconsin and other areas eastward over the next couple days.

What to know about Trump's order seeking to relax federal drug policies for marijuana

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

President Donald Trump has directed his administration to work as quickly as possible to reclassify marijuana as a less dangerous drug.

Trump's executive order on Thursday does not legalize marijuana under federal law. And it's not the final word. The proposed change still requires federal regulatory approval.

But the change could make the marijuana industry more profitable, facilitate new research on medicinal uses and nudge federal policy closer to a more tolerant approach already in place in many states.

What's the federal policy on marijuana?

Possessing marijuana is a federal crime punishable by fines and prison time. Selling or cultivating marijuana is a more serious offense, punishable by prison sentences of five years to life, depending on the quantity of the drug. That would not change.

Rather, Trump is proposing to reclassify marijuana from a Schedule I drug, alongside heroin and LSD, to a less dangerous Schedule III substance, which includes such things as ketamine and some anabolic steroids.

The federal government defines a Schedule I drug as having no accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse. Schedule III drugs are defined as having moderate to low potential for physical and psychological dependence.

The U.S. Justice Department had proposed to reclassify marijuana under President Joe Biden, eliciting nearly 43,000 formal public comments. The Drug Enforcement Administration was still in the review process when Trump succeeded Biden in January, triggering a re-examination of the policy.

What did Trump say?

Trump said he has long taken a just-say-no approach to drugs.

"I've always told my children, 'Don't take drugs, no drinking, no smoking,'" Trump said at a White House event Thursday.

But he added: "At the same time, the facts compel the federal government to recognize that marijuana can be legitimate in terms of medical applications when carefully administered."

Trump said he has been swamped with calls urging him to make marijuana more accessible for people struggling with health problems such as severe pain.

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"This reclassification order will make it far easier to conduct marijuana-related medical research, allowing us to study benefits, potential dangers and future treatments," Trump said.

His executive order directs the attorney general to "take all necessary steps" to complete the rule-making process to reclassify marijuana as a Schedule III drug "in the most expeditious manner" allowed under federal law.

What would reclassification mean for cannabis shops?

Federal income tax deductions for business expenses aren't available to enterprises involved in "trafficking" any Schedule I or II drug.

Changing marijuana to a Schedule III drug could save hundreds of millions of dollars in taxes for businesses licensed to sell marijuana in states where it is legal, said Rachel Gillette, a Denver attorney at Holland & Hart who leads the firm's cannabis industry practice.

Reclassification could allow marijuana businesses to claim tax deductions for expenses such as advertising, marketing, rent or labor costs associated with sales, she said.

Though some marijuana advocates would prefer it to be fully legalized, "I think the industry is willing to take whatever incremental steps they can in order to put themselves in a better financial position," Gillette said.

Opponents of the change say that's cause for concern.

"My worry is that we will supersize the commercialization of this industry, which is going to lead to more people using and more damage," said Kevin Sabet, a former drug policy adviser under President Barack Obama who now is CEO of the group Smart Approaches to Marijuana.

How does the public view marijuana?

Support for marijuana legalization has grown significantly over the past several decades, from just 23% support in 1985 to 64% this year, according to polling from Gallup.

But that's down from 70% support just two years ago, primarily because of declining enthusiasm among Republicans.

Support among Republicans for legalizing marijuana dropped from 55% to 40% since 2023, Gallup said. By comparison, support shifted only slightly among Democrats, from 87% to 85% during that same period, and inched down from 69% to 66% among independents.

More than 20 Republican U.S. senators, several of them staunch Trump allies, had signed a letter this year urging the president to keep marijuana a Schedule I drug. They asserted that marijuana remains dangerous and argued that reclassifying it would "undermine your strong efforts to Make America Great Again."

How has marijuana use changed?

The medical use of marijuana already is allowed in 40 states and Washington, D.C. Over the past dozen years, the number of jurisdictions legalizing recreational marijuana for adults rose rapidly to 24 states and Washington, D.C.

As more states have embraced marijuana, more people have used it.

More than 64 million Americans age 12 and older — 22% of people — used marijuana during the previous year, according to a 2024 national survey released earlier this year by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. That was up from 19% of people in 2021.

Reclassifying marijuana could cause that figure to keep growing.

"The biggest impact would be further normalizing marijuana use, especially among our young people," Sabet said.

Half of \$18B in federal funds for Minnesota-run programs may have been defrauded, official says

By HANNAH FINGERHUT and GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Half or more of the roughly \$18 billion in federal funds that supported 14 Minnesota-run programs since 2018 may have been stolen, a federal prosecutor said Thursday, describing the

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massive and multilayered fraud schemes as staggering.

First Assistant U.S. Attorney Joe Thompson said the scale of fraud puts services at risk for people who need them, including adults leaving addiction treatment centers who needed help finding a stable place to live and children with autism who were seeking one-on-one therapy.

While prosecutors typically see fraud manifest as providers overbilling, Thompson said during a news conference in Minneapolis that companies have been created to provide zero services while submitting claims to Medicaid and pocketing federal funds for international travel, luxury vehicles and lavish lifestyles.

"The magnitude cannot be overstated," Thompson said. "What we see in Minnesota is not a handful of bad actors committing crimes. It's staggering, industrial-scale fraud."

The investigators' new findings may bolster President Donald Trump in his claims that Minnesota is a "hub of fraudulent money laundering activity" under Gov. Tim Walz, who was the Democrats' vice presidential nominee in last year's election.

Trump has capitalized on the fraud cases to target the Somalia diaspora in Minnesota, which has the largest Somali population in the U.S. Eighty-two of the 92 defendants in the child nutrition, housing services and autism program schemes are Somali Americans, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office for Minnesota.

In October, Walz initiated a third-party audit of and paused payments to the 14 high-risk Medicaid programs for 90 days.

"We will not tolerate fraud, and we will continue to work with federal partners to ensure fraud is stopped and fraudsters are caught," Walz said in a statement Thursday.

Walz last week appointed a director of program integrity, who is tasked with finding and preventing fraud statewide. It's not stopped his Republican counterparts from criticizing his administration for failure to protect Minnesota's taxpayer dollars.

Investigation into autism program grew out of Feeding Our Future

The announcements Thursday follow years of investigation that began with the \$300 million Feeding Our Future scheme, for which 57 defendants have been convicted. Prosecutors said the Feeding Our Future nonprofit was at the center of the country's largest COVID-19-related fraud scam, when defendants exploited a state-run, federally funded program intended to provide food for children.

