

Groton Daily Independent

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Friday, Jan. 30, 2026

- School Breakfast: Breakfast boats.
- School Lunch: Garlic Cheese Bread, Cooked carrots.
- Girls Wrestling at Aberdeen Central Invitational, 3:30 p.m.
- Boys Wrestling hosts Britton-Hecla, 6 p.m.

Saturday, Jan. 31, 2026

- Groton Invitational Wrestling Tournament, 10 a.m.
- Boys DakXII/NEC Basketball Clash at Madison: Groton area vs. Vermillion at 2:45 p.m. in the Main Gym.

Groton Daily Independent
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1440

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

Midnight Funding Deadline

Senate Democrats and the White House struck a deal yesterday that could fund a large portion of the government through September. A spending bill must pass in the Senate and House before midnight today to avert a partial government shutdown.

The deal would separate Department of Homeland Security funding from the broader spending package, which includes increased funding for cancer research, air traffic controllers, and the military. Homeland Security would be funded at current levels until Feb. 13, as lawmakers continue negotiating restrictions on the Trump administration's immigration crackdown. Democrats outlined a series of demands after two Americans were fatally shot in Minneapolis this month, including requiring agents to remove face masks, obtain arrest warrants, and be subject to a uniform code of conduct.

Last year's record 43-day government shutdown—driven by a fight over expiring healthcare subsidies—ended after a small group of Democrats reached an agreement with Republicans to fund the government through today.

Iranian Crackdown Continues

Iranian authorities have arrested multiple doctors and medical workers accused of treating wounded anti-government protesters, according to human rights groups. The arrests come amid a sweeping government crackdown on nationwide unrest that activists say has killed thousands.

Doctors and nurses have reported large numbers of patients with gunshot wounds and say security forces have removed some injured protesters from emergency wards. The EU yesterday designated Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard as a terrorist organization, and a US-based activist agency says it has verified more than 6,000 deaths, with over 17,000 additional cases under investigation. The Iranian government acknowledged over 3,000 dead.

The news comes as Israeli and Saudi defense and intelligence officials met in Washington to discuss options on Iran—Israeli representatives were expected to share Iran-related intelligence, while Saudi officials were expected to press to avoid a wider war and urge de-escalation. The US has expanded its military presence in the region, but it remains unclear whether it will use force.

Artificial Lungs Prevail

A man survived 48 hours without lungs using an artificial system until he was well enough to receive a double transplant. The landmark procedure took place nearly three years ago, with the patient since developing good function with his donated lungs.

In 2023, the 33-year-old developed flu, pneumonia, and acute respiratory distress syndrome. In severe cases, ARDS is treated with life support to give patients time to fight infection. In this case, however, the patient's heart stopped, his lungs were melting, and his kidneys had begun to fail. Surgeons at Northwestern Memorial Hospital decided to remove both lungs and use a four-component "total artificial lung" system to drain, filter, and return oxygenated blood to the patient's heart at a responsive flow rate.

Dr. Ankit Bharat, who designed the system, hopes it can be used in similar cases of severe ARDS, which impacts a portion of the roughly 190,000 US cases per year.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka advances to fourth straight Australian Open women's final Saturday, where she will face No. 5 Elena Rybakina.

Boxer Gervonta Davis arrested after two-week search spurred by alleged assault on ex-girlfriend.

"Inception" and "Clueless" among 25 films added to National Film Registry by Library of Congress for cultural, historical, or aesthetic importance (More, w/full list)

Shakira sets record for highest-grossing Latin artist tour after "Las Mujeres Ya No Lloran" earns \$421.6M across 86 shows.

Grammy-winning musician Wynton Marsalis to step down as Lincoln Center jazz director after nearly 40 years.

Science & Technology

Google rolls out Project Genie, an AI tool enabling users to build interactive worlds from photos, prompts.

San Francisco jury finds ex-Google engineer guilty of sharing proprietary Google AI information with tech companies in China.

Polar bears gain weight in the Arctic Norwegian archipelago despite a warming climate, suggesting they are shifting their diets to land-based prey, such as reindeer and walruses, as shrinking ice cover makes seal hunting more difficult.

Scientists discover potentially habitable planet roughly 146 light-years from Earth, four times closer than the next best planet in a habitable zone; surface temperature may be below minus 94 degrees Fahrenheit.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close down (S&P 500 -0.1%, Dow -0.1%, Nasdaq -0.7%) as Microsoft shares fall 10% over AI spending concerns.

Southwest shares rise the most since 1978 after predicting quadruple profit growth this year.

Apple acquires Israeli AI audio startup Q.ai, reportedly for roughly \$2B, making it Apple's second-largest acquisition in history.

Apple tops Q1 earnings estimates, sees 16% annual sales growth amid increased iPhone demand.

Investment giant Fidelity launches dollar-pegged stablecoin on Ethereum, dubbed the Fidelity Digital Dollar.

How do stablecoins work? (1440 Topics)

Politics & World Affairs

Border czar Tom Homan plans to draw down ICE operations in Minnesota, calls for local government's cooperation.

Justice Department charges suspect who targeted Rep. Ilhan Omar (D, MN-5) at a town hall; substance in syringe identified as apple cider vinegar.

Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME) says ICE ended operations in the state.

At least 60 people died in winter storms across the US.

Bomb cyclone expected to hit parts of the East Coast this weekend.

See 101.

Pakistan, Thailand, and Malaysia screen for Nipah virus at airports after cases are reported in India.

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Locke, Dunker lead Lady Tigers in win over Webster Area

The Groton Area girls basketball team got back on the winning track Thursday night in Webster, rolling past the Webster Area Bearcats 58-28.

Groton came out firing, jumping to a 10-0 lead and knocking down six three-pointers in the opening quarter to spark the offense. The Lady Tigers built a commanding advantage early and never looked back, taking a 34-17 lead into halftime and stretching it to 51-25 by the end of the third quarter before emptying the bench with 6:25 remaining. Groton went on to close out the night with the 30-point win.

"When the shot goes in, everything's easier," said Groton head coach Matt Locke. "I thought that was the best we've looked in the half court all year, and the best we've moved the basketball by far."

While the Tigers' shooting set the tone, Locke noted that defensive discipline remains a point of emphasis. He pointed to a stretch in the second half where Groton had several blown assignments before correcting things after a timeout.

Jerica Locke led the Tigers with 16 points, including four three-pointers. Rylee Dunker followed with 15 points, including two from beyond the arc. Jayden Penning added nine points, while Taryn Traphagen scored seven. McKenna Tietz finished with five points, Kella Tracy had four, and Talli Wright added two.

Locke said Dunker's night stood out, both statistically and in overall play.

"Rylee had a very productive night," he said. "Hopefully we can go back and watch this game and carry that confidence forward."

Webster was led by Georgia Vergeldt with seven points. Ryan Johnson and Chloe Mammenga each scored five, Bailee Ninke added four, Kenzie Kuecker had three, and Karli Sandness and Mallory Steiner chipped in two apiece.

With the win, Groton improves to 9-5 on the season and will host Florence-Henry on Monday. Locke said the focus down the stretch won't be so much on opponents as it will be on the Tigers themselves.

"Everything from here on out is about us," he said. "We need to play with the confidence, calmness, and togetherness we had tonight, even in the games that feel bigger. If all five players do their job for 32 minutes, we'll live with the result."



Taryn Traphagen drives to the basket.

(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



Jaedyn Penning launches a three-pointer.

(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



Talli Wright puts up a shot.

(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

Junior Varsity

Groton completed the sweep with a 27-19 junior varsity victory. The game featured several lead changes early, with Groton holding a 10-7 edge after the first quarter. Webster tied the game at 10 before Groton led 16-12 at halftime. The Bearcats again tied it at 16 in the third quarter, but the Tigers responded, taking an 18-16 lead into the fourth and pulling away late.

Sydney Locke led Groton with 11 points, including three three-pointers. Kella Tracy added nine points, McKenna Krause scored four, Ashlynn Warrington had two, and Teagan Hatten finished with one. Webster was led by Chloe Kvernevig with 12 points.

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C Game

Groton made it a clean sweep on the night with a 29–20 win in the C game. The Tigers led 5–4 after one quarter, 14–9 at halftime, and 23–12 at the end of the third.


Brynlee Dunker led Groton with 14 points. Taylynn Traphagen scored six, Teagan Hanten added five, Andi Iverson had three, and Avery Crank finished with one. Webster's leading scorer was Hannah Sonstebo with 10 points.

The varsity broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Avantara - Groton, Agtegra, Bierman Farm Service, Bary Keith at Harr Motors, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Full Circle Ag, Groton Ag Partners, Groton Chamber, Groton Ford, John Sieh Agency, Heartland Energy and The MeatHouse in Andover. Jeslyn Kosel ran the camera and Paul Kosel did the commentary, stats and technology. The junior varsity and C games were broadcast as well, sponsored by Grandparents.

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US Senate poised to send House spending deal in race to avert partial shutdown

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT AND ARIANA FIGUEROA

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate could vote as soon as Thursday night to approve a government funding package after Democrats brokered a deal with the White House to strip out the full-year spending bill for the Department of Homeland Security.

That bill will be replaced by a two-week stopgap for programs run out of DHS, which includes the Coast Guard, the Federal Emergency Management Agency — at a time when the agency is responding to a major winter storm — and the Secret Service.

The change is intended to give Republicans and Democrats more time to reach agreement on restrictions to federal immigration enforcement after the deadly shooting of a second U.S. citizen by immigration agents in Minneapolis on Saturday.

President Donald Trump wrote in a social media post that he wanted lawmakers to send him the reworked package in time to avoid a partial government shutdown, which would likely begin this weekend after a stopgap spending law expires.

"I am working hard with Congress to ensure that we are able to fully fund the Government, without delay," Trump wrote. "Republicans and Democrats in Congress have come together to get the vast majority of the Government funded until September, while at the same time providing an extension to the Department of Homeland Security (including the very important Coast Guard, which we are expanding and rebuilding like never before). Hopefully, both Republicans and Democrats will give a very much needed Bipartisan 'YES' Vote."

The package, once through the Senate, will need to go back to the House for final approval, though GOP leaders in that chamber haven't announced if they will bring lawmakers back before Monday, when members are scheduled to return to Capitol Hill from a weeklong break.

Once the House clears the package, it will head to Trump for his signature.

Senators did not change or remove the Defense, Financial Services and General Government, Labor-HHS-Education, National Security-State and Transportation-HUD appropriations bills from the package.

Congress previously approved half of the dozen annual spending bills, so once this package becomes law, the Department of Homeland Security will be the only division of the federal government without its full-year funding bill.

List of Democratic demands

Democrats and Republicans reached consensus on some changes to the Homeland Security appropriations bill after the Jan. 7 shooting of 37-year-old Renee Good, including funding for body cameras and additional oversight of detention facilities.

The House approved that bill last week and sent it to the Senate as part of the larger package.

But Border Patrol agents' shooting and killing of Alex Pretti led Democrats to call for the DHS spending bill to be pulled to give lawmakers time to negotiate additional guardrails on federal immigration actions.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., outlined a list of proposed changes Tuesday that included:

The end of roving patrols;

Tightening the rules governing the use of warrants;

Requiring Immigration and Customs Enforcement to coordinate with state and local law enforcement;

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Implementing a uniform code of conduct that holds federal law enforcement to the same set of standards that apply to state and local agencies;

Barring the wearing of masks;

Requiring the use of body cameras; and

Mandating immigration agents carry proper identification.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., said Thursday morning that "there's a path to consider some of" the changes to federal immigration during bipartisan negotiations.

But he expressed doubt later in the day that a two-week stopgap bill for DHS would give lawmakers enough time to find agreement on changes to immigration enforcement, saying there's "no way you could do it that fast."

"At some point we want to fund the government," Thune said. "Obviously the two-week (continuing resolution) probably means there's going to be another two-week CR and maybe another two-week CR after that. I don't know why they're doing it that way."

Senate Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee Chairwoman Katie Britt, R-Ala., also expressed doubt a two-week stopgap would provide enough time for negotiators to broker a bipartisan deal and hold votes in each chamber.

"I think, obviously, four weeks would be much better when you're looking at what's in front of us," she said.

Britt said she'd decide on any counter-proposals to Democrats after the government was funded.

"We're going to land this plane and then we're going to figure it out," she said.

Homan comments please Tillis

In response to immigration agents killing Pretti, the president directed his border czar, Tom Homan, to head to Minneapolis.

Homan said during a morning press conference that immigration enforcement would only end if state officials cooperate and aid the federal government in the Trump administration's immigration campaign. States and localities are not required to enforce immigration law, as it's a federal responsibility.

Homan did not specify how long he would remain in Minnesota, only "until the problem's gone."

North Carolina Republican Sen. Thom Tillis said in the afternoon that he had messaged Trump to express his appreciation for sending Homan to Minneapolis, saying it led to a "sea change."

"I texted the president and said, 'great job,'" Tillis said. "You know, I can't imagine we would be in this place if he'd been there to begin with."

Tillis said he thought Homan's press conference had been "perfect."

"He said at least twice he wasn't there for a photo op and he was there to de-escalate," Tillis said. "That's what happens when you put a professional law enforcement officer in the role versus people who have no experience in it."

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

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.

Lawmakers ask South Dakotans to 'seek the Lord Most High'

Nonbinding resolution sparks bipartisan opposition but passes both chambers

BY: MEGHAN O'BRIEN

PIERRE — Both chambers of the Legislature have approved a resolution that urges the people of South Dakota to "seek the Lord Most High for His healing presence and mercy," after debates about the role of religion in government.

The measure passed 22-11 on Tuesday in the Senate and 42-23 on Thursday in the House of Representatives.

Rep. Tony Randolph, R-Rapid City, who sponsored the bill in the House, said the state is "in trouble from an internal manner," citing rising violent crime rates. Throughout the country's history, he said, people have turned to prayer.

"We are in the lowest moral state, probably, in the history of our nation," he told lawmakers Thursday. "How do we deal with that? I say we go back to the root of what made this nation great, and call on Him."

The resolution says that "because of our fallen nature," many South Dakotans "continue to face significant challenges" such as violent crimes, addiction, mental illness and divorce.

"Cultural forces are inviting us to turn a blind eye towards growing tendencies to embrace suicide, infanticide and self-mutilation, each of which conflict with the truth that all men have been created in the image and likeness of God," the legislation reads.

The resolution further proclaims that the month of July should annually be recognized as a "time of prayer and fasting in South Dakota."

The measure is a concurrent resolution, which is an expression of the Legislature's opinion without the force of law. It does not go to the governor for his signature.

Rep. John Shubeck, R-Beresford, said he sees "no harm" in the policy. The Founding Fathers would be "rolling over in their grave," said Rep. Phil Jensen, R-Rapid City, over "the fact that we're even having to debate this."

"This should be a no-brainer," Jensen told lawmakers. "And I would venture to say the only ones that are going to be voting red up there are going to be Democrats."

Jensen declined to comment further to South Dakota Searchlight afterward. No Democrats spoke during the House floor debate on the resolution Thursday.

Afterward, Rep. Erik Muckey, D-Sioux Falls, said "Representative Jensen's actions today were beyond the pale."

All five Democratic members of the House voted against the measure. So did 18 Republicans. All three Democratic members of the Senate also voted against the resolution, along with eight Republicans.

"For me, a resolution like that is not something that I think is a good policy reflection of our chamber," Muckey said. "The issue at hand with that resolution was that it was urging a particular approach to faith, and I don't agree with that."

Some Republicans raised concerns about mixing religion with lawmaking. Rep. Taylor Rehfeldt, R-Sioux Falls, said she worried about what message the resolution would send to South Dakotans who aren't Christians.

"Scripture itself repeatedly shows us that faith should be chosen freely and not forced," she said during the House floor debate. "Out of respect for the diverse faith traditions across South Dakota and also out of respect for the proper role of government, I won't be voting for this resolution."

Rep. Mike Weisgram, R-Fort Pierre, who voted against the measure, said he worries about how it conflicts with the First Amendment.

"Religious liberty is guaranteed to us to practice or not to practice," he said. "Yet a House concurrent resolution acts as a formal statement of policy."

Meghan O'Brien is the audio reporter for South Dakota Searchlight where she covers the state government and its impact on South Dakotans. She's previously reported in Nebraska with a focus on health care and rural communities across the state.

COMMENTARY

The clearest critique of Noem's conjecture about a shooting is, unwittingly, from her successor

by Seth Tupper

For yet another reminder of what a poor job Kristi Noem is doing, just ask her handpicked replacement as governor of South Dakota.

Not directly, mind you. Larry Rhoden will defend her to the hilt if asked about her by name.

But ask him indirectly, or just let him talk awhile, and he'll criticize her actions without even realizing he's doing it.

That happened often during the beginning of his tenure as governor, when he spoke repeatedly about the need for a "reset" on nearly every important issue in the state, even while claiming Noem did a wonderful job as his predecessor.

Another prime example popped up Thursday during a news conference at the South Dakota Capitol in Pierre.

A reporter asked Rhoden about nationwide criticism of Noem's response to fatal shootings in Minneapolis. The federal agents who fired the guns work for Noem, who leads the Department of Homeland Security, which has been conducting immigration enforcement activities with thousands of agents in Minneapolis for weeks.

Rhoden, who ascended from lieutenant governor to governor last year when Noem got her new job, said the two of them still communicate via text messages.

"I've tried to encourage her because I know she's got a tough, tough job," Rhoden said. "And I still think she's up to the task."

Moments later, another reporter told Rhoden about comments from South Dakota Democratic legislative leaders. They expressed disappointment about the silence from Republican leaders regarding the most recent fatal shooting by federal agents in Minneapolis, who took the life of 37-year-old Alex Pretti.

Asked if he wanted to comment on Pretti's death, Rhoden answered "I don't."

Five or so awkward seconds of silence passed after that, and Rhoden's press secretary tried to end the press conference. But Rhoden interjected, "Let me just clarify a little bit with that."

"There's all kinds of information that I am not aware of, so why would I make a comment basing my opinion with no grounding in fact?" Rhoden said, in part. "And I think that's a big part of the problem that we face in some of these issues is people jumping to conclusions and then standing their ground and making absurd statements based on conjecture."

So, in other words, exactly what Noem did.

Within hours of Pretti's death, Noem went to a podium and proclaimed, "This looks like a situation where an individual arrived at the scene to inflict maximum damage on individuals and to kill law enforcement." She also said Pretti committed "an act of domestic terrorism."

Many of us have seen the bystander videos, which show Pretti carrying a cellphone and attempting to assist someone who was pushed down by federal agents. Those agents then wrestled Pretti to the ground. The videos appear to show an agent removing a handgun — which Pretti had a permit to carry — from Pretti's hip just before other agents opened fire.

Rhoden is exactly right. To come out within hours of Pretti's death, before all the facts were known, and proclaim him a domestic terrorist intent on killing law enforcement was irresponsible.

So is Rhoden's blind defense of Noem, even as he seems to recognize on some level that her actions are antithetical to his own values.

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

Groundwater recharge requirement wins legislative committee's approval

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

PIERRE — A committee of South Dakota lawmakers advanced a bill Thursday that would tighten state limits on groundwater withdrawals by eliminating an exception for some deep aquifers used by public water systems.

The bill, sponsored by Rep. Scott Odenbach, R-Spearfish, would require that annual withdrawals from any groundwater source could not exceed the source's estimated recharge rate. It would do so by striking language in state law that allows an exception when pumping from lower than the Greenhorn formation, a layer of limestone found across the state.

Supporters framed the change as "common sense" long-term planning to prevent "water mining," particularly in the drier areas of western South Dakota.

Odenbach said applying the same recharge standard across aquifers would protect water for future generations and for long-term economic prospects.

"We balance our budget every year. We're proud of that," he said. "We need to begin to balance our water budget."

Jay Gilbertson, manager of the East Dakota Water Development District, told lawmakers the state already conducts hydrologic balance analyses even when the exception could apply; therefore, there would be no additional requirements on the state if the bill passed.

Opponents included state water officials, rural water groups, municipalities and business advocates. They warned the bill could create practical and financial problems for public water providers that depend on deep aquifers where the recharge is harder to estimate with precision.

Mark Mayer, with the state Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources, said the current Greenhorn exception is discretionary and exists to help regulators navigate uncertainty in recharge calculations for deep, expansive aquifers.

"The statute says 'may' approve, not 'shall,'" Mayer said. "There's no automatic approval."

He said removing the exception could restrict water distribution systems that deliver drinking water.

State Geologist Tim Cowman told the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee that calculating better recharge estimates for deep aquifers would require additional observation wells and more extensive study and modeling. Opponents of the legislation said those costs would show up in the public's water bills and in the costs of digging a well.

The committee approved the bill 9-4 and sent it to the full House of Representatives.

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.

South Dakota House stops proposal asking voters to repeal Medicaid expansion

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER

Lawmakers in the state House of Representatives halted an effort to send a proposed repeal of expanded Medicaid to South Dakota voters.

The effort would have placed a state constitutional amendment on the general election ballot in November, reopening a policy debate from four years ago. But state representatives voted 39-27 against it on Thursday in Pierre.

Medicaid is a low-income health insurance and disability assistance program, jointly funded by the federal government and the states. South Dakotans approved a 2022 ballot question that expanded eligibility to adults with incomes up to 138% of the poverty level. Because the expansion is part of the state constitution, it can only be altered by voters.

While transitioning to expanded Medicaid has been a "long process" and a "forecasting nightmare," said Rep. Chris Kassin, R-Vermillion, Medicaid expansion costs are about 6% of the overall Medicaid budget. Enrollment in the program has plateaued at about 30,000 South Dakotans, said Kassin, who is a member of the legislative budget committee.

Lawmakers already placed a constitutional amendment on November's ballot that would let the Legislature repeal expanded Medicaid if the federal government stops funding at least 90% of the program. Kassin worried two questions about Medicaid on the ballot would confuse voters.

Voters approved an effort in 2024 to authorize work requirements for expanded Medicaid as well. Congress later voted to implement work requirements, which will start in 2027.

Kassin defended those ballot questions.

"The distinction is that we aren't subverting the will of the people with those ballot measures," Kassin said. "All we're doing is asking them to clarify what they voted on."

Supporters of Thursday's failed resolution said the rising costs of Medicaid in the state are diverting funds from other needs, such as state education funding.

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

South Dakota governor signs bill authorizing state spending of federal rural health funding

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER

The first bill Gov. Larry Rhoden signed into law this legislative session approves spending of federal funds for South Dakota's Rural Health Transformation Program.

The federal government awarded South Dakota \$189.5 million to carry out the first year of the five-year program. The funding comes from \$50 billion Congress included in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, in response to concerns that the bill's Medicaid cuts will hurt rural health providers. Medicaid is a federal-state program that provides health insurance for people with disabilities or low incomes.

Rhoden said the approval is a "big win for South Dakota."

"This may be the most significant investment in rural health care in South Dakota's history, and it will strengthen our state for our kids and grandkids," Rhoden said in a news release.

The state plans to use the money to recruit health care professionals to rural areas, modernize facilities and expand access to care — including to behavioral health and maternal and infant care.

Sen. Mykala Voita, R-Bonesteel, voted to approve the funding on the Senate floor, despite saying the spending happens while the federal government's level of debt "makes me sick to my stomach."

She added that she lives in one of the "extremely rural areas" that'll likely benefit from the program and that she hopes the state spends "this money toward where it's supposed to go: and this is bridging the gap between Rapid City and Sioux Falls."

The state received about \$4 million less than requested in its first year, and it requested \$212.3 million for its second year.

The state Department of Health will share quarterly expense reports about the program with the Legislative Research Council and the Department of Legislative Audit.

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Rising health costs could shift midterm voters toward Democrats, survey shows

BY: JACOB FISCHLER

Americans feel their health care costs are going up faster than other household expenses, hold President Donald Trump and congressional Republicans responsible and say the issue will factor into their votes in this year's midterm elections, according to a poll published Thursday by the nonpartisan health research organization KFF.

Three-quarters of voters polled, including majorities of Democrats, Republicans and independents, said the price of health care would have a minor or major impact on whom they choose to vote for in congressional elections in the fall.

While voters of all parties said the issue would affect their vote, Democrats held a substantial advantage when those surveyed were asked which party voters trusted on several health costs questions.

Voters also blamed Trump and congressional Republicans for allowing tax credits for Affordable Care Act marketplace plans to expire. Two-thirds of respondents, including 72% of independents, said Congress did the wrong thing in letting those credits go away as of Jan. 1. Among those who said it was a mistake not to renew the credits, 80% said Trump or Republicans in Congress were most to blame.

"Republicans won the legislative battle to let the enhanced ACA tax credits expire, but that helped make health costs more of an economic worry and voting issue, and Democrats are well positioned to capitalize on that in the midterms," KFF President and CEO Drew Altman said in a statement.

Health insurance premium costs

The cost of health insurance premiums and out-of-pocket expenses topped the list of respondents' economic worries, with 66% of those surveyed saying they worried about affording care for themselves and their families. That group was larger than those who said the same about all other categories, including housing, utilities and food.

Four in 10 independents and two-thirds of Democrats surveyed said the cost of health care would have a "major impact" on who they vote for in the upcoming elections, which will determine control of Congress for the final two years of Trump's second term.

Among all voters, Democrats held a 13-point advantage over Republicans on the question of who voters trust to handle the cost of health care.

Democrats were favored by double digits on other health policy questions, with the lone exception being who voters trusted to lower prescription drug prices. Democrats still led Republicans on that issue, which Trump has emphasized, but by a narrower 35%-30% margin.

Affordability focus

In limited major elections in 2025, Democratic candidates found success in campaign messages focused on affordability, an issue that Trump has also sought to address.

Thursday's poll shows the issue may remain salient in this year's elections. One-half of respondents said their household expenses had increased "a lot." A supermajority, 82%, said costs had gone up at least "a little." Though lower, at 75%, for Republicans, the trend was true across the partisanship of respondents.

A clear majority, 71%, said Trump was focusing not enough on domestic affairs like lowering health care costs.

That number included 89% of Democrats, 76% of independents and 66% of Republicans who do not consider themselves supporters of Trump's Make America Great Again, or MAGA, movement. Among MAGA Republicans, 6 in 10 thought Trump was focusing about the right amount on domestic issues.

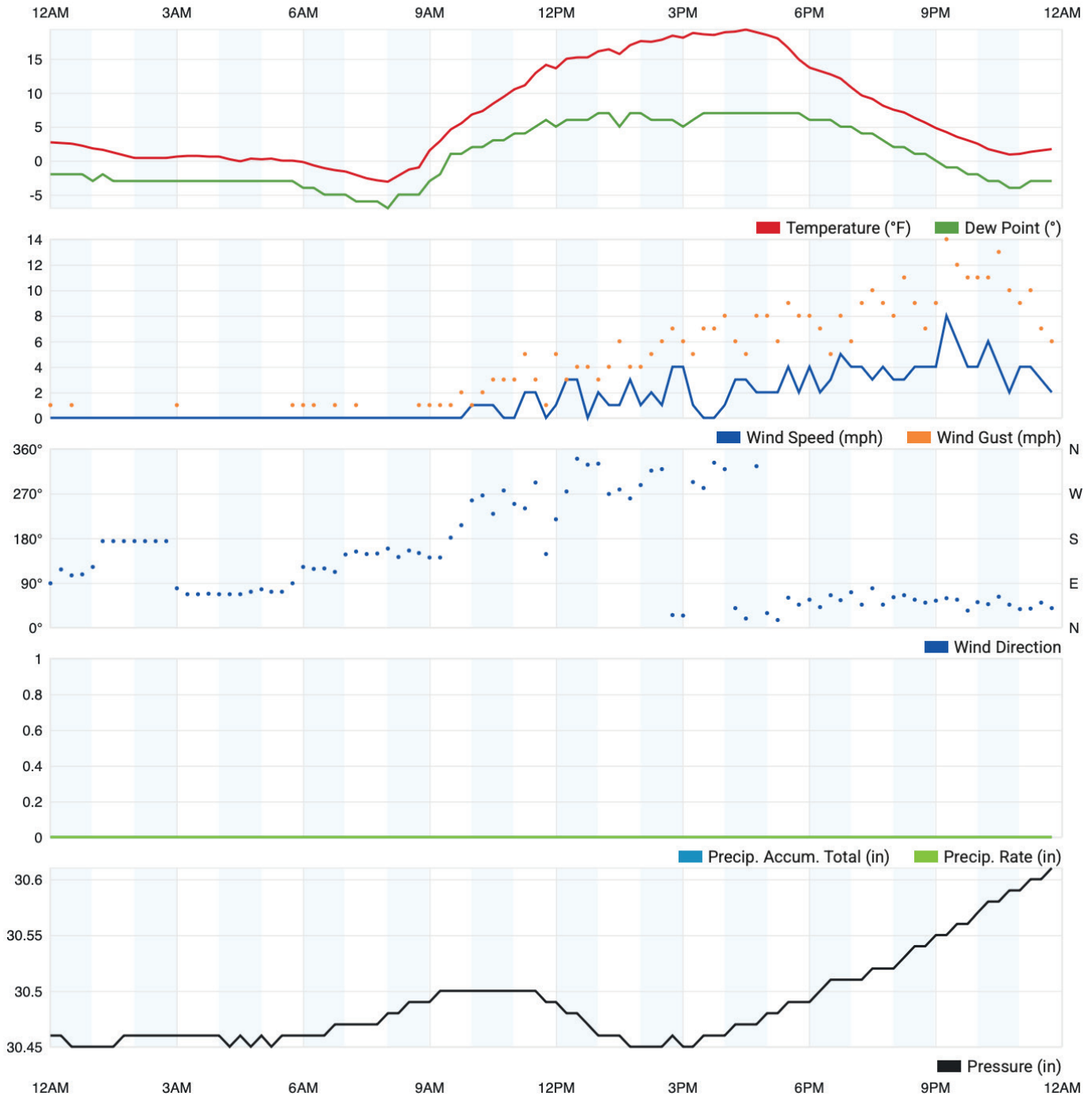
Jacob covers federal policy and helps direct national coverage as deputy Washington bureau chief for States Newsroom. Based in Oregon, he focuses on Western issues. His coverage areas include climate, energy development, public lands and infrastructure.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

January 29, 2026



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Friday

Friday Night

Saturday

Saturday Night

Sunday



High: 5 °F

Chance
Flurries



Low: -8 °F

Mostly Clear



High: 24 °F

Snow Likely
and Patchy
Blowing Snow



Low: 17 °F

Snow then
Chance Snow



High: 34 °F

Mostly Cloudy



Light Snow Saturday into Saturday Night

January 30, 2026
4:40 AM CST

Wintry mix with light freezing rain mixing in over central SD

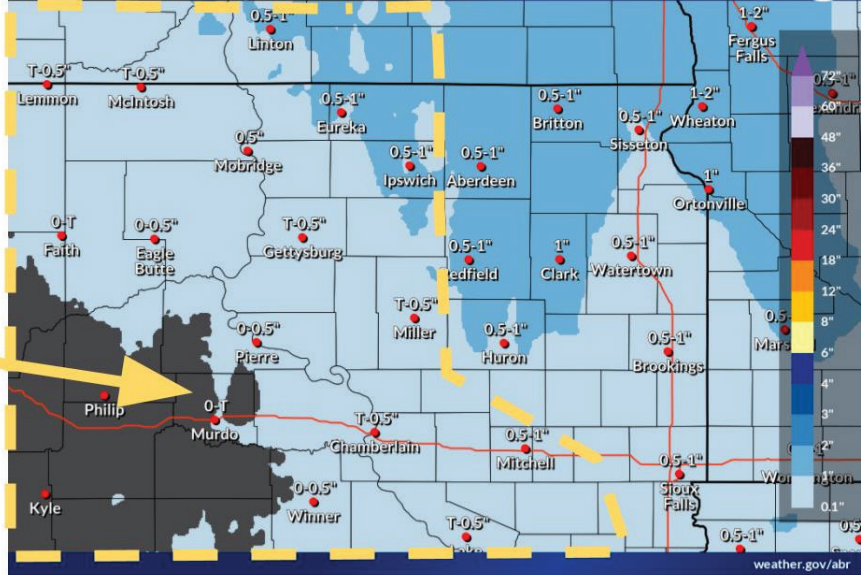
Key Messages:

- Light snow over central SD Saturday morning to expand across northeastern SD & west central MN in the afternoon. Precipitation ending over central SD Saturday evening.
- Precipitation Totals:
 - 1-2" of snow over northeastern SD & west central MN
 - Less than 1" of snow & a light glaze of ice from freezing rain over central South Dakota
- Winds gusting out of the south 30-40 mph. Gusts over 50 mph possible across the Sisseton Hills
- Roads may be slick! Plan ahead if travelling Saturday or Saturday Night

Expected Snowfall: Official NWS Forecast

Valid 6 AM Sat Jan 31, 2026 through 6 AM Sun Feb 1, 2026

Weather Forecast Office
Aberdeen, SD
Issued Jan 30, 2026 4:29 AM CST



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Light snow over central SD Saturday morning to expand across northeastern South Dakota and west central Minnesota in the afternoon. Precipitation will be ending over central South Dakota Saturday evening. Less than 1 inch of snow and a light glaze of ice from freezing rain is expected over central South Dakota, mostly Saturday afternoon into early Saturday evening. Expect 1 to 2 inches of snow over northeastern South Dakota and west central Minnesota, with most of the snow accumulating Saturday night. Wind will gust out of the south 30 to 40 mph, with gusts over 50 mph possible across the Sisseton Hills. The strongest winds will be in the afternoon. Plan ahead if travelling Saturday or Saturday night, as slick roads are expected.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 20 °F at 4:28 PM