Thompson said the investigation into a state program to support children on the autism spectrum, the Early Intensive Developmental and Behavioral Intervention benefit, grew out of Feeding Our Future.

"Roughly two dozen or so Feeding Our Future defendants were getting money from autism clinics," Thompson said. "That's how we learned about the autism fraud."

Prosecutors on Thursday named a new defendant accused of defrauding the program, alleging he approached parents in the Somali community to "recruit their children" for the clinic and paid them kickbacks to drive up enrollment, according to court filings.

His clinic ultimately submitted \$6 million worth of claims for Medicaid reimbursement, prosecutors say.

One woman previously charged for exploiting that program pleaded guilty Thursday morning. Prosecutors allege she received \$14 million in Medicaid reimbursements.

New charges in housing services program and more under investigation

Five new defendants were charged Thursday in connection with a Minnesota housing services fraud, in which they stole the money instead of helping Medicaid recipients find stable housing, Thompson said. One defendant fled the country after his company received a federal grand jury subpoena, the prosecutor said.

The five charged include two Philadelphia residents who have been accused of "fraud tourism," Thompson said, because they saw the Minnesota Housing Stability Services Program as a source of "easy money." They are accused of submitting \$3.5 million in fraudulent claims.

They join eight others who were charged in September for their alleged roles in the scheme to defraud the program, which has been shuttered entirely.

Authorities also served a search warrant Thursday in an investigation of a third state-run program, Integrated Community Supports, which was intended to support adults with disabilities who want to live independently. Payments to providers are on track to reach \$180 million this year — exponentially more

than when the state program was introduced in 2021 — leading prosecutors to believe it's another program that has been abused.

"Every day, we look under a rock and find a new \$50 million fraud scheme," Thompson said.

Money sent abroad but no evidence it has purposefully funded terrorism

Trump's rhetoric against Somalis in Minnesota has intensified since a conservative news outlet, City Journal, claimed last month that taxpayer dollars from defrauded government programs have flowed to the Somali militant group al-Shabab, an affiliate of al-Qaida.

While Thompson said money sent to Somalia might have indirectly gotten into the hands of al-Shabab, he emphasized that there was no evidence that defendants were sending money to or otherwise supporting terrorist organizations.

Still, Trump has referred to the Somali community as "garbage" and said he doesn't want immigrants from the East African country in the U.S., rhetoric that has stoked fear and frustration among many in the community.

Thompson said a significant amount of the fraudulently obtained funds have been sent abroad, and much of it has been used to purchase real estate in Nairobi, Kenya's capital, which has a large Somali diaspora.

"There's no indication that the defendants that we've charged were radicalized or seeking to fund al-Shabab or other terrorist groups," Thompson said.

Instead, one Feeding Our Future defendant spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on an aircraft in Nairobi. Another wired \$1.5 million to China and Kenya, prosecutors said, and sent a text message claiming to have invested \$6 million in Kenya. And one man bought Mediterranean coastal property in Alanya, Turkey.

Tennessee governor pardons country star Jelly Roll, who has sought redemption from criminal past

By JONATHAN MATTISE Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Tennessee's governor pardoned country star Jelly Roll on Thursday for his criminal past in the state, acknowledging the Nashville native's long road back from drugs and prison through soul-searching, songwriting and advocacy for second chances.

The rapper-turned-singer whose legal name is Jason Deford has spoken for years about his redemption arc before diverse audiences, from people serving time in correctional centers to concert crowds and even in testimony before Congress.

Republican Gov. Bill Lee issued the pardon after friends and civic leaders of the Grammy-nominated musician joined in an outpouring of support.

Jelly Roll's convictions include robbery and drug felonies. He has said a pardon would make it easier for him to travel internationally for concert tours and to perform Christian missionary work without filling out burdensome paperwork.

He was one of 33 people to receive pardons Thursday from Lee, who for years has issued clemency decisions around the Christmas season. Lee said Jelly Roll's application underwent the same monthslong thorough review as other applicants. The state parole board gave a nonbinding, unanimous recommendation for Jelly Roll's pardon in April.

"His story is remarkable, and it's a redemptive, powerful story, which is what you look for and what you hope for," Lee told reporters.

Jelly Roll and Lee meet at the governor's mansion

Lee said he never met Jelly Roll until Thursday, when the musician visited the governor's mansion over the pardon news. The two hugged in front of a lit Christmas tree and a fireplace decorated with holiday garlands.

Unlike recent high-profile federal pardons, which let people off the hook for prison, a Tennessee pardon serves as a statement of forgiveness for someone who has already completed a prison sentence. Pardons offer a path to restoring certain civil rights such as the right to vote, although there are some legal limitations, and the governor can specify the terms.

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Jelly Roll broke into country music with the 2023 album "Whitsitt Chapel" and crossover songs like "Need a Favor." He has won multiple CMT Awards, a CMA Award and also picked up seven career Grammy nominations.

Much of his music deals with overcoming adversity, like the song "Winning Streak" about someone's first day sober. Or the direct-and-to-the-point, "I Am Not Okay."

"When I first started doing this, I was just telling my story of my broken self," he told The Associated Press in an interview. "By the time I got through it, I realized that my story was the story of many. So now I'm not telling my story anymore. I'm getting to pull it right from the crevices of the people whose story's never been told."

Jelly Roll: "I was a part of the problem"

Before the parole board, Jelly Roll said he first fell in love with songwriting while in custody, calling music a therapeutic passion project that "would end up changing my life in ways that I never dreamed imaginable."

Outside of sold-out shows, he's testified before the U.S. Senate about the dangers of fentanyl, describing his drug-dealing younger self as "the uneducated man in the kitchen playing chemist with drugs I knew absolutely nothing about."

"I was a part of the problem," he told lawmakers at the time. "I am here now standing as a man that wants to be a part of the solution."

Jelly Roll's most serious convictions include a robbery at 17 and drug charges at 23. In the first case, a female acquaintance helped Jelly Roll and two armed accomplices steal \$350 from people in a home in 2002. Because the victims knew the female acquaintance, she and Jelly Roll were quickly arrested. Jelly Roll was unarmed, and was sentenced to one year in prison plus probation.

In another run-in 2008, police found marijuana and crack cocaine in his car, leading to eight years of court-ordered supervision.

Sheriff whose jail held Jelly Roll urged a pardon

Friends and civic leaders cited his transformation in backing a pardon.

Davidson County Sheriff Daron Hall, who runs Nashville's jail, wrote that Jelly Roll had an awakening in one of the jails he managed. Live Nation Entertainment CEO and President Michael Rapino cited Jelly Roll's donations from his performances to charities for at-risk youth.