Low Temp: -3 °F at 7:56 AM

Wind: 14 mph at 9:14 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 55 in 1931

Record Low: -37 in 2019

Average High: 25

Average Low: 2

Average Precip in Jan.: .53

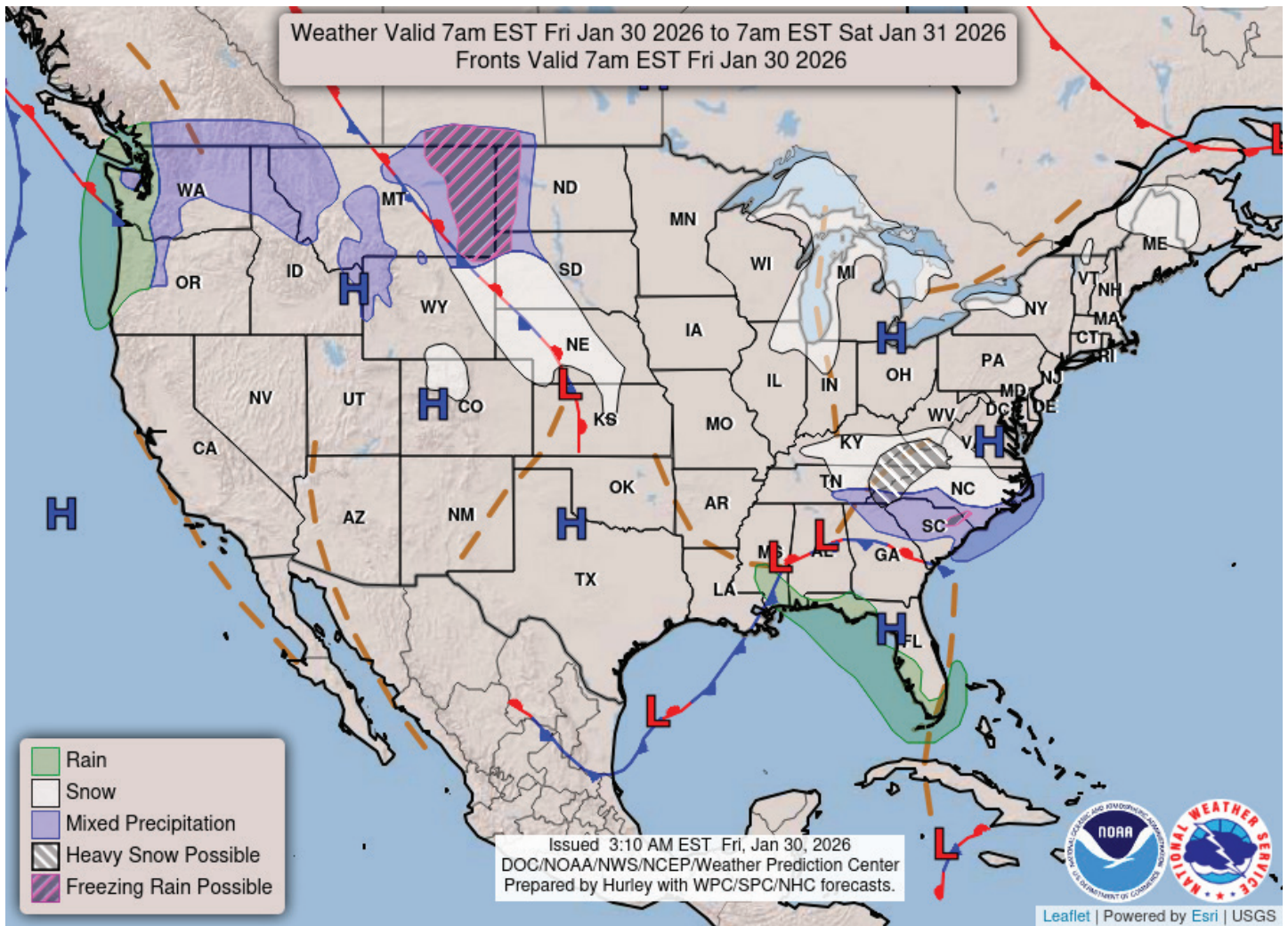
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 0.53

Precip Year to Date: 0.00

Sunset Tonight: 5:35 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:54 am



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Today in Weather History

January 30, 2001: Widespread freezing rain, accumulating from 1/8 to 1/2 inch, changed over to snow late in the evening of the 29th. The snow accumulated from 6 to 12 inches over much of central and northeast South Dakota and west-central Minnesota. The combination of ice and snow caused significant travel problems, school and flight cancellations and delays, business closings, and numerous vehicle accidents. Several highways were closed along with large portions of Interstates 29 and 90. Some snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Murdo, 14 SSW Hayes, and 8 E of Eden, 7 inches at Castlewood and 5 NE of Peever, 8 inches at Miller, Gann Valley, Iona, Watertown, Ortonville, and 2 NW Stephan. Nine inches of snowfall accumulated 18 S of Harrold with 10 inches at Tulare and Kennebec, 11 inches at Clark, Clear Lake, and Wheaton, 12 inches at Carpenter, Willow Lake, Milbank, and Browns Valley, and 13 inches at Wilmot.

January 30, 2011: Heavy snow of 6 to 9 inches fell across part of northeast South Dakota from the afternoon of the 30th to the 31st. Travel was disrupted, especially along Interstate-90. Some snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Webster, Summit, and Clear Lake; 7 inches at Watertown and Milbank; 8 inches at Wilmot and Sisseton; and 9 inches at Bryant, Waubay, and Andover.

1607: The Bristol Channel floods in England resulted in the drowning of many people and the destruction of a large amount of farmland and livestock. Recent research has suggested that the cause may have been a tsunami. Cardiff was one of the most badly affected towns, with the foundations of St. Mary's Church destroyed.

1936 — Birmingham, AL, established a single storm record and 24 hour record with 11 inches of snow. (29th-30th) (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1954: A tornado touched down near White Point Beach, Nova Scotia. A great deal of hail and lightning was reported along the coast near Liverpool, Nova Scotia.

1966: The Blizzard of 1966 impacted New York and paralyzed the region. The train service was disrupted. Numerous highways, the New York State Thruway from Albany to the Pennsylvania state line, and the Buffalo Airport and other airports throughout western and central New York were closed. The Syracuse-Oswego area's hardest hit, where Bob Sykes, a meteorology professor at the State University of New York at Oswego, reported a whopping 102.4 inches! Some schools in Orleans County were closed for the entire week following the blizzard. Economic loss from the storm was estimated at \$35 million. Winds gusting to 60 mph and temperatures in the teens, and heavy and blowing snow created severe blizzard conditions.

1977 — The great "Buffalo Blizzard" finally abated after three days. The storm added a foot of new snow to 33 inches already on the ground. Winds gusting to 75 mph reduced visibilities to near zero, produced snow drifts twenty-five feet high, and kept wind chill readings 50 degrees below zero. The blizzard paralyzed the city, and caused 250 million dollars damage. (David Ludlum)

1990 — A major winter storm produced heavy snow from Indiana to New England. It was the biggest storm in two and a half years for eastern New York State. Snowfall totals in the mountains of Maine ranged up to 20 inches at Guilford and Lovell. Other heavy snowfall totals included 17 inches at Utica NY, and 19 inches at Bethel VT, Ludlow VT, and New London NH. The storm claimed three lives in eastern New York State, and four lives in Vermont. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2002 — One of the driest Januarys on record in Iowa was broken up by a winter storm that produced snowfall across the state from January 30-31. The snow was heaviest across southern and southeastern Iowa, where storm total accumulations ranged between 11 and 13 inches along and south of Chariton's line through Ottumwa to Wapello and Burlington. The highest reported totals were 13.2 inches at Leon and 13.0 inches at Bloomfield and Fairfield.

2005 — A significant ice storm struck parts of northern Georgia on the 30th-31st. Ice accretion was as great as 2 inches in Monroe county, located southeast of Atlanta. Power outages in the area at the height of the storm affected nearly 320,000 homes and businesses.

Hope: The Anchor of the Soul

Jesus is our sure and steady hope—we can cling to Him through any trial.

Hebrews 6:13-20: 13 For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself,

14 saying, "I WILL SURELY BLESS YOU AND I WILL SURELY MULTIPLY YOU."

15 And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise.

16 For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute.

17 In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath,

18 so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.

19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil,

20 where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

An anchor was a popular image in the ancient Mediterranean world. Because that economy depended on shipping, the anchor symbolized safety and steadiness. The writer of Hebrews used the word to remind believers that God has given a hope that holds firm in any storm (6:19).

Hope is a healthy attitude. Anticipating good brings comfort to the mind and heart. In contrast, hopelessness is painful. It's overwhelming and depressing to think that what you're facing cannot improve. For the person who has lost all hope, life feels like an endless, dark tunnel.

Included in Proverbs is a verse that describes the result of this oppressive feeling: "Hope deferred makes the heart sick" (Proverbs 13:12). But with our eternal and all-powerful God, no situation is hopeless. In Him, we have the promise of the second half of that proverb: "Desire fulfilled is a tree of life."

Believers have a hope that anchors their soul. Our relationship with Jesus brings us close to the throne of heaven, where we can cast all our burdens before the Lord. Moreover, we can cling to Him through any trial that comes our way. He lights that darkened tunnel and tenderly guides us through trying situations.

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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The Groton Independent

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
01.27.26

4 20 38 56 66 5

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$303,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 21 Mins 25 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
01.28.26

25 31 33 36 41 2

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$14,300,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 36 Mins 25 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
01.29.26

14 24 25 39 40 17

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 51 Mins 25 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
01.28.26

5 13 14 20 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$233,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 51 Mins 25 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
01.28.26

3 27 34 42 47 3

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 20 Mins 25 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
01.28.26

21 35 40 46 68 11

Power Play: 10x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$57,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 20 Mins 25 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the **AP** Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Christian 45, James Valley Christian School 32

Andes Central/Dakota Christian 26, Bon Homme 23

Arlington 67, Estelline-Hendricks 40

Burke 48, Boyd County, Neb. 47

Canton 51, McCook Central-Montrose 37

Castlewood 48, Iroquois-Lake Preston 22

Centerville 55, Viborg-Hurley 29

Chester 55, Bridgewater-Emery/Ethan 29

Clark-Willow Lake 57, Redfield 19

Dell Rapids 60, Vermillion 51

Douglas 52, Lead-Deadwood 21

Faulkton 43, Leola-Frederick High School 34

Flandreau 41, Deubrook 27

Freeman 56, Canistota 23

Great Plains Lutheran 66, Florence-Henry 56

Groton 58, Webster 28

Hamlin 69, Sisseton 39

Harding County 73, Sundance, Wyo. 45

Highmore-Harrold 55, Wolsey-Wessington 41

Hitchcock-Tulare 63, Sully Buttes 39

Kadoka 57, Kimball-White Lake 15

Lemmon High School 85, McLaughlin 49

Lyman 67, New Underwood 17

Milbank 60, Deuel 22

Omaha Nation, Neb. 82, Flandreau Indian 34

Philip 85, Newell 49

Platte-Geddes 50, Hanson 38

Sioux Falls Christian 60, Dakota Valley 28

Sioux Falls Washington 55, Aberdeen Central 42

Sioux Valley 70, Beresford 43

Spearfish 43, Rapid City Central 36

St Thomas More 41, Sturgis Brown High School 32

Stanley County 45, Crow Creek Tribal School 38

Tea 59, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 33

Timber Lake 50, McIntosh High School 38

Tri-Valley 56, Elk Point-Jefferson 38

Wagner 66, Scotland/Menno 16

Wakpala 67, Strasburg, N.D. 34

Wall 59, Hill City 55

Warner 61, Waverly-South Shore 41

Waubay/Summit 47, Ortonville, Minn. 13

Yankton 54, Huron 50

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

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BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Christian 71, James Valley Christian School 48
Aberdeen Roncalli 59, Britton-Hecla 53
Belle Fourche 49, Hot Springs 43
Bon Homme 74, Andes Central/Dakota Christian 53
Boyd County, Neb. 66, Burke 47
Castlewood 54, Iroquois-Lake Preston 33
Centerville 39, Viborg-Hurley 36
Douglas 60, Lead-Deadwood 48
Elkton-Lake Benton 62, Oldham-Ramona-Rutland 46
Florence-Henry 55, Great Plains Lutheran 51
Glen Ullin, N.D. 61, Lemmon High School 40
Gregory 60, Avon 56, OT
Hamlin 63, Sisseton 21
Harding County 74, Philip 53
Ipswich 52, Herried-Selby 51
Leola-Frederick High School 64, Faulkton 45
Lyman 66, New Underwood 37
Madison 48, Pipestone, Minn. 39
Milbank 46, Deuel 38
Omaha Nation, Neb. 45, Flandreau Indian 44
Platte-Geddes 59, Hanson 48
Sioux Falls Christian 80, Dakota Valley 56
Sioux Falls Washington 77, Aberdeen Central 59
Sioux Valley 65, Beresford 54
Spearfish 70, Rapid City Central 38
Stanley County 81, Crow Creek Tribal School 45
Sully Buttes 68, Hitchcock-Tulare 54
Tri-Valley 42, Elk Point-Jefferson 28
Vermillion 76, Dell Rapids 35
Wagner 57, Scotland/Menno 56
Wakpala 68, Strasburg, N.D. 66, OT
Wall 58, Hill City 47
Warner 61, Waverly-South Shore 48

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

Fearing ICE, Native Americans rush to prove their right to belong in the US

By GRAHAM LEE BREWER, SAVANNAH PETERS and STEWART HUNTINGTON Associated Press/ICT
MINNEAPOLIS, Minn. (AP) — When U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement flooded Minneapolis, Shane Mantz dug his Choctaw Nation citizenship card out of a box on his dresser and slid it into his wallet. Some strangers mistake the pest-control company manager for Latino, he said, and he fears getting caught up in ICE raids.

Like Mantz, many Native Americans are carrying tribal documents proving their U.S. citizenship in case they are stopped or questioned by federal immigration agents. This is why dozens of the 575 federally recognized Native nations are making it easier to get tribal IDs. They're waiving fees, lowering the age of eligibility — ranging from 5 to 18 nationwide — and printing the cards faster.

It's the first time tribal IDs have been widely used as proof of U.S. citizenship and protection against

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federal law enforcement, said David Wilkins, an expert on Native politics and governance at the University of Richmond.

"I don't think there's anything historically comparable," Wilkins said. "I find it terribly frustrating and disheartening."

As Native Americans around the country rush to secure documents proving their right to live in the United States, many see a bitter irony.

"As the first people of this land, there's no reason why Native Americans should have their citizenship questioned," said Jaqueline De León, a senior staff attorney with the nonprofit Native American Rights Fund and member of Isleta Pueblo.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security didn't respond to more than four requests for comment over a week.

Native identity in a new age of fear

Since the mid- to late 1800s, the U.S. government has kept detailed genealogical records to estimate Native Americans' fraction of "Indian blood" and determine their eligibility for health care, housing, education and other services owed under federal legal responsibilities. Those records were also used to aid federal assimilation efforts and chip away at tribal sovereignty, communal lands and identity.

Beginning in the late 1960s, many tribal nations began issuing their own forms of identification. In the last two decades, tribal photo ID cards have become commonplace and can be used to vote in tribal elections, to prove U.S. work eligibility and for domestic air travel.

About 70% of Native Americans today live in urban areas, including tens of thousands in the Twin Cities, one of the largest urban Native populations in the country.

There, in early January, a top ICE official announced the "largest immigration operation ever."

Masked, heavily armed agents traveling in convoys of unmarked SUVs became commonplace in some neighborhoods. By this week, more than 3,400 people had been arrested, according to Immigration and Customs Enforcement. At least 2,000 ICE officers and 1,000 Border Patrol officers were on the ground.

Representatives from at least 10 tribes traveled hundreds of miles to Minneapolis — the birthplace of the American Indian Movement — to accept ID applications from members there. Among them were the Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Ojibwe of Wisconsin, the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate of South Dakota and the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa of North Dakota.

Turtle Mountain citizen Faron Houle renewed his tribal ID card and got his young adult son's and his daughter's first ones.

"You just get nervous," Houle said. "I think (ICE agents are) more or less racial profiling people, including me."