"I think he has a chance and is in the process of rehabilitating a generation, and that's not just words," Hall said in a phone interview Thursday. "I'm talking about what I see we need in our country, is people who accept responsibility, accept the fact that they make mistakes and accept the fact that they need help."

The parole board began considering Jelly Roll's pardon application in October 2024, which marks the state's five-year timeline for eligibility after his sentence expired. Prominent Nashville attorney David Raybin represented Jelly Roll in the pardon case.

Lee's office said no one was pardoned Thursday who had a homicide or a sex-related conviction, or for any crime committed as an adult against a minor.

Wall Street rises after an encouraging inflation update, as Micron helps AI stocks stop their slide

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. stocks rose on Thursday following an encouraging report on inflation that could help the Federal Reserve keep cutting interest rates next year. A strong profit report from Micron Technology also helped AI stocks halt their sharp slides, at least for now.

The S&P 500 climbed 0.8% and broke a four-day losing streak. The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 65 points, or 0.1%, and the strength for tech stocks sent the Nasdaq composite up a market-leading 1.4%.

Some relief came from a report showing that inflation was less bad last month than economists expected. That could soothe nerves at the Fed, which is responsible for keeping inflation low and for keeping the job market strong.

Inflation is still higher than anyone would like, at 2.7% last month, but if it creeps closer to the Fed's

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target of 2%, Fed officials could feel more free to cut interest rates to help a slowing job market. Wall Street loves lower rates because they can boost the economy and prices for investments, even if they may also worsen inflation.

To be sure, some along Wall Street said Thursday's inflation update may not move the needle much at the Fed given how noisy economic reports have been following the U.S. government's earlier shutdown. Next month's update on inflation could provide a better gauge of what's actually happening. But a better-than-expected report on inflation is nevertheless better than the alternative.

Also helping to drive the U.S. stock market was Micron Technology, the seller of memory and storage for computers, which rallied 10.2% after reporting better profit and revenue for the latest quarter than analysts expected. CEO Sanjay Mehrotra said each of the company's business units enjoyed stronger revenue and made more in profit off each \$1 of that revenue.

Micron also gave forecasts for upcoming profit and revenue that blew past analysts' expectations, and Mehrotra credited its position as an "AI enabler," among other things.

Billions of dollars are flowing into artificial-intelligence technology, which helped superstar stocks like Nvidia lead the market for years.

But questions are rising about whether those stock prices shot too high and whether customers will get a good-enough return on their AI investments through bigger profits and productivity. Worries are also weighing on companies that are borrowing lots of money amid the AI frenzy.

Oracle and Broadcom have been at the center of such concerns recently, and their stock prices had been falling sharply since last week despite both reporting better profits for the latest quarter than analysts expected. On Thursday, Oracle added 0.9%, and Broadcom rose 1.1%.

Nvidia, the chip company that's become Wall Street's most influential because of its immense size, gained 1.8%.

Another winner was Trump Media & Technology Group, which jumped 41.9% to trim some of its steep loss for the year so far, 69.3% coming into the day. The company, which began with President Donald Trump's Truth Social platform and then moved into cryptocurrencies and various other lines of business, is now moving into nuclear power.

It's merging with TAE Technologies in an all-stock deal, and each company will own roughly half of the combined business. The companies said the deal would pair TMTG's ability to raise significant money by attracting investors with TAE's technology. They hope to get TAE's nuclear-fusion reactors, which would create power in a similar way as the sun does, running commercially.

Cintas rose 1.3% after the provider of work uniforms and cleaning supplies reported stronger profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected, while also announcing a program to send up to \$1 billion to shareholders by buying back its own stock.

Darden Restaurants, the company behind Olive Garden and LongHorn Steakhouse, climbed 1.8% even though its profit for the latest quarter fell short of analysts' expectations. Its growth in revenue topped forecasts, benefiting from both the opening of new restaurants and increased revenue at its older locations.

CarMax dropped 4.2% even though the auto retailer reported a stronger profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected. It said it may make less profit from each \$1 of revenue in sales of used autos during the current quarter, as it tries to get more competitive in the market. It also plans to increase spending on marketing to drive more customers to lots.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 53.33 points to 6,774.76. The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 65.88 to 47,951.85, and the Nasdaq composite jumped 313.04 to 23,006.36.

In stock markets abroad, indexes rose 0.6% in London, 0.8% in France and 1% in Germany after the Bank of England cut its key interest rate and the European Central Bank kept its steady.

Asian indexes were mixed, with stocks falling 1.5% in South Korea but adding 0.2% in Shanghai.

In the bond market, Treasury yields sank following the cooler-than-expected report on U.S. inflation.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury fell to 4.11% from 4.16% late Wednesday.

Democrats keep 2024 election review under wraps, saying a public rehash won't help them win in 2026

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Democrats will not issue a postelection report on their 2024 shellacking after all.

The Democratic National Committee head has decided not to publish a formal assessment of the party's defeat that returned Donald Trump to power and gave Republicans complete control in Washington.

Ken Martin, a Minnesota party leader who was elected national chair after Trump's election, ordered a thorough review of what went wrong and what could be done differently, with the intent they would circulate a report as Republicans did after their 2012 election performance. Martin now says the inquiry, which included hundreds of interviews, was complete but that there is no value in a public release of findings that he believes could lead to continued infighting and recriminations before the 2026 midterms when control of Congress will be at stake.

"Does this help us win?" Martin said in a statement Thursday. "If the answer is no, it's a distraction from the core mission."

Martin's decision, first reported by The New York Times, spares top Democrats from more scrutiny about their campaigns, including former President Joe Biden, who withdrew from the race after announcing his second-term run, and his vice president, Kamala Harris, who became the nominee and lost to Trump.

Keeping the report under wraps also means Martin does not have to take sides in the tug-of-war between moderates and progressives or make assessments about how candidates should handle issues that Trump capitalized on, such as transgender rights.

"We are winning again," Martin said.

Martin's announcement follows a successful string of 2025 races, both in special elections and off-year statewide votes, that suggest strong enthusiasm for Democratic candidates.

In November, Abigail Spanberger and Mikie Sherrill won races for governor in Virginia and New Jersey, respectively. In New York's mayoral election, Zohran Mamdani, a democratic socialist, defeated establishment Democrat-turned-independent Andrew Cuomo.

In U.S. House special elections throughout 2025, Democratic nominees have consistently outperformed the party's 2024 showing, often by double-digit percentages. Democrats have flipped state legislative districts and some statewide seats around the country, even in Republican-leaning places.

Although the DNC's report will not be made public, a committee aide said some conclusions will be integrated into the party's 2026 plans.

For example, the findings reflect a consensus that Democratic candidates did not adequately address voter concerns on public safety and immigration, two topics that Trump hammered in his comeback campaign, and that Democrats did not spend their money wisely despite outraising Republicans on the whole. They also found that Democrats must overhaul their digital outreach, especially to younger voters, a group where Trump saw key gains over Harris compared with previous elections.

Hubble Space Telescope spies dusty debris from two cosmic collisions

By ADITHI RAMAKRISHNAN AP Science Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — NASA's Hubble Space Telescope got a rare look at the aftermath of two cosmic collisions — and helped scientists solve a decades-old mystery.

Many years ago, scientists saw a dense, bright spot near a young star called Fomalhaut. They thought it could be a planet and continued to track it.

But in 2023, Hubble's pictures revealed something strange. The bright spot had vanished — and a new one had appeared — a sign that it wasn't a planet after all.

Scientists had stumbled on the dusty debris from two cosmic crashes. Massive space rocks slammed together to create clouds of dust that were thick enough to masquerade as planets. Over time, the remains

spread out and eventually disappeared altogether.

Scientists think the space rocks involved in the collision were at least 37 miles (60 kilometers) wide. It's rare to capture such clashes on camera, especially since theories suggest they only happen in the same vicinity about once every 100,000 years.

It's "highly unexpected" that this area "has now exhibited two, unique, massive collisions inside 20 years," said Joshua Lovell with the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics in an email. He had no role in the study, which was published Thursday in the journal *Science*.

The new observations could just be a lucky find. Or, they could mean that such smashups happen more often than scientists thought. It'll take more data to know for sure.

Collisions of large space rocks are essential to how planets like ours form and what they're made of. Studying them is "like taking a toddler picture of our solar system," said astrophysicist Meredith MacGregor with Johns Hopkins University, who was not involved with the study.

Researchers plan to track the new dust cloud in the coming years to see how it changes and eventually disintegrates.

The star near the collision site is in our cosmic neighborhood, just 25 light years from Earth. A light year is nearly 6 trillion miles.

By keeping an eye on it, scientists are "catching these violent explosions in real time," said study author Paul Kalas with the University of California, Berkeley.

Romanian court sentences US rapper Wiz Khalifa to 9 months for drug possession

BUCHAREST, Romania (AP) — American rapper Wiz Khalifa was sentenced by a court in Romania on Thursday to nine months in jail for drug possession, more than a year after he took part in a music festival in the Eastern European country.

Khalifa was stopped by Romanian police in July 2024 after allegedly smoking cannabis on stage at the Beach, Please! Festival in Costinesti, a coastal resort in Constanta County. Prosecutors said the rapper, whose real name is Cameron Jibril Thomaz, was found in possession of more than 18 grams of cannabis, and that he consumed some on stage.

The Constanta Court of Appeal handed down the sentence after Khalifa was convicted of "possession of dangerous drugs, without right, for personal consumption," according to Romania's national news agency, Agerpres. The decision is final.

The decision came after a lower court in Constanta County in April issued Khalifa a criminal fine of 3,600 lei (\$830) for "illegal possession of dangerous drugs," but prosecutors appealed the court's decision and sought a higher sentence.

Romania has some of the harsher drugs laws in Europe. Possession of cannabis for personal use is criminalized and can result in a prison sentence of between three months and two years, or a fine.

It isn't clear whether Romanian authorities will seek to file an extradition request, since Khalifa is a U.S. citizen and doesn't reside in Romania.

The 38-year-old Pittsburgh rapper rose to prominence with his breakout mixtape "Kush + Orange Juice." On stage in Romania last summer, the popular rapper smoked a large, hand-rolled cigarette while singing his hit "Young, Wild & Free."

Brian Walshe is sentenced to life in prison for the murder of his wife, whose body was never found

By MICHAEL CASEY and PATRICK WHITTLE Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — A Boston-area man was sentenced Thursday to life in prison for the grisly murder of his wife, who disappeared nearly three years ago and whose body has never been found.

Brian Walshe, 50, was convicted Monday of first-degree murder in the killing of Ana Walshe, 39. The

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sentence carries no possibility of parole.

He pleaded guilty in November to misleading police and illegally disposing of a body after admitting he had dismembered her body and disposed of it in a dumpster. He said he did so only after panicking when he found she had died in bed.

Judge Diane Freniere called Walshe's crimes "barbaric and incomprehensible" and she chastised him for "deceitful and manipulative behavior."

Walshe showed no emotion as the sentence was read.

Children 'without their mother's hand to hold'

Before the sentencing, Ana Walshe's sister Aleksandra Dimitrijevic told the court how the death has devastated her family, especially because they have no body to bury.

"I struggle with the grief that comes without warning, hoping every morning that this is just a terrible dream," she said. "The most painful part of this loss is knowing her children must now grow up without their mother's hand to hold. They now face a lifetime of milestones, big and small, where her absence will be deeply and painfully felt."

The Walshe's were married for about six years, and their three children are in state custody.

No chance to properly grieve

Walshe was also sentenced to 19 to 25 years for witness intimidation and two to three years for improper disposal of a body. Those sentences are to run consecutive to his life sentence, the judge ruled.

Walshe's lawyer, Kelli Porges, described the consecutive sentencing — which prosecutors requested due to the severity of the crimes — as "excessive." Freniere disagreed.

"You had no regard for the lifelong mental harm that your criminal acts inflicted on your then two, four and six year old sons, not only in taking their mother, but also, as is specific to this charge, and never being able to properly grieve that loss, to say goodbye to their mom," Freniere said to Walsh during sentencing.

Assistant District Attorney Gregory Connor defended the sentence.

"When I looked behind me after the closing arguments, I realized that was the closest day that those people had come to a wake, because they never got together to mourn her. And that happened three years later," Connor said.

"We recognize it's harsh," he said of the sentencing recommendation, "but we think it's appropriate based on the facts."

Online searches reveal dismemberment and disposal plan

Ana Walshe, a real estate agent who immigrated from Serbia, was last seen early Jan. 1, 2023, after a New Year's Eve dinner at the couple's home.

When initially questioned by investigators, Walshe said his wife had been called to Washington, D.C., for a work emergency. But witnesses testified there was no evidence she took a ride service to the airport or boarded a flight. Walshe didn't contact her employer until Jan. 4.