Events in downtown coffee shops, hotel ballrooms, and at the Minneapolis American Indian Center helped urban tribal citizens connect and share resources, said Christine Yellow Bird, who directs the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation's satellite office in Fargo, North Dakota.

Yellow Bird made four trips to Minneapolis in recent weeks, putting nearly 2,000 miles on her 2017 Chevy Tahoe to help citizens in the Twin Cities who can't make the long journey to their reservation.

Yellow Bird said she always keeps her tribal ID with her.

"I'm proud of who I am," she said. "I never thought I would have to carry it for my own safety."

Some Native Americans say ICE is harassing them

Last year, Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren said that several tribal citizens reported being stopped and detained by ICE officers in Arizona and New Mexico. He and other tribal leaders have advised citizens to carry tribal IDs with them at all times.

Last November, Elaine Miles, a member of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation in Oregon and an actress known for her roles in "Northern Exposure" and "The Last of Us," said she was stopped by ICE officers in Washington state who told her that her tribal ID looked fake.

The Oglala Sioux Tribe this week banned ICE from its reservation in southwestern South Dakota and northwestern Nebraska, one of the largest in the country.

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The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe of North and South Dakota said a member was detained in Minnesota last weekend. And Peter Yazzie, who is Navajo, said he was arrested and held by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Phoenix for several hours last week.

Yazzie, a construction worker from nearby Chinle, Arizona, said he was sitting in his car at a gas station preparing for a day of work when he saw ICE officers arrest some Latino men. The officers soon turned their attention to Yazzie, pushed him to the ground, and searched his vehicle, he said.

He said he told them where to find his driver's license, birth certificate, and a federal Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood. Yazzie said the car he was in is registered to his mother. Officers said the names didn't match, he said, and he was arrested, taken to a nearby detention center and held for about four hours.

"It's an ugly feeling. It makes you feel less human. To know that people see your features and think so little of you," he said.

DHS did not respond to questions about the arrest.

Mantz, the Choctaw Nation citizen, said he runs pest-control operations in Minneapolis neighborhoods where ICE agents are active and he won't leave home without his tribal identification documents.

Securing them for his children is now a priority.

"It gives me some peace of mind. But at the same time, why do we have to carry these documents?" Mantz said. "Who are you to ask us to prove who we are?"

South Dakota knocks off Oral Roberts 77-69

By The Associated Press undefined

VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — Uzziah Buntyn had 26 points in South Dakota's 77-69 win over Oral Roberts on Thursday.

Buntyn shot 6 of 15 from the field, including 0 for 4 from 3-point range, and went 14 for 15 from the free-throw line for the Coyotes (12-11, 4-4 Summit League). Cameron Fens scored 25 points and added 13 rebounds and three blocks. Jordan Crawford had 11 points and shot 4 for 12 (1 for 3 from 3-point range) and 2 of 4 from the free-throw line.

The Golden Eagles (5-18, 0-8) were led in scoring by Ty Harper, who finished with 23 points. Oral Roberts also got 17 points and seven rebounds from Ofri Naveh. Connor Dow finished with 10 points and nine rebounds. The loss is the 11th in a row for the Golden Eagles.

Up next

Both teams next play Saturday. South Dakota hosts North Dakota State and Oral Roberts plays South Dakota State on the road.

Man could avoid more prison time with guilty plea in Navajo woman's disappearance

By SAVANNAH PETERS Associated Press

EDGEWOOD, N.M. (AP) — A man charged in connection to the 2021 disappearance of a Navajo woman pleaded guilty Thursday to robbery, marking the latest turn in a case that been emblematic of the epidemic of killings and disappearances in Native American communities.

Preston Henry Tolth appeared before a federal judge in Phoenix. Tolth, who has been in custody since 2023, will not spend any additional time in prison if the court accepts the terms of the plea agreement reached with prosecutors.

Prosecutors allege that Tolth assaulted Ella Mae Begay, stole her Ford F-150 pickup truck and drove it across state lines. In the plea agreement, he admitted to punching Begay in the face several times and leaving her on the side of the road before selling her truck for money and drugs.

Begay's case helped bring national attention to the high rate of violence faced by Native people, providing fuel for tribal leaders and victim advocates as they continued pushing for law enforcement resources and more cooperation for investigation across jurisdictional lines.

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There have been marches, listening sessions and congressional hearings in recent years, and federal authorities have funneled more investigators and prosecutors to field offices in key locations around the United States in hopes of solving cases and prosecuting offenders.

Still, Begay has never been found and her family remains heartbroken.

Known in her community as a master rug weaver, Begay lived in Sweetwater, Arizona, a town on the Navajo Nation not far from the Four Corners Monument. Gerald Begay, the eldest of her three children, remembered his mother as someone who was always willing to lend a hand, even to a stranger.

Gerald Begay listened to Thursday's court proceeding via phone from Denver. He called the plea deal a "slap on the wrist" for Tolth and said mistakes made by law enforcement during interrogations cost his family a just outcome.

Gerald Begay called on authorities to find his mother's remains.

"She belongs in the community where she resided," he said. "If I could bring my mother home, I could at least have some closure."

Timothy Courchaine, the interim U.S. Attorney for the district of Arizona, declined a request by for an interview.

Attorneys representing Tolth did not respond to a request for comment.

Tolth initially entered a plea of not guilty to assault and carjacking resulting in serious bodily injury — charges that carry a maximum penalty of 10 and 25 years in prison, respectively.

In August 2025, a federal appeals court ruled that a confession made by Tolth was not admissible in court because officers did not honor his decision to stop speaking during the interrogation and instead persuaded him to waive his right to remain silent.

A sentencing hearing is scheduled for April 9 in Phoenix.

Reserves of critical minerals driving mining interest in South Dakota

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

As worldwide demand for rare earth elements and other similar minerals rises – as do tensions among the United States, China and now Greenland – South Dakota is experiencing its own debate over its reserves of what are known as "critical minerals."

Rare earth elements are naturally occurring metallic materials found in sub-surface rocks that have been found to possess unique properties that make them highly valuable and highly useful, particularly in a variety of new technologies.

While 17 elements are classified as rare earth, the U.S. government has identified 50 minerals overall that are labeled critical minerals, which also includes a number of other minerals that are seen as essential to economic and military strength of the nation.

Of those 50 critical minerals, South Dakota is known to host reserves of 15 of them, none of which are rare earth minerals but which contain some of the same properties that make them valuable for industry and technology.

Critical minerals present in South Dakota

Critical minerals in the state include antimony, arsenic, barite, beryllium, cesium, fluorspar, graphite, lithium, manganese, niobium, tantalum, tellurium, tin, tungsten and vanadium, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

Those minerals are located in the western South Dakota counties of Custer, Fall River, Harding, Lawrence, Pennington and Perkins as well as the central counties of Buffalo and Lyman, according to a 2024 analysis by the state Legislative Research Council.

Given its long history of mining, and based on new studies, the Black Hills region is well-known as a place where usable critical minerals are present, which is attracting exploratory mining, said Christopher Pellowski, a geology professor at South Dakota Mines in Rapid City.

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Rare earth elements and other critical minerals can be abundant but are difficult to extract because they tend to lie within other minerals that must be mined and separated through chemical processes.

One example, Pellowski said, is that the common Black Hills igneous rock pegmatite can hold deposits of lithium. Pellowski said he doesn't expect large-scale mining to occur in the Black Hills unless and until companies can find substantial levels of critical minerals that can be monetized.

"Mining is important and it's a real economic driver. ... But I don't see us at a point where we're ready for a large commitment (of money and resources)," he said. "They're just going to have to do this in steps. And what they're doing now is the homework to get their heads wrapped around what's there."

Pellowski said modern mining can also be done with far less intrusion on the land than in the past when open pit and strip mines were the norm.

"Mining today is not the mining of 100 years ago," he said. "It's new and improved."

Exploration underway in Black Hills

According to the LRC report and other state records, mining and exploration efforts are underway at several sites in South Dakota, including for graphite, lithium, niobium, tantalum, tellurium, tin and tungsten.

Exploration for lithium has seen the most activity in pegmatite ore near Hill City and Keystone. South Dakota was mined for lithium in the mid-20th century for use in glass, ceramics and grease. But the target products have shifted as technology has evolved.

Lithium is increasingly in demand for use in lithium-ion batteries in handheld technologies such as smartphones and laptops as well as in electric vehicles and for energy storage from wind farms and other electricity sources.

Four lithium exploration projects are now underway in the central Black Hills, the LRC report said.

A licensed pegmatite mine in Lawrence County is seeking ore that could contain critical minerals to include niobium, tantalum, tellurium, tin and tungsten, according to the LRC report. Tantalum, tin and tungsten are also being sought in a separate exploration effort in the central Black Hills, the report said.

The most recent critical mineral exploration is being undertaken by Rapid City-based Pete Lien and Sons, which hopes to find reserves of graphite by drilling 18 holes roughly 1,000 feet deep on federal lands about 3 miles southwest of Rochford, according to U.S. Forest Service documents.

Graphite can be used in lithium-ion batteries for electric vehicles, and in lubricants, brake linings, pencils and other products.

South Dakota lawmakers have made recent efforts to further regulate lithium mining, though none has been successful.

In 2023 and 2024, bills were filed to reclassify lithium and add taxation to its production. In 2025, lawmakers tried but failed to increase permitting requirements on lithium mines.

Under current law, lithium mines can be classified the same as sand and gravel mines, which require far less public notification and input and do not require environmental and cultural impact studies that are mandatory for hard rock mines.

That same debate is raging now in Piedmont, where a proposed limestone mine fell under the sand and gravel permit laws and therefore required no notification of the city or its residents that a mine is coming.

Environmental concerns and opposition

A handful of Native American and environmental groups have taken strong stances against further mining in the Black Hills, be it for critical minerals or for uranium at proposed mine sites in the southern hills region.

Native American tribal officials and the NDN Collective political organization have registered opposition to uranium and lithium mining and the efforts by Pete Lien and Sons to hunt for graphite.

The proposed Lien mine site is very close to Pe' Sla, a Lakota ceremonial site in the central hills. NDN has sponsored billboards in the Rapid City area urging the company to end its mining efforts.

The potential negative effects of mining on drinking water supplies is a major concern of the Black Hills Clean Water Alliance, which opposes further mining of any sort in the region.

Lilias Jarding, executive director of the alliance, said more than 250,000 acres of the Black Hills are already under active federal mining claims and can therefore be mined almost at any time.

"It's an issue of both quantity and quality of water," Jarding told News Watch. "We're in a semi-arid area

and mining uses huge quantities of water and makes the quality of the water worse.”

Any type of mining can be destructive to the Black Hills, she said.

“Wildlife is displaced and people can be displaced,” she said. “An open-pit mine destroys the landscape and contributes to global warming because mining creates 10% of the total carbon emissions worldwide.”

Jobs and revenue in eastern Wyoming

While direct comparisons to South Dakota aren’t suitable – because the state so far isn’t known to have rare earth elements – a project underway in eastern Wyoming shows the potential interest and investment associated with discovery of a strong reserve of a highly valuable material.

With funding from the U.S. Department of Energy, the state of Wyoming and private investors, the firm Rare Element Resources has invested \$170 million into a project to extract and separate rare earth minerals from rocks found in the Black Hills just west of the South Dakota border.

The company has spent \$100 million and is seeking final federal permitting to mine rocks from the Bear Lodge region of northeast Wyoming that it believes contain an “incredibly rich deposit” of NdPr oxide (Neodymium-Praseodymium oxide). The mineral is a key component of high-strength permanent magnets.

The company has obtained a 1,000-pound sample of rock from the Bear Lodge area that it will process soon to confirm its predictions, Paul Bonifas, RER director of business development, told News Watch.

To separate the NdPr oxide, RER has built a \$70 million demonstration plant in Upton, Wyoming, where more than 20 full-time employees have been hired to process the minerals.

The mineral NdPr oxide is used in magnets that are part of a wide range of consumer and military machines and products, including electric vehicles, robotics, electricity turbines, computers and medical devices such as MRI machines.

“It’s no secret that China controls roughly 90% of rare earth processing, separation and production,” Bonifas said. “Because all of these things are essential to national defense, it is absolutely a national security imperative that we domesticate the rare earth supply chain.”

As proof of concept, and evidence of the high value of rare earth element and critical minerals mining, Bonifas pointed out that RER’s market value in January 2026 was nearly \$440 million.

“This is much bigger than the Black Hills and just trying to get these projects going,” he said. “As ridiculous as it sounds, this is Upton and Sundance, Wyoming, versus Beijing.”

Ukraine is bracing for brutal weather as Trump says Putin agreed to halt power grid attacks

By SUSIE BLANN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine awaited signs Friday that Russia is abiding by a commitment that U.S. President Donald Trump said it made to temporarily halt attacks on Ukraine’s power grid, as Kyiv and other regions are gripped by the bitterest winter weather for years.

Trump said late Thursday that Russian President Vladimir Putin had agreed to his request not to target the Ukrainian capital and other towns for one week, as the region experiences frigid temperatures that have brought widespread hardship to civilians.

Trump didn’t say when the call with Putin took place or when the moratorium would go into effect, and the White House didn’t immediately respond to a query seeking clarity about the scope and timing of any limited pause. There was no immediate confirmation from the Kremlin that Putin has committed to the move.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was skeptical about Putin’s readiness for such a step as Russia’s all-out invasion, which began on Feb. 24, 2022, approaches its four-year anniversary next month with no signs that Moscow is willing to reach a peace settlement despite a U.S.-led push to end the fighting.

“I do not believe that Russia wants to end the war. There is a great deal of evidence to the contrary,” Zelenskyy said Thursday in comments made public on Friday.

Drone and missile attacks continue

He said that Ukraine is ready to halt its attacks on Russia’s energy infrastructure, including oil refineries, if Moscow also stops its bombardment of the Ukrainian power grid and other energy assets.

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While there was no official word on whether those conciliatory steps had been taken, the grinding war of attrition dragged on.

Russia fired 111 drones and one ballistic missile at Ukraine overnight, injuring at least three people, the Ukrainian Air Force said. The Russian Defense Ministry, meanwhile, said that its air defenses overnight shot down 18 Ukrainian drones over several Russian regions, as well as the annexed Crimea and the Black Sea.

Bitter cold is forecast for Ukraine

Kyiv, which recently has endured severe power shortages, is forecast to enter a brutally cold stretch starting Friday that is expected to last into next week. Temperatures in some areas will drop to minus 30 degrees Celsius (minus 22 Fahrenheit), the State Emergency Service said.

Russia has sought to deny Ukrainian civilians heat, light and running water over the course of the war, in a strategy that Ukrainian officials describe as "weaponizing winter."

The possibility of a respite in energy sector attacks was discussed at last weekend's meeting in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, between envoys of Ukraine, Russia and the United States, Zelenskyy said.

Zelenskyy said that he had agreed to adhere to a "reciprocal approach" on energy assaults.

"If Russia does not strike us, we will ... take corresponding steps," he told reporters.

Further talks were expected on Sunday in Abu Dhabi, but that could change because of a spike in tensions between the U.S. and Iran.

No agreement on a ceasefire, Zelenskyy says

It was unclear whether and how any partial truce might work amid ongoing wider fighting and mistrust between the two countries.

"There is no ceasefire. There is no official agreement on a ceasefire, as is typically reached during negotiations," Zelenskyy said. "There has been no direct dialogue and no direct agreements on this matter between us and Russia."

Ukraine had originally posited the idea for a limited energy ceasefire at talks in Saudi Arabia last year, Zelenskyy said, but the proposal gained no traction.

Disagreement over what happens to occupied Ukrainian territory, and Moscow's demand for possession of territory it hasn't captured, are a key issue holding up a peace deal, according to Zelenskyy.

"We have repeatedly said that we are ready for compromises that lead to a real end to the war, but that are in no way related to changes to Ukraine's territorial integrity," Zelenskyy said. "The American side understands this and says that there is a compromise solution regarding a free economic zone."

However, Ukraine demands control over such a zone, he said.

US futures fall and world shares are mixed as markets await Trump's word on replacing Fed chief

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer

U.S. futures dropped while European shares opened higher on Friday after markets retreated in Asia ahead of a possible announcement by U.S. President Donald Trump on his nominee to replace Jerome Powell as chair of the Federal Reserve.

Oil prices dropped and the prices of gold and silver weakened.

The future for the S&P 500 sank 0.8% while that for the Dow Jones Industrial Average was 0.7% lower.

Trump chose Powell to lead the U.S. central bank in 2017 but has relentlessly assailed him for not cutting interest rates quickly as quickly as the president would like. The appointment to replace him must be confirmed by the Senate.

In early European trading, Germany's DAX picked up 0.8% to 24,506.41, while the CAC 40 in Paris advanced 0.4% to 8,107.50. Britain's FTSE 100 edged 0.2% higher, to 10,189.05.