During the trial, prosecutors leaned heavily on digital evidence found on devices connected to Walshe, including online searches for "dismemberment and best ways to dispose of a body," "how long before a body starts to smell" and "hacksaw best tool to dismember."

Investigators also found searches on a laptop that included "how long for someone missing to inherit," "how long missing to be dead," and "can you throw away body parts," prosecutors told the jury.

Surveillance video also showed a man resembling Walshe throwing what appeared to be heavy trash bags into a dumpster not far from the couple's home. A subsequent search of a trash processing facility near his mother's home uncovered bags containing a hatchet, hammer, shears, hacksaw, towels and a protective Tyvek suit, cleaning agents, a Prada purse, boots like the ones Ana Walshe was last seen wearing and a COVID-19 vaccination card with her name.

Prosecutors told the jury that the Massachusetts State Crime Laboratory examined some of the items and found Ana and Brian Walshe's DNA on the Tyvek suit and Ana Walshe's DNA on the hatchet, hacksaw and other items.

A failing marriage and a life insurance policy

Prosecutors floated several possible motives for the killing.

An insurance executive testified that Brian Walshe was the sole beneficiary of Ana Walshe's \$1 million life insurance policy, suggesting a financial motive. But prosecutors also portrayed a marriage that was falling apart; Brian Walshe was confined at their home in the affluent coastal community of Cohasset, about 15 miles (24 kilometers) southeast of Boston, awaiting sentencing on an art fraud case. Ana Walshe meanwhile commuted from their home to Washington, D.C., where she worked.

The year before she died, his wife had started an affair, details of which were shared in court by her boyfriend William Fastow. Brian Walshe's attorney denied that his client knew about the affair.

In his opening, Walshe's attorney, Larry Tipton, argued it was not a murder case but what he called a "sudden unexplained death." He said the couple loved each other and were planning for the future.

But Walshe's defense never called a witness and Brian Walshe declined to testify.

During the trial, prosecutors did an excellent job of introducing circumstantial evidence and providing the breadcrumbs that led the jury down the path toward finding premeditation, said Daniel Medwed, a law professor at Northeastern University.

"Here, the evidence about dismemberment and improper disposal of a body was overwhelming, so I suspect the defense goal was to concede that through the guilty pleas, and make the case all about the murder and the absence of direct evidence about intent and cause of death," Medwed said.

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

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

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

Nevertheless, the Department of Justice 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 her on a 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 monthslong effort to prosecute people accused of assaulting or hindering federal officers while protesting the Republican president'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.

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— 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 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, where a former Afghan soldier who had worked for the CIA has been charged.

The specter of antifa

The administration has deployed — or sought to deploy — troops to the four cities where AP examined the criminal cases: Washington; Los Angeles; Portland, Oregon; and Chicago. Judges have blocked the deployments in Portland and Chicago, citing a lack of credible evidence there's any organized rebellion and finding that Trump administration officials had often exaggerated or lied about threats posed by protesters. A district judge and an 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 a "domestic terrorist organization."

"President Trump will not turn a blind-eye to the sustained campaign of violence destroying American cities

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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.

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 southwest 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

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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.

US says price increases eased last month but data may be distorted and Americans aren't feeling it

By PAUL WISEMAN and ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Business Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) — At a time when Americans are frustrated and angry over the high cost of living, the government released a report Thursday showing that inflation had cooled unexpectedly in November.

But economists quickly warned that that last month's numbers were suspect because they'd been delayed and likely distorted by the 43-day federal shutdown. And most Americans have not felt any let up in the high prices they are paying for food, insurance, utilities and other basic necessities.

The Labor Department reported Thursday that its consumer price index rose 2.7% in November from a year earlier. Yet, year-over-year inflation remains well above the Federal Reserve's 2% target. Americans, dismayed by high prices, handed big victories to Democrats in local and state elections last month.

The inflation report was delayed eight days by the shutdown, which also prevented the Labor Department from compiling overall numbers for consumer prices and core inflation in October and disrupted the usual data-collecting process. Thursday's report gave investors, businesses and policymakers their first look at CPI since the September numbers were released on Oct. 24.

Consumer prices had risen 3% in September from a year earlier, and forecasters had expected the November CPI to match that year-over-year increase.

"It's likely a bit distorted," said Diane Swonk, chief economist at the tax and consulting firm KPMG. "The good news is that it's cooling. We'll take a win when we can get it."

Still, Swonk added: "The data is truncated, and we just don't know how much of it to trust." By disrupting the economy — especially government contracting — the shutdown may have contributed to a cooling in prices, she said.

Kay Haigh, global co-head of fixed income and liquidity solutions at Goldman Sachs Asset Management, warned that the November numbers were "noisy ... The canceling of the October report makes month-on-month comparisons impossible, for example, while the truncated information-gathering process given the shutdown could have caused systematic biases in the data."

Many economists don't expect to get a reliable read on inflation until next month when the Labor Department releases CPI numbers for December.

Energy prices, driven up by sharply higher fuel oil prices, rose 4.2% in November. Excluding volatile food and energy prices, so-called core inflation rose 2.6%, compared with a 3% year-over-year gain in September and the lowest since March 2021.

U.S. inflation remains stubbornly high, partly because of President Donald Trump's decision to impose double-digit taxes on imports from almost every country on earth along with targeted tariffs on specific products like steel, aluminum and autos.

The president's tariffs have so far proved less inflationary than economists feared. But they do put upward pressure on prices and complicate matters at the Fed, which is trying to decide whether to keep cutting its benchmark interest rate to support a sputtering job market or whether to hold off until inflationary pressures ease. The central bank last week decided to reduce the rate for the third time this year, but Fed officials signaled that they expect just one cut in 2026.

"The Fed will instead focus on the December CPI released in mid-January, just two weeks before its next meeting, as a more accurate bellwether for inflation," said Haigh at Goldman Sachs.

Trump delivered a politically charged speech Wednesday that aired live during prime time on network television, seeking to pin the blame for economic challenges on Democrats.

The speech was a rehash of his recent messaging that has so far been unable to calm public anxiety about the rising cost of groceries, housing, utilities and other basic goods.

As the holiday season approaches, Americans are dipping into savings, scouring for bargains and feeling like the overall economy is sputtering, a new AP-NORC poll finds.

The vast majority of U.S. adults say they've noticed higher than usual prices for groceries, electricity

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and holiday gifts in recent months, according to the survey from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Roughly half of Americans say it's harder than usual to afford the things they want to give as holiday gifts, and similar numbers are delaying big purchases or cutting back on nonessential purchases more than they would normally.

Trump has promised an economic boom, yet inflation has stayed elevated and the job market has weakened in the wake of his import taxes.

Trump's tariffs are taking a toll on companies like Wolverine Worldwide, which makes footwear brands like Merrell and Saucony. Facing extra tariff costs of \$10 million this year and \$55 million in 2026, the Rockford, Michigan, company had to increase prices between 5% and 8% on some products in June, and will have to raise prices again next year. It's put a freeze on hiring and capital investments.

The company is getting squeezed even as it diversifies its sourcing network away from China, which now makes less than 10% of its products. During Trump's first term, Wolverine shifted production to Vietnam. Now it's moving to Bangladesh, Cambodia and Indonesia.

The problem isn't just the cost of the tariffs. It's the uncertainty caused by the unpredictable way that Trump rolls them out. "From a business leader's perspective, it's one thing if there's bad news," said Wolverine CEO Christopher Hufnagel. "Just tell me what the bad news is, and I'll go work to try to solve for it. It's the uncertainty of how it actually plays out that causes so much trouble because then we're modeling all these different scenarios and it seems like things can change in the middle of the night."

Pope names fellow Chicagoan, Bishop Ronald Hicks, as new archbishop of New York

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Leo XIV on Thursday made his most important U.S. appointment to date, naming a fellow Chicagoan as the next archbishop of New York to lead one of the biggest U.S. archdioceses as it navigates relations with the Trump administration and its immigration crackdown.

Bishop Ronald Hicks, the current bishop of Joliet, Illinois, replaces the retiring Cardinal Timothy Dolan, a prominent conservative figure in the U.S. Catholic hierarchy. Hicks takes over after Dolan last week finalized a plan to establish a \$300 million fund to compensate victims of sexual abuse who had sued the archdiocese.

Hicks addressed the matter during his news conference Thursday.

"As a church, we can never rest in our efforts to prevent abuse, to protect children and to care for survivors," he said. "While this work is challenging, it's difficult, it's painful, I hope it will continue to help in the areas of accountability, transparency and healing."

Dolan had submitted his resignation in February, as required when he turned 75. But the Vatican often waits to make important leadership changes in dioceses if there is lingering abuse litigation or other governance matters that need to be resolved by the outgoing bishop.

The handover, though, represents a significant new chapter for the U.S. Catholic Church, which is forging a new era with the Chicago-born Leo as the first American pope. Leo and the U.S. hierarchy have already shown willingness to challenge the Trump administration on immigration and other issues, and Hicks is seen as very much a Leo-style bishop.

"I accept this appointment with humility and an open heart," Hicks said. "I ask for your support and your prayers, and I ask God to support us as always."

As he referred to Hicks as "an early Christmas gift for the Archdiocese," Dolan said he didn't know Hicks before he was chosen as his successor. "The last week, since I found out, I've gotten to know him, and I already love him and appreciate him and trust him."

A call for solidarity with immigrants

Hicks, 58, grew up in South Holland, Illinois, a short distance from the suburban Chicago childhood home

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of Leo, the former Robert Prevost.

Like Prevost, who spent 20 years as a missionary in Peru, Hicks worked for five years in El Salvador heading a church-run orphanage program that operated in nine Latin American and Caribbean countries. Hicks said he was excited about getting to know the New York area and the people who live there, but jokingly noted he needed to make a controversial statement that "I'm a Cubs fan and I love deep dish pizza," an homage to his Chicago roots.

"Taking a new position as archbishop of New York is an enormous responsibility, but I can honestly say that Bishop Hicks is up to the task," said the Rev. Eusebius Martis, who has known Hicks since the mid-1980s and worked with him at Mundelein Seminary, the Chicago archdiocesan seminary.

He said New York was lucky to have him.

"He is a wonderful man, always thoughtful and attentive to the needs of seminarians," Martis, professor of sacramental theology at the Pontifical Liturgical Institute of Sant'Anselmo, the Benedictine University in Rome, said in an email.

In November, Hicks endorsed a special message from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops condemning the Trump administration's immigration raids, which have targeted Chicago in particular.

In a statement then urging Catholics to share the message, Hicks said it "affirms our solidarity with all our brothers and sisters as it expresses our concerns, opposition, and hopes with clarity and conviction. It is grounded in the church's enduring commitment to the Catholic social teaching of human dignity and a call for meaningful immigration reform."

A similar hometown

Though they both hail from Chicago, Hicks only met the future pope in 2024, when then-Cardinal Prevost visited one of Hicks' parishes and took part in a question and answer conversation for the public.

Hicks, who sat in the front pew, said he learned that day what sort of future pope Leo would be and said he liked what he saw both in his public remarks and then in their private conversation. "Five minutes turned into 10 minutes and the 10 minutes turned into 15 and the 15 turned into 20," Hicks told local Chicago WGN-TV news after Leo's May election.

He said he recognized their shared backgrounds and priorities to build bridges. "We grew up literally in the same radius, in the same neighborhood together. We played in the same parks, went swimming in the same pools, like the same pizza places."

Hicks served as a parish priest in Chicago and dean of training at Mundelein Seminary before Chicago Cardinal Blase Cupich made him vicar general of the archdiocese in 2015. Three years later, Hicks was made an auxiliary bishop, and in 2020 Pope Francis named him bishop of Joliet, serving around 520,000 Catholics in seven counties.

Cupich, seen as a progressive in the U.S. church, has been a close adviser to both Francis and Leo, and Hicks' appointment to such a prominent job likely could not have come without Cupich's endorsement.

A pastor for New York

The New York archdiocese is among the largest in the nation, serving roughly 2.5 million Catholics in Manhattan, the Bronx and Staten Island in New York City, as well as seven counties to the north.

The gregarious Dolan is one of the most high-profile Catholic leaders in the United States and a prominent voice in the city.

Dolan is widely viewed as conservative, writing a 2018 Wall Street Journal column headlined "The Democrats Abandon Catholics." Yet in 2023, he also wrote a letter of welcome to a conference at Fordham University celebrating outreach programs aimed at LGBTQ+ Catholics, and he welcomed LGBTQ+ participation in the city's annual St. Patrick's Day parade.

Dolan has ties to the current Republican administration. As archbishop of New York, Dolan hosted the annual Al Smith white-tie dinner that raises millions of dollars for Catholic charities. It has traditionally offered candidates from both parties the chance to trade lighthearted barbs ahead of Election Day, though in 2024 only Donald Trump participated since Democratic nominee Kamala Harris declined the invitation.