The CEO of Indonesia's stock market, Imam Rachman, resigned Friday "As part of a commitment toward recent market conditions," the exchange said in an announcement.

Jakarta's benchmark gained 1.2% following news of his resignation. It had been trading at all-time highs

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but sank 7.4% on Wednesday and 1.1% on Thursday after MSCI, a U.S. provider of global equity, fixed income and real estate indices, warned about market risks such as a lack of transparency.

Chinese markets retreated, with the Hang Seng in Hong Kong shedding 2.1% to 27,387.11. Shares in major ports operator CK Hutchison Holdings dropped 4.6% after Panama's Supreme Court ruled that the concession held by a subsidiary to operate ports at either end of the Panama Canal was unconstitutional.

That advanced a U.S. effort to block any influence by China over the strategic waterway.

The Shanghai Composite index slipped 1% to 4,117.95.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 fell back, losing 0.1% to 53,322.85 as stocks related to artificial intelligence declined. Testing equipment maker Advantest lost 4.5% and computer chip equipment maker Disco Corp. lost 1.7%.

South Korea's Kospi gave up most of its gains late in the session, edging just 0.1% higher to 5,224.36 after the Yonhap News Agency reported that a first day of talks with U.S. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick aimed at resolving trade tensions had not yielded an agreement. The talks are due to continue Friday.

Earlier this week, President Donald Trump said he planned to raise tariffs on South Korean exports if the U.S. ally did not swiftly ratify a trade agreement worked out months ago.

In Australia, the S&P/ASX 200 declined 0.7% to 8,869.10.

Taiwan's benchmark lost 1.5%, while India's Sensex fell 0.3%.

On Thursday, U.S. stocks finished with relatively modest moves.

The S&P 500 slipped 0.1% after flirting with its record high in the morning and dropping by as much as 1.5% later in the day. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 0.1% and the Nasdaq composite fell 0.7%.

Investors will likely focus on the Fed and who is to lead it, though earnings are also a major driver of market activity this week. Companies are under pressure to deliver solid growth in profits following record-setting runs for their stock prices.

In other dealings early Friday, the price of gold slipped 5% after it rallied briefly to nearly \$5,600 on Thursday. Gold's price topped \$5,000 for the first time just this week.

Silver, which has been zooming higher in its own feverish run, tumbled 11%.

Prices for precious metals have been surging as investors look for safer investments while weighing a wide range of risks, including a U.S. stock market that critics say is expensive, political instability, threats of tariffs and heavy debt loads for governments worldwide.

The U.S. dollar has seen its value sink over the last year because of many of the same risks that drove gold's price higher. Early Friday, the dollar was trading at 154.14 Japanese yen, up from 153.09 yen. The euro slipped to \$1.1922 from \$1.1971.

Oil prices slipped after jumping more than 3% on Thursday due to worries about tensions between the United States and Iran, which could ultimately constrict the flow of crude. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth warned the U.S. military "will be prepared to deliver whatever the president expects," just a day after President Donald Trump told Iran to "make a deal" on its nuclear program.

U.S. benchmark crude oil lost 59 cents to \$64.83 per barrel. Brent crude, the international standard, shed 61 cents to \$68.98 per barrel.

Hong Kong company's concession to operate Panama Canal ports is ruled unconstitutional

By ALMA SOLÍS Associated Press

PANAMA CITY (AP) — Panama's Supreme Court ruled late Thursday that the concession held by a subsidiary of Hong Kong's CK Hutchison Holdings to operate ports at either end of the Panama Canal is unconstitutional, an outcome that advances a U.S. aim to block any influence by China over the strategic waterway.

The court's ruling followed an audit by Panama's comptroller, which alleged irregularities in the 25-year extension of the concession granted in 2021.

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The Trump administration made blocking China's influence over the Panama Canal one of its priorities in the hemisphere. Panama was U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio's first overseas stop as the United States' top diplomat.

Despite the insistence by Panama's government and the canal authority that China has no influence over its operations, Rubio made clear that the U.S. viewed the operation of the ports as a national security issue for the U.S. President Donald Trump had gone so far as to say Panama should return the canal to U.S. control.

The court's brief statement gave no guidance on what would happen to the ports now.

The ruling draws backlash from Hong Kong

CK Hutchison's subsidiary, Panama Ports Company, said it has not been notified yet about the decision but insisted its concession was the result of transparent international bidding.

It said in its statement that the ruling "lacks legal basis and jeopardizes not only PPC and its contract, but also the well-being and stability of thousands of Panamanian families who depend directly and indirectly on port activity, but also the rule of law and legal certainty in the country."

It said that it reserves all rights to proceed legally in Panama or elsewhere, but gave no more details.

The Hong Kong government firmly rejected the ruling in a statement, saying it strongly opposes any foreign government using coercive, repressive or other unreasonable means to seriously harm the business interests of Hong Kong enterprises. It said the Panamanian government should respect the spirit of contracts and provide a fair business environment.

"Given the current situation in Panama, Hong Kong enterprises should carefully review their existing and future investments there," it said.

In Beijing, China's foreign ministry spokesperson, Guo Jiakun, told reporters that China would take all necessary measures to safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of "the Chinese company," without elaborating on the potential steps.

Political analyst Edwin Cabrera said once the parties are notified, the issue of what to do with the ports goes to Panama's executive branch, specifically the Panama Maritime Authority.

"I have the impression from conversations that I have had with some people that the operation (of the ports) will not stop," Cabrera said.

A sale deal that apparently angered Beijing

CK Hutchison Holdings announced a deal last year to sell its majority stake in the Panamanian ports and others around the world to an international consortium that included BlackRock Inc. But the deal appeared to stall over objections by the Chinese government.

The company said last July that it was considering seeking a Chinese investor to join as a significant member of the consortium, a move that some interpreted as way to please Beijing, but CK Hutchison hasn't said more since.

The awkward position the company found itself in highlights the challenges Hong Kong business elites face in navigating Beijing's expectations of national loyalty, especially when relations between China and the United States are strained. CK Hutchison is owned by the family of Hong Kong's richest man, Li Ka-shing.

In parallel, Panama's comptroller audited the concession to the Panama Ports Company, which had held the contract to operate the ports since 1997. The concession was renewed in 2021 for 25 years, during the prior Panamanian administration.

Comptroller Anel Flores said the audit found payments that were not made, accounting errors and the apparent existence of a "ghost" concessions operating within the ports since 2015. The company denied those allegations.

The audit determined that the irregularities had cost the government about \$300 million since the concession was extended and an estimated \$1.2 billion during the original 25-year contract.

Flores also said the extension was granted without the required endorsement of his office.

On July 30, the comptroller challenged the Panama Ports Company's contract to operate the ports before the Supreme Court.

Senate leaders scramble to save bipartisan deal and avert partial government shutdown at midnight

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate leaders were scrambling to save a bipartisan spending deal and avert a partial government shutdown at midnight Friday as Democrats have demanded new restrictions on federal immigration raids across the country.

Democrats struck a rare deal with President Donald Trump Thursday to separate funding for the Homeland Security Department from a broad government spending bill and fund it for two weeks while Congress debates curbs on the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency. The deal came as irate Democrats had vowed to vote against the entire spending bill and trigger a shutdown in the wake of the deaths of two protesters at the hands of federal agents in Minneapolis.

"Republicans and Democrats have come together to get the vast majority of the government funded until September" while extending current funding for Homeland Security, Trump said in a social media post Thursday evening. He encouraged members of both parties to cast a "much needed Bipartisan 'YES' vote."

Trump had said earlier in the day that "we don't want a shutdown."

Still, passage of the agreement was delayed late Thursday as Senate leaders were still working to win enough support for the package.

Leaving the Capitol just before midnight Thursday after hours of negotiations, Senate Majority Leader John Thune said there were "snags on both sides" as he and Democratic leader Chuck Schumer tried to work through any objections that could delay passage past the Friday deadline.

"Hopefully people will be of the spirit to try and get this done tomorrow," Thune said as the Senate was scheduled to reconvene on Friday.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., said late Thursday that he was one of the senators objecting. He said ICE agents were being treated unfairly and he opposed House language repealing a new law that gives senators the ability to sue the government for millions of dollars if their personal or office data is accessed without their knowledge.

Rare bipartisan talks

The unusual bipartisan talks between Trump and Schumer, his frequent adversary, came after the fatal shooting of 37-year-old Alex Pretti in Minnesota over the weekend and calls by senators in both parties for a full investigation. Schumer called it "a moment of truth."

"What ICE is doing, outside the law, is state-sanctioned thuggery and it must stop," Schumer said Thursday. "Congress has the authority — and the moral obligation — to act."

The standoff has threatened to plunge the country into another shutdown, just two months after Democrats blocked a spending bill over expiring federal health care subsidies. That dispute closed the government for 43 days as Republicans refused to negotiate.

That shutdown ended when a small group of moderate Democrats broke away to strike a deal with Republicans, but Democrats are more unified this time after the fatal shootings of Pretti and Renee Good by federal agents.

Republicans were more willing to make a deal, as well, as several of them said they were open to new restrictions after the two fatal shootings.

Democrats lay out demands

Democrats have laid out several demands, asking the White House to "end roving patrols" in cities and coordinate with local law enforcement on immigration arrests, including requiring tighter rules for warrants.

They also want an enforceable code of conduct so agents are held accountable when they violate rules. Schumer said agents should be required to have "masks off, body cameras on" and carry proper identification, as is common practice in most law enforcement agencies.

Earlier on Thursday, Tom Homan, the president's border czar, stated during a press conference in Minneapolis that federal immigration officials are developing a plan to reduce the number of agents in Min-

nesota, but this would depend on cooperation from state authorities.

Still far apart on policy

If the deal moves forward, negotiations down the road on a final agreement on the Homeland Security bill are likely to be difficult.

Democrats want Trump's aggressive immigration crackdown to end. "If the Trump administration resists reforms, we shut down the agency," said Connecticut Sen. Richard Blumenthal.

But Republicans are unlikely to agree to all of the Democrats' demands.

North Carolina Sen. Thom Tillis said he is opposed to requiring immigration enforcement officers to show their faces, even as he blamed Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem for decisions that he said are "tarnishing" the agency's reputation.

"You know, there's a lot of vicious people out there, and they'll take a picture of your face, and the next thing you know, your children or your wife or your husband are being threatened at home," Tillis said.

Graham said some of the Democratic proposals "make sense," such as better training and body cameras. Still, he said he was putting his Senate colleagues "on notice" that if Democrats try to make changes to the funding bill, he would insist on new language preventing local governments from resisting the Trump administration's immigration policies.

"I think the best legislative solution for our country would be to adopt some of these reforms to ICE and Border Patrol," Graham posted on X. But he said that the bill should also end so-called "sanctuary city" policies.

Uncertainty in the House

Across the Capitol, Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., told The Associated Press on Thursday that he had been "vehemently opposed" to breaking up the funding package, but "if it is broken up, we will have to move it as quickly as possible. We can't have the government shut down."

On Thursday evening, at a premiere of a movie about first lady Melania Trump at the Kennedy Center, Johnson said he might have some "tough decisions" to make about when to bring the House back to Washington to approve the bills separated by the Senate, if they pass.

"We'll see what they do," Johnson said.

House Republicans have said they do not want any changes to the bill they passed last week. In a letter to Trump on Tuesday, the conservative House Freedom Caucus wrote that its members stand with the Republican president and ICE.

"The package will not come back through the House without funding for the Department of Homeland Security," they wrote.

Trump threatens tariffs on any country selling oil to Cuba, backing Mexico into a corner

By MICHELLE L. PRICE and MEGAN JANETSKY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Thursday signed an executive order that would impose a tariff on any goods from countries that sell or provide oil to Cuba, a move that could further cripple an island plagued by a deepening energy crisis.

The order would primarily put pressure on Mexico, a government that has acted as an oil lifeline for Cuba and has constantly voiced solidarity for the U.S. adversary even as Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum has sought to build a strong relationship with Trump.

Trump was asked by a reporter Thursday whether he was trying to "choke off" Cuba, which he called a "failing nation."

"The word 'choke off' is awfully tough," Trump said. "I'm not trying to, but, it looks like it's something that's just not going to be able to survive."

Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez and a number of other Cuban officials condemned Trump's executive order. Rodríguez called it a "brutal act of aggression against Cuba and its people ... who are now threatened with being subjected to extreme living conditions."

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He accused the U.S. of resorting to "blackmail and coercion to try to force other countries to join its universally condemned blockade policy against Cuba."

Cuba relies on allies for energy

This week has been marked by speculation that Mexico would slash oil shipments to Cuba under mounting pressure by Trump to distance itself from the Cuban government.

In its deepening energy and economic crisis, fueled in part by strict economic sanctions by the U.S., Cuba has relied heavily on foreign assistance and oil shipments from allies like Mexico, Russia and Venezuela before a U.S. military operation ousted former Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

Since the Venezuela operation, Trump has said no more Venezuelan oil will go to Cuba and the Cuban government is ready to fall.

In its most recent report, Mexico's state-owned oil company Pemex said it shipped nearly 20,000 barrels of oil per day to Cuba from January through Sept. 30, 2025. That month, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio visited Mexico City. Afterward, Jorge Piñon, an expert at the University of Texas Energy Institute who tracks shipments using satellite technology, said the figure had fallen to about 7,000 barrels.

Uncertainty simmers in Mexico

Sheinbaum has been incredibly vague about where her country stood, and this week has given round-about and ambiguous answers to inquiries about the shipments, and dodged reporters questions in her morning press briefings.

On Tuesday, Sheinbaum said Pemex had at least temporarily paused some oil shipments to Cuba. But she struck an ambiguous tone, saying the pause was part of general fluctuations in oil supplies and a "sovereign decision" not made under pressure from the U.S. Sheinbaum has said Mexico would continue to show solidarity with Havana, but didn't clarify what kind of support Mexico would offer.

On Wednesday, the Latin American leader claimed she never said Mexico has completely "suspended" shipments and "humanitarian aid" to Cuba would continue and decisions about shipments to Cuba were determined by Pemex contracts.

"So the contract determines when shipments are sent and when they are not sent," Sheinbaum said.

Trump and Sheinbaum spoke by phone Thursday morning. Sheinbaum said they did not discuss Cuba.

"We didn't address the issue of Cuba," Sheinbaum said, adding that Mexico's foreign affairs secretary had discussed with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio that it was "very important" for Mexico to maintain its humanitarian aid to Cuba and Mexico was willing to serve as an intermediary between the U.S. and Cuba.

'Under threat of tariff coercion'

The lack of clarity from the leader has underscored the extreme pressure Mexico and other Latin American nations are under as Trump has grown more confrontational following the Venezuelan operation.

It remains unclear what the Thursday order by Trump will mean for Cuba, which has been roiled by crisis for years and a U.S. embargo. Anxieties were already simmering on the Caribbean island as many drivers sat in long lines this week for gasoline, many unsure of what would come next.

On Cuban state television, commentator Jorge Legañoa, who usually expresses views aligned with the government, asserted "Cuba was not a threat," but rather that the island's authorities were fighting gangs and preventing regional drug trafficking with their zero-tolerance policy.

Cuban Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Carlos F. de Cossio wrote on social media platform X that the U.S. is tightening its Cuban blockade after "the failure of decades of relentless economic warfare" and attempting to "force sovereign states to join the embargo."

"Under threat of tariff coercion, they must decide whether to forgo their right to export their own fuel to Cuba," he wrote.

Venezuela's acting president signs oil industry overhaul, easing state control to lure investors

By REGINA GARCIA CANO Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Venezuela's acting President Delcy Rodríguez on Thursday signed a law that opens the nation's oil sector to privatization, reversing a tenet of the self-proclaimed socialist movement that has ruled the country for more than two decades.

The reform will undoubtedly be her government's signature policy as it positions the oil sector – Venezuela's engine – to lure the foreign investment needed to revamp a long-crippled industry. Rodríguez enacted the measure less than a month after the brazen seizure of then-President Nicolás Maduro in a U.S. military attack in Venezuela's capital, Caracas.

Rodríguez, facing oil workers and ruling-party supporters, signed the bill less than two hours after the National Assembly approved it. At the same time, the U.S. Department of Treasury officially began to ease punishing economic sanctions on Venezuelan oil, which were imposed by the first Trump administration, and expanded the ability of U.S. energy companies to operate in the South American nation.

Rodríguez on Thursday also spoke with U.S. President Donald Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who a day earlier explained to U.S. senators in a hearing how the administration is planning to handle the sale of tens of millions of barrels of oil from Venezuela and oversee where the money flows. Venezuela has the largest proven reserves of crude in the world.

The moves by both governments are paving the way for yet another radical geopolitical and economic shift in Venezuela.

"We're talking about the future. We are talking about the country that we are going to give to our children," Rodríguez said of the reform.

Rodríguez proposed the changes earlier this month, after Trump said his administration would take control of Venezuela's oil exports and revitalize the ailing industry by luring foreign investment.

Private companies to control oil production

The legislation promises to give private companies control over the production and sale of oil, ending the state-owned Petróleos de Venezuela SA's monopoly over those activities as well as pricing.

A private company "will assume full management of the activities at its own expense, account, and risk, after demonstrating its financial and technical capacity through a business plan approved by" the nation's Oil Ministry, according to the law. The legislation provides that ownership of the hydrocarbon reservoirs on which a company will carry out activities remains vested in the state.

The new law also allows for independent arbitration of disputes, removing a mandate for disagreements to be settled only in Venezuelan courts, which are controlled by the ruling party. Foreign investors view the involvement of independent arbitrators as crucial to guard against future expropriation.

Rodríguez's government expects the changes to serve as assurances for major U.S. oil companies that have so far hesitated about returning to the volatile country. Some of those companies lost investments when the ruling party enacted the existing law two decades ago to favor Venezuela's state-run oil company, PDVSA.

Additionally, the revised law modifies extraction taxes, setting a royalty cap rate of 30% and allowing the executive branch to set percentages for every project based on capital investment needs, competitiveness and other factors.

Potential economic improvements

Ruling-party lawmaker Orlando Camacho, head of the assembly's oil committee, said the reform "will change the country's economy."

Meanwhile, opposition lawmaker Antonio Ecarri urged the assembly to add transparency and accountability provisions to the law, including the creation of a website to make funding and other information public. He noted that the current lack of oversight has led to systemic corruption and argued that these provisions can also be considered judicial guarantees.

Those guarantees are among the key changes foreign investors are looking for as they weigh entering the Venezuelan market.

“Let the light shine on in the oil industry,” Ecarri said.

Oil workers dressed in red jumpsuits and hard hats celebrated the bill’s approval, waving a Venezuelan flag inside the legislative palace and then joining lawmakers in a demonstration with ruling-party supporters.

A reversal of policies

The law was last altered two decades ago as Maduro’s mentor and predecessor, the late Hugo Chávez, made heavy state control over the oil industry a pillar of his socialist-inspired revolution.

Chávez, elected in 1998, expanded social services, including housing and education, thanks to the country’s oil bonanza which generated revenues estimated at some \$981 billion between 1999 and 2011 as crude prices soared. His 2006 changes to the oil industry law required PDVSA to be the principal stakeholder in all major oil projects.

In tearing up the contracts that foreign companies signed in the 1990s, Chávez nationalized huge assets belonging to American and other Western firms that refused to comply, including ExxonMobil and ConocoPhillips. They are still waiting to receive billions of dollars in arbitration awards.

From those heady days of lavish state spending, PDVSA’s fortunes turned — along with the country’s — as a drop in oil prices, corruption and mismanagement eroded profits and hurt production, first under Chávez, then Maduro. By 2013, the fell into the dire economic crisis that has driven more than 7.7 million Venezuelans to migrate.

Sanctions imposed by successive U.S. administrations further crippled the oil industry.

Through the eyes of Iranian protesters, glimpses of disorder, disarray and death

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB and SARAH EL DEEB Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — This time felt different.

The 25-year-old Iranian fashion designer hoped that mass protests nearly four years ago — the ones that erupted after a young woman was arrested and died in custody for not wearing the hijab properly — would improve civil rights in the Islamic Republic.

Not much changed, though. Being on those streets, she felt, may have been for nothing. But it didn’t deter her.

In early January, she protested again. The sea of people across Tehran’s busy streets lifted her spirits. This time, the spark was inflation and the plummeting value of the Iranian rial — though chants soon targeted the country’s theocratic leaders.

The crowd was larger, more diverse, she said. Protests in Iran erupt every few years. But this momentum felt unprecedented, she said.

The response by security forces would be, too.

Activists estimate that over 6,000 people, mostly protesters, were killed in the bloodiest crackdown on dissent since the Islamic Republic was created in 1979. They worry the number will increase as information trickles out.

The Associated Press spoke with six Iranians, each on condition of anonymity through secure channels as security forces continued to crack down on dissenters after the protests. They said they demonstrated and witnessed state violence against protesters. Four of them took risks to circumvent an internet shut-down to share what they saw, while two spoke from abroad.

They described a rare sense of hope among protesters, a consensus that the current status quo was no longer sustainable. The younger, more defiant generation was there, they said, but so were older residents, people from well-to-do families, even some children. All said they expected the state to respond aggressively but were horrified by the extent of the brutal crackdown.

“When we went out, I couldn’t say I wasn’t stressed, but there was no way I could stay at home,” the designer said. “I felt that if I stayed home — if anyone stayed home — out of fear, nothing would move

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forward.”

No group of interviews — no matter how illuminating — can reflect the experiences of an entire population or even a segment of it. They’re not representative of the large country of over 85 million people and its diverse ethnic and religious makeup. But these Iranians offer a rare glimpse of life in the Islamic Republic at a pivotal moment in its history.

Iran was battered by Israeli and U.S. jets during a 12-day war in June and has been under the grip of Western-led sanctions, compounding economic problems. People say the government has not responded to their concerns of economic mismanagement and interference in their personal lives. They want rights, they say. Dignity.

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has said several thousand have been killed — a rare admission that indicates the scale of the movement and the government’s response. Officials and state media repeatedly refer to demonstrators as “terrorists,” showing images of buildings and state property they say protesters have burned or damaged. Iran’s mission to the United Nations did not respond to questions from AP about these witnesses’ recollections. Iran’s U.N. ambassador, Amir Saeid Irvani, has previously said security forces “firmly and responsibly” confronted protesters, whom he called “violent separatists.”

The fashion designer: ‘Everyone was afraid’

During the peak of the protests, the fashion designer said, people poured into the streets of Tehran. She described the events of Jan. 8, a turning point in the mood and crackdown on demonstrations.

“When I was outside in the evening, the city was still and empty,” the fashion designer said. Then came a call to protest from Reza Pahlavi, the exiled crown prince. By 8 p.m., she said, she was in a sea of thousands — a crowd larger and more diverse than she’d ever seen.

“Everyone was afraid,” she said, but “they kept saying, ‘No, don’t leave. This time, we can’t leave it. We must not leave until they are over.’” She and two friends who protested with her spoke to the AP using a Starlink satellite dish because of the internet blackout, devices now being seized by authorities there.

They marched up Shariati Street, a commercial road that connects some of northern Tehran’s most bustling neighborhoods to one of the country’s busiest bazaars. But shops were closed. The three said they sprayed graffiti and yelled anti-government chants at the top of their lungs.

They described teenagers and elderly people joining Iran’s regular dissenting voices in chants of defiance and anger. Some chants called for the death of Khamenei — a cry that can bring the death penalty.

Then came the security forces.

Anti-riot police and members of the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard’s all-volunteer Basij force arrived, the three friends said, blocking the road and lobbing tear gas and firing pellet guns into the crowd. Protesters panicked and scrambled as the stench of tear gas swept across the crowd.

The group told AP that many pushed forward, throwing rocks at the security forces. Some younger people, veterans of previous protests, donned scarves or masks to protect themselves and hide their identities, expecting a violent pushback.

The protesters built momentum. Some security forces that had arrived on motorcycles appeared to have retreated. But, the fashion designer said, the forces returned, charging at protesters. She knew she and her friends had to run.

They dashed into alleys and side streets, away from the chaos. Residents cheering on protesters had thrown rags and antiseptics from their windows as security forces fired pellets at the crowd.

Soon, tear gas canisters fell into the alley. The fashion designer remembered lessons from other protests: “I thought I’d kick it back,” she said, to protect the wounded. But as she did, she said, security forces were firing paintballs and pellets. She described being pierced in the hand and leg.

Fortunately, she said, her mask softened the blow of the paintball that hit the side of her face.

The doctor: ‘This had never happened before at this scale’

When protests reached her part of the country, the doctor said, she wasn’t surprised. But the extent was a different story.

“This had never happened before at this scale,” said the doctor in Mashhad, Iran’s second-largest city and home to an important Shiite shrine. She spoke to AP while visiting family abroad.

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Days before a hospital night shift, the physician said, she had attended protests in the northeastern city, hearing gunfire from a distance and feeling tear gas burn her eyes. She saw graffiti on walls and buildings afire, even mosques believed to be used by government forces as rally points.

Once she clocked in at the hospital, Iranian security forces had escalated their response.

"I was not afraid for myself," the doctor said. "I was afraid for others."

She didn't work in the emergency room but tried to see what was going on as ambulances and protesters delivered bodies. Colleagues told her 150 bodies were brought in that night. As she tried to move in closer, she managed a glimpse at some of them, she said: a boy and a young woman lying on stretchers, bearing gunshot wounds.

Security agents in the hospital, both in uniform and plainclothes, took over the command of the hospital emergency room, the doctor said. Doctors protested, she said of the colleagues' account, but they were told to stop speaking or asking questions.

"They were standing over their (ER workers) heads with a gun, telling them not to touch (the wounded)," the doctor recalled of the experience relayed by one colleague. It was "as if they wanted those injured people to die on their own."

Momentum ebbed, and Iran remains isolated

Khamenei told the nation that the protesters were either collaborators working for American or Israeli intelligence agencies or misguided members of the public trying to sabotage the country. Authorities held a counterdemonstration showing people loyal to the country's theocratic leadership.

Crackdowns continued. Momentum ebbed. Iran remains cut off from the world. For some, rage and grief over the violence have grown.

"What I fear is that these events will be treated as something ordinary by the world, that people will simply move on and no one will pay attention," the doctor said. "The fact that the voices of so many of those who were killed never reaches anyone is truly the most painful thing for me."

She described observing a family arrive at the hospital to retrieve the body of a relative—a young woman. Agents refused to hand over her body, the doctor said, unless the family gave them her national identification and let them identify her as a Basij volunteer and government supporter. An argument started, and her family was arrested, the doctor said, and the woman's body was taken to the cemetery with the others.

The family said, "Our daughter was killed by your forces," the doctor recalled. "I can't get the picture of that day out of mind, even for an hour."

As January comes to an end, tensions on the streets have cooled, the three Iranians in Tehran told AP. Some daily life peeks through. But everywhere they go, they said, they remain watchful — in case something sets it all off again.

They can't connect with Iranians outside their circles because of the internet blackout, but in their area, they said they see large deployments of security forces in public places.

"I don't know how the other places are," one of the three said. "But on every square in Tehran, there are agents in plain clothing — and even riot police."

The doctor said she hopes the world won't turn away from Iran.

"No matter how many times I explain, I truly can't really convey the extent of the horrible situation," she said. "No one would believe that a government of a country can so easily kill its own people."

Masked agents, face scans and a question: Are you a citizen?

Inside Trump's Minnesota crackdown

By GARANCE BURKE and BYRON TAU Associated Press

Luis Martinez was on his way to work on a frigid Minneapolis morning when federal agents suddenly boxed him in, forcing the SUV he was driving to a dead stop in the middle of the street.

Masked agents rapped on the window, demanding Martinez produce his ID. Then one held his cellphone inches from Martinez's face and scanned his features, capturing the shape of his eyes, the curves of his lips, the exact quadrants of his cheeks.

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All the while, the agent kept asking: Are you a U.S. citizen?

The encounter in a Minneapolis suburb this week captures the tactics on display in the Trump administration's immigration crackdown in Minnesota, which it describes as the largest of its kind and one that has drawn national scrutiny after federal agents shot and killed two U.S. citizens this month.

Across Minnesota and other states where the Department of Homeland Security has surged personnel, officials say enforcement efforts are targeted and focused on serious offenders. But photographs, videos and internal documents paint a different picture, showing agents leaning heavily on biometric surveillance and vast, interconnected databases — highlighting how a sprawling digital surveillance apparatus has become central to the Trump administration's immigration crackdown.

Civil liberties experts warn the expanding use of those systems risks sweeping up citizens and noncitizens alike, often with little transparency or meaningful oversight.

Over the past year, Homeland Security and other federal agencies have dramatically expanded their ability to collect, share and analyze people's personal data, thanks to a web of agreements with local, state, federal and international agencies, plus contracts with technology companies and data brokers. The databases include immigration and travel records, facial images and information drawn from vehicle databases.

In Martinez's case, the face scan didn't find a match and it wasn't until he produced his U.S. passport, which he said he carried for fear of such an encounter, that federal agents let him go.

"I had been telling people that here in Minnesota it's like a paradise for everybody, all the cultures are free here," he said. "But now people are running out of the state because of everything that is happening. It's terrifying. It's not safe anymore."

Together with other government surveillance data and systems, federal authorities can now monitor American cities at a scale that would have been difficult to imagine just a few years ago, advocates say. Agents can identify people on the street through facial recognition, trace their movements through license-plate readers and, in some cases, use commercially available phone-location data to reconstruct daily routines and associations.

When asked by The Associated Press about its expanding use of surveillance tools, the Department of Homeland Security said it would not disclose law enforcement sensitive methods.

"Employing various forms of technology in support of investigations and law enforcement activities aids in the arrest of criminal gang members, child sex offenders, murderers, drug dealers, identity thieves and more, all while respecting civil liberties and privacy interests," it said.

Dan Herman, a former Customs and Border Protection senior adviser in the Biden administration who now works at the Center for American Progress, said the government's access to facial recognition, other personal data and surveillance systems poses a threat to people's privacy rights and civil liberties without adequate checks.

"They have access to a tremendous amount of trade, travel, immigration and screening data. That's a significant and valuable national security asset, but there's a concern about the potential for abuse," Herman said. "Everyone should be very concerned about the potential that this data could be weaponized for improper purposes."

Facial recognition

On Wednesday, DHS disclosed online that it has been using a facial recognition app, Mobile Fortify, that it said uses "trusted source photos" to compare scans of people's faces that agents take to verify their identity. The app, which Customs and Border Protection said is made by the vendor NEC, uses facial comparison or fingerprint-matching systems.

The app was in operation for CBP and ICE before the immigration crackdown in the Los Angeles area in June, when website 404Media first reported its existence.

In interactions observed by reporters and videos posted online, federal agents are rarely seen asking for consent before holding their cellphones to people's faces, and in some clips they continue scanning even after someone objects.

In two instances seen by an AP journalist near Columbia Heights, Minnesota, where immigration officials recently detained a 5-year-old boy and his father, masked agents held their phones a foot away from

people's faces to capture their biometric details.

The technology resembles facial recognition systems used at airports, but unlike airport screenings, where travelers are typically notified and can sometimes opt out, Martinez said he was given no choice.

According to a lawsuit filed against DHS by the state of Illinois and the city of Chicago this month, DHS has used Mobile Fortify in the field more than 100,000 times. The Department of Homeland Security told AP that Mobile Fortify supports "accurate identity and immigration-status verification during enforcement operations. It operates with a deliberately high-matching threshold," and uses only some immigration data.

Without federal guidelines for the use of facial recognition tools, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights warned in a September 2024 report their deployment raises concerns about accuracy, oversight, transparency, discrimination and access to justice.

Body-camera footage

Last year, the Trump administration scaled back a program to give Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials body cameras, but administration officials said some agents tied to the fatal shooting of Minneapolis ICU nurse Alex Pretti were wearing them and that footage is now being reviewed.

Gregory Bovino, who was the administration's top Border Patrol official charged with the immigration crackdown in Minneapolis until Monday, began wearing a bodycam in response to a judge's order late last year.

Body-camera video could help clarify events surrounding federal agents' killing of Pretti, who was filming immigration agents with his cellphone when they shot him in the back.

Administration officials shifted their tone after independent video footage emerged raising serious questions about some Trump officials' accusations that Pretti intended to harm agents.

Emerging technologies

Homeland Security and affiliated agencies are piloting and deploying more than 100 artificial intelligence systems, including some used in law enforcement activities, according to the department's disclosure Wednesday.

Congress last year authorized U.S. Customs and Border Protection to get more than \$2.7 billion to build out border surveillance systems and add in AI and other emerging technologies.

In recent weeks, DHS requested more information from private industry on how technology companies and data providers can support their investigations and help identify people.

Meanwhile, longtime government contractor Palantir was paid \$30 million to extend a contract to build a system designed to locate people flagged for deportation. On Wednesday, the Trump administration disclosed it's using Palantir's AI models to sift through immigration enforcement tips submitted to its tip line.

DHS has also been exploring partnerships with license-plate reader companies like Flock Safety to expand their tracking capabilities.

Rachel Levinson-Waldman, who directs the Brennan Center for Justice's Liberty and National Security Program, said more funding for government surveillance tools changes the landscape.

"We are developing these technologies for immigrant enforcement," she said. "Are we also going to expand it or wield it against U.S. citizens who are engaging in entirely lawful or protest activity?"