Trump, who has long-standing connections to his native New York City, later had the cardinal pray at his inauguration and appointed Dolan to his new Religious Liberty Commission.

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Dolan was Trump's pick to succeed Pope Francis, though Dolan did criticize the president for sharing an AI-generated image of Trump, who is not a Catholic, dressed up as a pope before the May conclave that ultimately elected Leo.

Dolan was named archbishop of New York by Pope Benedict XVI in February 2009 after serving as archbishop of Milwaukee. He was made cardinal in 2012 and headed the U.S. bishops conference from 2010-2013.

A first task to oversee abuse settlements

In one of his biggest first tasks, Hicks will have to oversee the implementation of the abuse settlement fund that Dolan finalized, which is to be paid for by reducing the archdiocesan budget and selling off assets. The aim is to cover settlements for most, if not all of the roughly 1,300 outstanding abuse claims against the archdiocese.

Hicks is no stranger to managing the fallout of the abuse scandal, after the Joliet diocese under his predecessors and the rest of the Illinois church came under scathing criticism by the state's attorney general in 2023.

A five-year investigation found that 451 Catholic clergy abused 1,997 children in Illinois between 1950 and 2019. Hicks had been appointed to lead the Joliet church in 2020. The attorney general's report was generally positive in recognizing the diocese's current child protection policies, but documented several cases where previous Joliet bishops moved known abusers around, disparaged victims and refused to accept responsibility for their role in enabling the abuse.

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

TEHRAN, 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 red soil flowed into the sea and turned the water shades of deep red.

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, angering China

By MATTHEW LEE and SIMINA MISTREANU Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's 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 the Republican president, who made scant mention of foreign policy issues and did not speak about China or Taiwan. 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.

If approved by Congress, it would be the largest-ever U.S. weapons package to Taiwan, exceeding the total

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amount of \$8.4 billion in U.S. arms sales to Taiwan during President Joe Biden's Democratic administration.

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.

The eight sales agreements amount to \$11.15 billion, according to Taiwan's Defense Ministry.

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 sale 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.

Bit by bit, small US groups chip away at historic levels of social isolation

By PETER SMITH Associated Press

Across the country, small groups are working to rebuild social connection amid rising loneliness in their own modest ways.

It sounds simple — building relationships. But they're up against powerful cultural forces.

By many measures, Americans are socially disconnected at historic levels.

They're joining civic groups, clubs and unions at lower rates than in generations. Recent polling shows that membership rates in religious congregations are around the lowest in nearly a century. Americans have fewer close friends than they used to. They trust each other less. They're hanging out less in shared public places like coffee shops and parks.

About one in six adults feels lonely all or most of the time. It's the same for about one in four young adults.

No one has a simple solution. But small groups with diverse missions and makeups are recognizing that social disconnection is a big part of the problems they're trying to address, and reconnection is part of the solution.

There's a Baltimore neighborhood trying to build a culture of giving and mutual support, and a Pittsburgh ministry focused on healing those wounded by poverty and violence. In Kentucky, a cooperative is supporting small farmers in hopes of strengthening their rural communities, while groups in Ohio are restoring neighborhoods and neighborliness.

"We need to build a movement centered around connection," former Surgeon General Vivek Murthy told The Associated Press. "The good news is that that movement is already starting to build. ... What we have to do now is accelerate that movement."

In 2023, Murthy issued a report on an "epidemic of loneliness and isolation," similar to previous surgeon generals' reports on smoking and obesity. Social isolation and loneliness "are independent risk factors for several major health conditions, including cardiovascular disease, dementia, depression, and premature mortality," it said.

Finding 'personal connections' in Akron

Murthy recently met with groups working toward community repair in Akron, Ohio, as part of his new Together Project, supported by the Knight Foundation.

In one meeting, leaders of the Well Community Development Corp. told of fostering affordable housing and small businesses in a marginalized neighborhood and cultivating social gatherings, whether at the local elementary school or the coffee shop it launched in the former church that houses its offices.

One encouraging development: Families have resumed trick-or-treating after years of largely dormant Halloweens in the neighborhood.

"Those types of things make a big difference," said Zac Kohl, executive director of The Well. "It's not just a safe, dry roof over your head. It's the personal connections."

Across town, more local leaders met in a community room overlooking Summit Lake.

The urban lakefront, once obscured by overgrowth, now draws joggers, fishers, boaters, people grilling. Summit Lake Nature Center provides educational programs and urban garden plots. The lakefront adjoins a public housing development and a recreational trail.

"It's strategically located to try to get people in the space to talk and interact with one another," said Erin Myers, director of real estate development for the Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority.

"I love that you've worked on creating spaces where people can gather and connecting them with nature," Murthy told the gathering.

Neighbors 'responsible for each other' in Baltimore

On an October afternoon on Baltimore's outskirts, neighbors set out trays heaped with vegan jambalaya, beet salad, fresh-roasted goat meat and more. A rooster crowed insistently from a nearby backyard.

Before the neighborhood feast, dozens of visitors gathered for a walking tour. Ulysses Archie described

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how this short block of Collins Avenue became a hub of backyard farming, environmental cleanup and neighborly connection.

Visitors saw hens and rabbits raised by neighbors, and they explored a "Peace Park" created out of an abandoned lot, which now hosts food distributions and summer camps for neighborhood kids.

"The core of what we do is building relationships, and building relationships with nature," Archie said.

Neighbors described helping to clear overgrowth and create footpaths in an adjacent urban forest. They described their "intentional" community — not a formal program, but a commitment to caring for each other and the wider community, sharing anything from potlucks to rides to child care.

Michael Sarbanes and his late wife, Jill Wrigley, moved to the neighborhood three decades ago. They spent long hours of youth mentoring and other services.

"We were burning out," Sarbanes recalled. They recognized, "We need to be doing this in community."

They reached out to other families involved in social justice work. Though not everyone on the block is an active participant, several moved in or got involved over the years.

Some belong to a local Catholic Worker group. Others are Protestants, Muslims, those with no religion, "but believing we are responsible for each other," said resident Suzanne Fontanesi.

Participants include Ulysses and Chrysalinn Archie, who founded the Baltimore Gift Economy, a small nonprofit.

Years earlier, Ulysses Archie suffered an injury that left him struggling financially and in spirit.

He joined an urban farming program, "put my hands in the soil, and my life was kind of normal again," he said. That healing work helped inspire the backyard farming.

While the Archies appreciated the charities that supported their family during his long recovery, they often felt treated impersonally.