Hypothermia risks increase in Mississippi and Tennessee with next wave of frigid temperatures

By SOPHIE BATES, SUDHIN THANAWALA and RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

BELZONI, Miss. (AP) — With another wave of dangerous cold heading for the U.S. South on Friday, experts say the risk of hypothermia heightens for people in parts of Mississippi and Tennessee who are entering their sixth day trapped at home without power in subfreezing temperatures.

"The longer you're exposed to the cold, the worse it is," said Dr. Hans House, a professor of emergency medicine at the University of Iowa. "The body can handle cold temperatures briefly very well, but the prolonged exposure is a problem."

The National Weather Service said arctic air moving into the Southeast will cause already frigid tempera-

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tures to plummet into the teens (minus 10 degrees Celsius) on Friday night in cities like Nashville, where more than 79,000 homes and businesses still lacked power nearly a week after a massive storm dumped snow and ice across the eastern U.S.

People who are more vulnerable — the elderly, infants and those with underlying health conditions — may have started experiencing hypothermia symptoms within hours of being exposed to the frigid temperatures, explained Dr. Zheng Ben Ma, medical director of the University of Washington Medical Center's northwest emergency department. That includes everything from exhaustion to slurred speech and memory loss.

But almost a week in and the situation is nearing a turning point, he explained: Younger people who are generally healthy could potentially begin to fall victim to these symptoms as well.

"Once you get into days six, seven, upwards of 10, then even a healthy, resilient person will be more predisposed to experiencing some of those deleterious effects of the cold temperature," he said.

Hundreds of National Guard troops mobilized Thursday in Mississippi and Tennessee to clear debris and assist people stranded in cars or stuck at homes.

Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves said Guard troops were delivering meals, blankets and other supplies by truck and helicopter. And in Tennessee, Gov. Bill Lee said crews had distributed more than 600 units of warming supplies and over 2,200 gallons (8,328 liters) of gas and diesel.

Nashville Mayor Freddie O'Connell said that they have the most line workers, crews and vegetation support workers in the city utility's history as they work to get electricity back for everyone.

But the exact timeline for power to be restored, especially in more rural areas, remains unclear.

At least 85 people have died in areas affected by bitter cold from Texas to New Jersey. Roughly half the deaths were reported in Tennessee, Mississippi and Louisiana. While some deaths have been attributed to hypothermia, others are suspected to be related to carbon monoxide exposure.

Dr. Abhi Mehrotra, an emergency medicine physician with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, said it's important to make sure heat sources used indoors, including generators, are not emitting carbon monoxide, which could be deadly.

More than 230,000 homes and businesses were without electricity Thursday night, according to the outage tracking website poweroutage.us. The vast majority were in Mississippi and Tennessee, with roughly 87,000 each.

Mississippi officials say it's the state's worst winter storm since 1994. About 80 warming centers were opened across the state, known as one of the nation's poorest.

Forecasters say the subfreezing weather will persist in the eastern U.S. into February and there's high chance of heavy snow in the Carolinas, Virginia and northeast Georgia this weekend, possibly up to a foot (30 centimeters) in parts of North Carolina. Snow is also possible along the East Coast from Maryland to Maine.

The National Weather Service said there was a chance of freezing rain Thursday night in parts of Mississippi, and light snow showers could hit Nashville overnight Friday. Forecasters said the extreme cold and subzero wind chills (minus 18 C) represented the greatest danger.

Melania Trump's documentary premieres at the Kennedy Center ahead of global release

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Melania Trump is capping her first year back as first lady with the global release of a documentary she produced about the 20 days leading up to husband Donald Trump's return to the White House.

A private person, Melania Trump remains a bit of a mystery to the public in her husband's second term. "Melania" premiered Thursday at the Kennedy Center before it is released on Friday in more than 1,500 theaters in the U.S. and around the world.

"I want to show the audience my life, what it takes to be a first lady again and (the) transition from

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private citizen back to the White House," Melania Trump told reporters as she and the president moved along a charcoal-colored walkway at the event attended by Cabinet members, members of Congress and conservative commentators.

She said viewers will see how she conducts her businesses and philanthropy, cares for her family and builds her White House team.

"It's beautiful, it's emotional, it's fashionable, it's cinematic and I'm very proud of it," she said.

The documentary was produced by AmazonMGM Studios and is said to have cost \$40 million. It will stream exclusively on the Amazon Prime Video streaming service after its theatrical run.

Director Brett Ratner said his measure of success would not be box-office performance.

"It's a documentary and documentaries historically have not been huge box office smashes," he told reporters on his way into the premiere. "You can't expect a documentary to play in theaters."

The Republican president saw the nearly two-hour film for the first time at a private White House screening over the weekend. He said Thursday that he thought it was "really great."

"It really brings back a glamour that you just don't see anymore," Trump said. "Our country can use a little bit of that, right?"

'Melania' more than a year in the making

It was unclear how much money Melania Trump stands to earn or what her plans are for any film proceeds. Experts said it was unusual for a first lady to pursue a project of this kind from the White House — but not unusual for the Trumps.

"As far as I know, she's the first first lady to be paid a lot of money to have a documentary made about her and it is unprecedented in terms of the Trumps because they are always breaking precedent," said Katherine Jellison, professor emerita of history at Ohio University.

Asked about the sum, Trump mentioned the book deal for Barack Obama and his wife, Michelle, that the publisher announced in 2017, shortly after he left office.

Presidents and first ladies generally refrain from pursuing outside business ventures while in office to avoid potential conflicts of interest or raising ethical concerns.

Both Trumps participate in numerous business ventures, selling everything from watches, fragrances and Bibles for him to jewelry, Christmas ornaments and digital collectibles for her.

Marc Beckman, the first lady's longtime senior adviser, defended the financial arrangement, which Amazon has declined to comment on. He noted that she was a private citizen when Amazon announced the film in January 2025 and that she is unelected and receives no salary as first lady. "So why should we limit her?" he said Thursday.

The movie also marks another link between the Trumps and Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, who has worked to improve a once-tense relationship with the president.

Melania Trump said Thursday that a bidding process was conducted and that Amazon "was the best because they agreed to do theatrical releases."

The movie is the first project by Ratner since he was accused of sexual misconduct in the early days of the #MeToo reckoning. Ratner's lawyer has denied the allegations.

'Here we go again'

In a scene from a teaser for the movie, it is Inauguration Day and Melania Trump is inside the Capitol, waiting to be escorted into the Rotunda for the ceremony. She turns her head, looks directly into the camera and says, "Here we go again."

She wrote in her self-titled memoir published in 2024 about how much she values her privacy. She is not seen or heard from as often as some of her recent predecessors, which may be influencing the public's perceptions of her. But she also likes to do things her way.

She said she did the film to show people what goes into becoming first lady.

The U.S. public is divided on their views of her, but a significant number — about 4 in 10 adults — had no opinion or had not heard of her, according to a CNN poll from January 2025. About 3 in 10 adults saw her favorably while roughly the same share had an unfavorable opinion.

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Her standing among Republicans was higher, with about 7 in 10 saying in the poll that they viewed her favorably, but around one-quarter had no opinion.

"I think it's an attempt, in a way, to really augment or tailor or really refine her image for the American public," said Katherine Sibley, who teaches history at Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia. "She's a mystery to the American people."

First lady cites impactful first year of second Trump term

Melania Trump, 55, said she's honored to execute the traditional duties of first lady, such as planning state dinners, hosting the annual Easter Egg Roll and decorating for Christmas. But she also has said she wants to leave her mark in other ways, too.

She spent chunks of time away from Washington last year working on the documentary and was deeply involved in every aspect of its development, according to Beckman.

Her first-year record centers on the well-being and safety of children.

She used her influence to lobby Congress to pass the "Take It Down Act," making it a federal crime to publish intimate images online without consent. The president signed the bill into law and had her sign it, too.

Her advocacy for foster children was enshrined in an executive order creating a "Fostering the Future" program. It's part of the "Be Best" child-focused initiative she launched in the first term.

She wrote to Russian President Vladimir Putin for help reuniting children who had been separated from their families because of his war against Ukraine. She had her husband hand-deliver the letter when the leaders met in Alaska, and she later announced that eight children had been reunited with their families.

The first lady has a prominent role in the administration's efforts on artificial intelligence and education and recently launched a global version of the foster child program.

She told guests at a White House Christmas reception that she is working on a new legislative effort for 2026, but has not yet shared details.

Trump says he will announce his Federal Reserve chair nominee on Friday morning

By JOSH BOAK and DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said he plans to announce his choice for chairman of the Federal Reserve on Friday morning, a long-awaited decision that could set up a showdown on whether the U.S. central bank preserves its independence from the White House and electoral politics.

For the past year, the president has aggressively attacked Fed Chair Jerome Powell, whose term as the head of the U.S. central bank ends in May. Trump maintains that Powell should cut the Fed's benchmark interest rates more drastically to fuel faster economic growth, while the Fed chair has taken a far more judicious approach in the wake of Trump's tariffs because inflation is already elevated.

"I'll be announcing the Fed chair tomorrow morning," Trump told reporters Thursday night as he went into a screening of the documentary "Melania" about his wife. "It's going to be, somebody that is very respected, somebody that's known to everybody in the financial world. And I think it's going to be a very good choice. I hope so."

Trump stayed relatively cryptic about his pick. His search was led by Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent with four known finalists: Kevin Warsh, a former Fed governor; Christopher Waller, a current Fed governor; Rick Rieder, an executive with the financial firm BlackRock; and Kevin Hassett, director of the White House National Economic Council. Trump previously suggested Hassett was the frontrunner, only to recently say that he wanted him to remain in his current post.

Trump did say on Thursday night that "a lot of people think that this is somebody that could have been there a few years ago," fueling speculation that he had chosen Warsh, who was a finalist in the 2017 search for Fed chair that led to Powell's selection.

Tensions between Trump and the central bank had been steadily mounting as the president used the renovation costs of the Fed's headquarters to further lambaste Powell, a campaign that resulted in the

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Fed getting subpoenas from the Justice Department earlier this month. The Fed chair took the rare step of issuing a video statement in which he said, "The threat of criminal charges is a consequence of the Federal Reserve setting interest rates based on our best assessment of what will serve the public, rather than following the preferences of the president."

Trump has long teased his Fed choice while saying his nominee would slash interest rates that influence the supply of money in the U.S. economy, the rate of inflation and the stability of the job market.

On the cusp of Trump's announcement, Powell might have the ability to block him in an effort to ensure the Fed preserves its credibility by staying away from political considerations.

While his term as chair ends in roughly three months, Powell's term on the Fed's board of governors runs through 2028 and he could choose to remain in that post, likely blocking Trump's ability to have his nominees control the majority of the seats on the board. Of the seven Fed governors, former President Joe Biden picked three of them in addition to renominating Powell to a second term as chair.

If Powell stays on the board, he could also create a small procedural hurdle for Trump's ability to nominate someone new to the board. This would mean Trump would either have to choose an existing board member as chair or replace Stephen Miran, who is on leave from his job as chair of the White House Council of Economic Advisers to fill a term as governor that technically ends on Saturday. If Trump chooses to replace Miran, he could name someone new to the board.

At a Wednesday news conference, Powell declined to say whether he would leave the board. But he did offer some advice to any successor about balancing the need for independent judgment with public accountability.

"Don't get pulled into elected politics — don't do it," Powell said. "Another is, that our window into democratic accountability is Congress. And it's not a passive burden for us to go to Congress and talk to people. It's an affirmative regular obligation."

Democrats, White House strike spending deal that would avert government shutdown

By MARY CLARE JALONICK, KEVIN FREKING and SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats and the White House struck a deal to avert a partial government shutdown and temporarily fund the Department of Homeland Security as they consider new restrictions for President Donald Trump's surge of immigration enforcement. But passage was delayed late Thursday as leaders scrambled to win enough support for the agreement before the midnight Friday deadline.

As the country reels from the deaths of two protesters at the hands of federal agents in Minneapolis, the White House agreed to separate homeland security funding from a larger spending bill and fund the department for two weeks while they debate Democratic demands for curbs on the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency.

"Republicans and Democrats have come together to get the vast majority of the government funded until September" while extending current funding for Homeland Security, Trump said in a social media post Thursday evening. He encouraged members of both parties to cast a "much needed Bipartisan 'YES' vote."

Still, all senators weren't yet on board. Leaving the Capitol just before midnight Thursday after hours of negotiations, Senate Majority Leader John Thune said there were "snags on both sides" as he and Democratic leader Chuck Schumer tried to rally support.

"Hopefully people will be of the spirit to try and get this done tomorrow," Thune said.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., said late Thursday that he was one of the senators objecting. He said Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents were being treated unfairly. He has also opposed House language that would repeal a new law that gives senators the ability to sue the government for millions of dollars if their personal or office data is accessed without their knowledge.

Democrats had requested the two-week extension and say they are prepared to block the wide-ranging spending bill if their demands aren't met, denying Republicans the votes they need to pass it and potentially triggering a shutdown.

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Rare bipartisan talks

The rare bipartisan talks between Trump and his frequent adversary, Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer, came after the fatal shooting of 37-year-old Alex Pretti in Minnesota over the weekend and calls by senators in both parties for a full investigation. Schumer called it "a moment of truth."

"The American people support law enforcement. They support border security. They do not support ICE terrorizing our streets and killing American citizens," Schumer said.

The standoff has threatened to plunge the country into another shutdown, just two months after Democrats blocked a spending bill over expiring federal health care subsidies. That dispute closed the government for 43 days as Republicans refused to negotiate.

That shutdown ended when a small group of moderate Democrats broke away to strike a deal with Republicans, but Democrats are more unified this time after the fatal shootings of Pretti and Renee Good by federal agents.

Democrats lay out demands

Democrats have laid out several demands, asking the White House to "end roving patrols" in cities and coordinate with local law enforcement on immigration arrests, including requiring tighter rules for warrants.

They also want an enforceable code of conduct so agents are held accountable when they violate rules. Schumer said agents should be required to have "masks off, body cameras on" and carry proper identification, as is common practice in most law enforcement agencies.

The Democratic caucus is united in those "common sense reforms," and the burden is on Republicans to accept them, Schumer said.

"Boil it all down, what we are talking about is that these lawless ICE agents should be following the same rules that your local police department does," said Democratic Sen. Tina Smith of Minnesota. "There has to be accountability."

Earlier on Thursday, Tom Homan, the president's border czar, stated during a press conference in Minneapolis that federal immigration officials are developing a plan to reduce the number of agents in Minnesota, but this would depend on cooperation from state authorities.

Still far apart on policy

Negotiations down the road on a final agreement on the Homeland Security bill are likely to be difficult.

Democrats want Trump's aggressive immigration crackdown to end. "If the Trump administration resists reforms, we shut down the agency," said Connecticut Sen. Richard Blumenthal.

"We need to take a stand," he said.

But Republicans are unlikely to agree to all of the Democrats' demands.

North Carolina Sen. Thom Tillis said he is opposed to requiring immigration enforcement officers to show their faces, even as he blamed Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem for decisions that he said are "tarnishing" the agency's reputation.

"You know, there's a lot of vicious people out there, and they'll take a picture of your face, and the next thing you know, your children or your wife or your husband are being threatened at home," Tillis said.

South Carolina Sen. Graham said some of the Democratic proposals "make sense," such as better training and body cameras. Still, he said he was putting his Senate colleagues "on notice" that if Democrats try to make changes to the funding bill, he would insist on new language preventing local governments from resisting the Trump administration's immigration policies.

"I think the best legislative solution for our country would be to adopt some of these reforms to ICE and Border Patrol," Graham posted on X. But he said that the bill should also end so-called "sanctuary city" policies.

Uncertainty in the House

Across the Capitol, Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., told The Associated Press on Thursday that he had been "vehemently opposed" to breaking up the funding package, but "if it is broken up, we will have to move it as quickly as possible. We can't have the government shut down."

On Thursday evening, at a premiere of a movie about first lady Melania Trump at the Kennedy Center,

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Johnson said he might have some "tough decisions" to make about when to bring the House back to Washington to approve the bills separated by the Senate, if they pass.

"We'll see what they do," Johnson said.

House Republicans have said they do not want any changes to the bill they passed last week. In a letter to Trump on Tuesday, the conservative House Freedom Caucus wrote that its members stand with the Republican president and ICE.

"The package will not come back through the House without funding for the Department of Homeland Security," they wrote.

Trump threatens Canada with 50% tariff on aircraft sold in US, expanding trade war

By MICHELLE L. PRICE and ROB GILLIES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Thursday threatened Canada with a 50% tariff on any aircraft sold in the U.S., the latest salvo in his trade war with America's northern neighbor as his feud with Prime Minister Mark Carney expands.