With the Baltimore Gift Economy, they're seeking a more personal approach. A couple times a week, for example, they place food donated by nearby organic stores at the Peace Park. Participants take what suits their diet and needs.

Participants are respectful and don't hoard, Ulysses Archie said.

The food isn't labeled "free."

"Free' is really transactional," Archie said. "When we present it as a gift, it's really relational." The group encourages recipients "to realize that they have something to give."

Myk Lewis, 56, who returned to Baltimore after years in California, tends chickens and rabbits in his backyard. Neighbors support him as he cares for his aging mother.

"I probably wouldn't have been able to move back and start my life over if it wasn't for them," he said.

Connecting to the land and each other in Kentucky

On another October day in the small Kentucky town of New Castle, a guitarist played folk-rock classics as patrons lined up beneath a tent pavilion.

Area chefs served them smoked brisket with salsa, beef Wellington bites, Thai beef salad and other specialties.

But this "Beef Bash" was about much more than beef.

Its sponsor, a cooperative of local farmers who raise grass-fed cattle, coordinates the processing and marketing of their beef to area restaurants and individuals. The program aims to provide a dependable income — helping small farmers stay on the farm and, in turn, strengthening rural communities.

"With just a little help, people and land can heal," said Mary Berry, executive director of the Berry Center of New Castle, which launched the cooperative.

The cooperative adapts methods from a former tobacco quota system that provided some stability for small farmers. After that program's demise in 2004, "people lost what they held in common, which was an agricultural economy and calendar," Berry said. "We also needed each other."

The surrounding community remains rural, but less tight-knit, she said, as many commute elsewhere or farm at a larger scale.

The center promotes the agrarian principles of her father, the novelist and essayist Wendell Berry.

At the end of the Beef Bash, farmers cheerfully gathered for a group photo, trading stories of tractor

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mishaps and middle of the night calving.

They were finding community and mutual support.

"If we keep our farms going, we're all winning," said one farmer, Ashley Pyles.

Another, Kylene Douglas, underscored the effects of strained social bonds.

"Everything's so digital, and everything's with the phone," Douglas said. "We're disconnected not only from where our food comes from, but just the center of life. Fewer people are going to church. Rural communities are having a hard time."

Stronger farms can strengthen these communities, he said. "Everybody should be able to have the opportunity to live here."

Healing 'block by block' in Pittsburgh

On a recent weekday at the Neighborhood Resilience Project in Pittsburgh, some residents were upstairs, training for a project to get more people qualified to perform CPR in marginalized neighborhoods.

Downstairs amid the fragrant incense of St. Moses the Black Orthodox Church, worshippers were concluding a prayer liturgy. Afterward, they set out folding tables for a light meal of soup, hummus and conversation.

The parish is closely fused with the Neighborhood Resilience Project, an Orthodox social service agency.

They share a modest brick building in Pittsburgh's Hill District, a historically Black neighborhood just blocks from downtown but a world away — long suffering from crime, gun violence, racism and displacement.

The project's mission is "trauma-informed community development." It hosts a food pantry and free health clinic. It deploys community health deputies and provides emotional support at violent crime scenes.

"In our work, community building is absolutely the core intervention," said the Rev. Paul Abernathy, its founder and CEO.

Social isolation "is no longer simply the experience of marginalized communities," he observed. "Now it seems as though the infection of isolation has spread across society."

The center serves people regardless of faith. Not everyone on staff belongs to the church, though the church is attracting members.

"It felt like real community, and people my age who want to actually do some things and not just talk about doing something," said Cecelia Olson, a recent college graduate. "We're going to feed people because they're hungry, and it's not that complicated."

Fidelia Gaba, a University of Pittsburgh medical student who grew up in another church tradition, recently was confirmed at St. Moses.

One Sunday, she felt emotionally distanced and couldn't even sing. "I remember being carried by the church," she said. "What was broken in me was healed."

Project workers are reaching the isolated. Kim Lowe, a community health deputy, helps residents get to a food bank, address a child's conflict at school, "whatever the need is," she said.

One recent afternoon, Lowe visited Tricia Berger in the small apartment she shares with her daughter and grandson. Berger said she has multiple sclerosis and struggles with depression and anxiety. Lowe provides practical help, and the two enjoy conversing and watching comedy routines.

"We connect well, with common interests, as well as her helping me get beyond my loneliness and conquering my fear," Berger said.

For Abernathy, such efforts exemplify community healing.

"It has to be healed person by person, relationship by relationship, block by block," he said. "Honestly, neighborhood by neighborhood, it can be healed."

Today in History: December 19, Bill Clinton is impeached

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Friday, Dec. 19, the 353rd day of 2025. There are 12 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Dec. 19, 1998, President Bill Clinton was impeached by the U.S. House of Representatives for perjury and obstruction of justice. (He was subsequently acquitted by the Senate.)

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Also on this date:

In 1777, during the American Revolutionary War, Gen. George Washington led his army of more than 12,000 soldiers to Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, to camp for the winter.

In 1907, 239 workers died in an explosion at the Darr coal mine near Van Meter, Pennsylvania.

In 1960, fire broke out on the hangar deck of the nearly completed aircraft carrier USS Constellation at the New York Naval Shipyard, killing 50 civilian workers.

In 1972, Apollo 17 splashed down in the Pacific, concluding the Apollo program of crewed lunar landings.

In 2008, citing imminent danger to the national economy, President George W. Bush ordered a \$17.4 billion emergency bailout of the U.S. auto industry.

In 2011, North Korea announced the death two days earlier of leader Kim Jong Il; North Koreans marched by the thousands to mourn while state media proclaimed his youngest son, Kim Jong Un, as the nation's new leader.

In 2016, a truck rammed into a crowded Christmas market in central Berlin, killing 12 people in an attack claimed by the Islamic State. (The suspected attacker was killed in a police shootout four days later.)

In 2023, a strong earthquake rocked a mountainous region of northwestern China, killing 131 people, reducing homes to rubble and leaving residents outside in below-freezing winter weather.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Tim Reid is 81. Singer Janie Fricke is 78. Actor Jennifer Beals is 62. Basketball Hall of Famer Arvydas Sabonis is 61. Olympic skiing gold medalist Alberto Tomba is 59. Actor Kristy Swanson is 56. Model Tyson Beckford is 55. Actor Alyssa Milano is 53. Football Hall of Famer Warren Sapp is 53. Actor Jake Gyllenhaal (JIH'-lihn-hahl) is 45. Actor Annie Murphy is 39. Journalist Ronan Farrow is 38.