Trump's threat posted on social media came after he threatened over the weekend to impose a 100% tariff on goods imported from Canada if it went forward with a planned trade deal with China. But Trump's threat did not come with any details about when he would impose the import taxes, as Canada had already struck a deal.

In Trump's latest threat, the Republican president said he was retaliating against Canada for refusing to certify jets from Savannah, Georgia-based Gulfstream Aerospace.

Trump said the U.S., in return, would decertify all Canadian aircraft, including planes from its largest aircraft maker, Bombardier. "If, for any reason, this situation is not immediately corrected, I am going to charge Canada a 50% Tariff on any and all Aircraft sold into the United States of America," Trump said in his post.

Trump said he is "hereby decertifying" the Bombardier Global Express business jets. There are 150 Global Express aircraft in service registered in the U.S., operated by 115 operators, according to Cirium, the aviation analytics company.

Bombardier and Gulfstream are head-to-head rivals, with the Global series battling for market share against Gulfstream's latest models.

Bombardier said in a statement that it has taken note of the president's post and is in contact with the Canadian government. The Montreal-based company said its aircraft are fully certified to Federal Aviation Administration standards and it is expanding U.S. operations.

"Thousands of private and civilian jets built in Canada fly in the U.S. every day. We hope this is quickly resolved to avoid a significant impact to air traffic and the flying public," the company said.

Spokespeople for the Canadian government didn't respond to messages seeking comment Thursday evening.

John Gradek, who teaches aviation management at McGill University, said certification is about safety and it would be unprecedented to decertify for trade reasons.

"Certification is not trivial. It is a very important step in getting planes to operate safely," Gradek said. "Somebody is not picking on the Gulfstream. Decertification for trade reasons does not happen."

Gradek said many Gulfstreams have been certified for years in Canada.

"This is really a smokescreen that's basically throwing up another red flag in the face of Mr. Carney," Gradek said. "This is taking it to the extreme. This is a new salvo in the trade war."

The U.S. Commerce Department previously put duties on a Bombardier commercial passenger jet in 2017 during the first Trump administration, charging that the Canadian company was selling the planes in America below cost. The U.S. said then that Bombardier used unfair government subsidies to sell jets at artificially low prices.

The U.S. International Trade Commission in Washington later ruled that Bombardier did not injure U.S.

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industry.

Bombardier has since concentrated on the business and private jet market in its Global and Challenger families of planes. Both are popular with individual owners and businesses as well as fractional jet companies like NetJets and Flexjet. If Trump cuts off the U.S. market it would be a major blow to the Quebec company.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent warned Carney on Wednesday that his recent public comments against U.S. trade policy could backfire going into the formal review of the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement, the trade deal that protects Canada from the heaviest impacts of Trump's tariffs.

Carney rejected Bessent's contention that he had aggressively walked back his comments at the World Economic Forum during a phone call with Trump on Monday.

Carney said he told Trump that he meant what he said in his speech at Davos, and told him Canada plans to diversify away from the United States with a dozen new trade deals.

In Davos at the World Economic Forum last week, Carney condemned economic coercion by great powers on smaller countries without mentioning Trump's name. The prime minister received widespread praise and attention for his remarks, upstaging Trump at the gathering.

Besides Bombardier, other major aircraft manufacturers in Canada include De Havilland Aircraft of Canada, which makes turboprop planes and aircraft designed for maritime patrols and reconnaissance, and European aerospace giant Airbus. Airbus manufactures its single-aisle A220 commercial planes and helicopters in Canada.

Trump sues IRS and Treasury for \$10 billion over leaked tax info

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is suing the IRS and Treasury Department for \$10 billion, as he accuses the federal agencies of a failure to prevent a leak of the president's tax information to news outlets between 2018 and 2020.

The suit, filed in a Florida federal court Thursday, includes the president's sons Eric Trump and, Donald Trump Jr. and the Trump organization as plaintiffs.

The filing alleges that the leak of Trump and the Trump Organization's confidential tax records caused "reputational and financial harm, public embarrassment, unfairly tarnished their business reputations, portrayed them in a false light, and negatively affected President Trump, and the other Plaintiffs' public standing."

In 2024, former IRS contractor Charles Edward Littlejohn of Washington, D.C. — who worked for Booz Allen Hamilton, a defense and national security tech firm — was sentenced to five years in prison after pleading guilty to leaking tax information about Trump and others to news outlets.

Littlejohn, known as Chaz, gave data to The New York Times and ProPublica between 2018 and 2020 in leaks that appeared to be "unparalleled in the IRS's history," prosecutors said.

The disclosure violated IRS Code 6103, one of the strictest confidentiality laws in federal statute.

The Times reported in 2020 that Trump did not pay federal income tax for many years prior to 2020, and ProPublica in 2021 published a series about discrepancies in Trump's records. Six years of Trump's returns were later released by the then-Democratically controlled House Ways and Means Committee.

Trump's suit states that Littlejohn's disclosures to the news organizations "caused reputational and financial harm to Plaintiffs and adversely impacted President Trump's support among voters in the 2020 presidential election."

Littlejohn stole tax records of other mega-billionaires, including Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk.

The president's suit comes after the U.S. Treasury Department announced it has cut its contracts with Booz Allen Hamilton, earlier this week, after Littlejohn, who worked for the firm, was charged and subsequently imprisoned for leaking tax information to news outlets about thousands of the country's wealthiest people, including the president.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said at the time of the announcement that the firm "failed to imple-

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ment adequate safeguards to protect sensitive data, including the confidential taxpayer information it had access to through its contracts with the Internal Revenue Service."

Representatives of the White House, Treasury and IRS were not immediately available for comment.

New cold snap adds urgency to winter storm recovery across the South

By SOPHIE BATES, SUDHIN THANAWALA and RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

BELZONI, Miss. (AP) — Hundreds of National Guard troops in ice-stricken Mississippi and Tennessee mobilized Thursday to clear debris and assist people stranded in cars or stuck at homes still without electricity as Southern states raced to recover from a crippling winter storm before another blast of dangerous cold hits.

The National Weather Service said arctic air moving into the Southeast will cause already frigid temperatures to plunge into the teens (minus 10 Celsius) Friday night in cities like Nashville, Tennessee, where more than 79,000 homes and businesses still had no power five days after a massive storm dumped snow and ice across the eastern U.S.

Glyn Alexander, 73, endured three days without electricity before deciding to leave her home in Belzoni, a small city in the Mississippi Delta. She was cozier Thursday at a local warming shelter, where a generator kept the indoor temperature at a balmy 82 F (28 C).

"Three days in the cold, sleeping in the cold, eating in the cold," Alexander said. "I just couldn't take the cold anymore."

At least 85 people have died in areas affected by bitter cold from Texas to New Jersey. Roughly half the deaths were reported in Tennessee, Mississippi and Louisiana.

The prolonged freeze left some residents increasingly desperate in a region unaccustomed to such conditions. Emergency dispatchers in Mississippi received calls from people running out of food and medications while stuck at home. In Tennessee, social workers coordinated with police and firefighters to check on residents who hadn't been heard from in days.

"No one really knew that it was going to be like this, or how bad," said CJ Bynum, who used his Jeep to help drivers stranded along Interstate 55 in northern Mississippi, where 18-wheel trucks still lined the icy highway two days after traffic ground to a halt.

Harriet Wallace, who works for a Nashville social services agency, said police and firefighters were visiting homes to check on older adults whose relatives couldn't reach them by phone. All were found alive, she said. For those without power who refused to leave, officers helped charge phones and get groceries.

"They are finding blankets and just sitting there with no TV, no power, nothing," Wallace said. "Some are a little delirious."

Major power outages persist

More than 230,000 homes and businesses were without electricity Thursday night, according to the outage tracking website poweroutage.us. The vast majority were in Mississippi and Tennessee, with roughly 88,000 each.

Nashville Electric Service said 963 linemen were repairing damage after the storm snapped hundreds of power poles in the area. A utility vice president, Brent Baker, said full restoration could take until the weekend or longer.

Interstates 55 and 22 remained closed in northern Mississippi as emergency crews used tow trucks and snowplows to clear the highways.

Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves said 650 National Guard troops were clearing fallen trees from roads and delivering meals, blankets and other supplies by truck and by helicopter. The Tennessee National Guard said about 170 soldiers and airmen were assisting with recovery efforts, including helping more than 200 people stranded in vehicles and homes and providing rides to nearly 300 emergency and health care workers.

Warming centers are open across Mississippi

Mississippi officials say it's the state's worst winter storm since 1994. About 80 warming centers were opened across the state, known as one of the nation's poorest. But for some communities, they weren't

enough.

In Batesville, Mississippi, where most of the city's 7,400 residents were without power, Mayor Hal Ferrell said officials were dealing with outages at nursing homes, a shortage of generators for shelters and ice-covered interstates that slowed deliveries.

"We're just stymied with everything we're trying to do," Ferrell said.

Health experts warn that prolonged exposure to cold without heat poses serious risks, especially for young children, older adults and people with cardiovascular conditions.

"The body can handle cold temperatures briefly very well," said Dr. Hans House, a professor of emergency medicine at the University of Iowa, "but the prolonged exposure is a problem."

As hypothermia sets in, the body shivers and reduces blood flow to hands and feet to preserve heat, House said, raising the risk of frostbite. As exposure continues, people can become sleepy and confused, and in severe cases the heart and lungs can fail.

Forecasters say the subfreezing weather will persist in the eastern U.S. into February and there's high chance of heavy snow in the Carolinas, Virginia and northeast Georgia this weekend, possibly up to a foot (30 centimeters) in parts of North Carolina. Snow is also possible along the East Coast from Maryland to Maine.

The National Weather Service said freezing rain was possible Thursday night in parts of Mississippi, and light snow showers could hit Nashville overnight Friday. Forecasters said the extreme cold and subzero wind chills (minus 18 C) represented the greatest danger.

Trump says he asked Putin not to target Kyiv for 1 week during brutal cold spell

By AAMER MADHANI and SUSIE BLANN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — U.S. President Donald Trump said Thursday that President Vladimir Putin has agreed not to target the Ukrainian capital and other towns for one week as the region experiences frigid temperatures. There was no immediate confirmation from the Kremlin that Putin has agreed to such a pause.

Russia has been pounding Ukraine's critical infrastructure, hoping to wear down public resistance to the war while leaving many around the country having to endure the dead of winter without heat.

"I personally asked President Putin not to fire on Kyiv and the cities and towns for a week during this ... extraordinary cold," Trump said during a Cabinet meeting at the White House, adding that Putin has "agreed to that."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov was asked earlier Thursday whether a mutual halt on strikes on energy facilities was being discussed between Russia and Ukraine, and he refused to comment on the issue.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy late Wednesday had warned that Moscow was planning another large-scale barrage despite plans for further U.S.-brokered peace talks at the weekend.

Trump said he was pleased that Putin has agreed to the pause. Kyiv, which has grappled with severe power shortages this winter, is forecast to enter a brutally cold stretch starting Friday that is expected to last into next week. Temperatures in some areas will drop to minus 30 degrees Celsius (minus 22 Fahrenheit), the State Emergency Service warned.

"A lot of people said, 'Don't waste the call. You're not going to get that.'" the Republican U.S. president said of his request of Putin. "And he did it. And we're very happy that they did it."

Zelenskyy, for his part, thanked Trump for his effort and welcomed the "possibility" of a pause in Russian military action on Kyiv and beyond. "Power supply is a foundation of life," Zelenskyy said in his social media post.

Trump did not say when the call with Putin took place or when the ceasefire would go into effect. The White House did not immediately respond to a query seeking clarity about the scope and timing of the limited pause in the nearly four-year war.

Russia has sought to deny Ukrainian civilians heat and running water over the course of the war, which began with Russia's full-scale invasion on Feb. 24, 2022. Ukrainian officials describe the strategy as "wea-

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ponizing winter.”

Last year was the deadliest for civilians in Ukraine since 2022 as Russia intensified its aerial barrages behind the front line, according to the U.N. Human Rights Monitoring Mission in the country.

The war killed 2,514 civilians and injured 12,142 in Ukraine — 31% higher than in 2024, it said.

A Russian drone attack killed three people in Ukraine’s southern Zaporizhzhia region overnight and caused a major blaze in an apartment building, officials said Thursday.

Firefighters also worked through the night to put out fires in the central Dnipropetrovsk region, where two people were injured, officials said.

Zelenskyy said Ukrainian intelligence reports indicate Russia is assembling forces for a major aerial attack. Previous large attacks, sometimes involving more than 800 drones as well as cruise and ballistic missiles, have targeted the Ukrainian power grid.

The ongoing attacks discredit the peace talks, Zelenskyy said. “Every single Russian strike does,” he said late Wednesday.

Russia’s daily bombardment of civilian areas behind the roughly 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line has continued despite international condemnation and attempts to end the fighting.

Ukraine is working with SpaceX to address the reported use of its Starlink satellite service by Russian attack drones, Ukrainian Defense Minister Mykhailo Fedorov said Thursday on the Telegram messaging app.

He said his team contacted the American aerospace company run by Elon Musk and “proposed ways to resolve the issue.” Starlink is a global internet network that relies on around 10,000 satellites orbiting Earth.

Fedorov thanked Musk and SpaceX President Gwynne Shotwell for their “swift response and the start of work on resolving the situation.”

Musk and SpaceX have sought to steer a delicate course in the war.

Shotwell said a year after the invasion that SpaceX was happy to provide Ukrainians with connectivity “and help them in their fight for freedom.” At the same time, the company sought to restrict Ukraine’s use of Starlink for military purposes, she said.

Negotiations between the two sides are poised to resume on Sunday amid doubts about Moscow’s commitment to a settlement.

The European Union’s top diplomat accused Russia of not taking the talks seriously, calling Thursday in Brussels for more pressure to be exerted on Moscow to press it into making concessions.

“We see them increasing their attacks on Ukraine because they can’t make moves on the battlefield. So, they are attacking civilians,” Kaja Kallas said of Russia at a meeting of EU foreign ministers.

She stressed that Europe, which sees its own future security at stake in Ukraine, must be fully involved in talks to end the war. The push for a settlement has been led over the past year by the Trump administration, and European leaders fear their concerns may not be taken into account.

Steve Witkoff, Trump’s special envoy, said Thursday “a lot of progress” was made in recent three-way talks and expressed optimism that more headway can be made when the parties meet again in the coming days.

“I think the people of Ukraine are now hopeful and expecting that we are going to deliver a peace deal sometime soon,” Witkoff added.

The number of soldiers killed, injured or missing on both sides during the war could reach 2 million by spring, with Russia sustaining the largest number of troop deaths for any major power in any conflict since World War II, according to an international think tank report published Tuesday.

A man impersonating an FBI agent tried to get Luigi Mangione out of jail, authorities say

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A man claiming to be an FBI agent showed up to a federal jail in New York City on Wednesday night and told officers he had a court order to release Luigi Mangione, authorities said. He’s now locked up there too.

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Mark Anderson, a 36-year-old Minnesota native who has a history of drug and other arrests and disclosed last year in court papers that he suffers from mental illness, was arrested and charged with impersonating a federal officer in a foiled bid to free Mangione from the Metropolitan Detention Center. Mangione is being held at the notorious Brooklyn jail while awaiting state and federal murder trials in the killing of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson.

A criminal complaint against Anderson did not identify the person he attempted to free. A law enforcement official familiar with the matter confirmed it was Mangione. The official was not authorized to speak publicly and did so on condition of anonymity.

Anderson was ordered held without bail after an initial appearance Thursday in Brooklyn federal court. He was not required to enter a plea. A day after getting stopped at the entrance, he is now jailed at the Metropolitan Detention Center, according to federal prison records.

A message seeking comment was left for Anderson's court-appointed lawyer. A message was also left for a spokesperson for Mangione's legal team.

In a lawsuit last year alleging injuries from a fall at a city homeless shelter, Anderson said he has "multiple disabilities" and has been ruled by the Social Security Administration to be "fully disabled because of mental illness." He said he had no money and said he received state and federal assistance.

According to public records, Anderson has had numerous drug and alcohol-related arrests and convictions over the past two decades in his native Minnesota and in Wisconsin, where he has also lived. He also has cases pending in the Bronx, including one in which he's accused of showing a gun.

Man had papers 'signed by a judge' and a pizza cutter, authorities say

According to the criminal complaint, Anderson approached the jail intake area around 6:50 p.m. Wednesday and told uniformed jail officers that he was an FBI agent in possession of paperwork "signed by a judge" authorizing the release of a specific person in custody at the jail.

When the officers asked for his federal credentials, Anderson showed them a Minnesota driver's license, threw documents at them and claimed to have weapons, the criminal complaint said. The documents appeared related to filing claims against the Justice Department, according to an FBI agent who viewed them and prepared the complaint. Officers searched Anderson's bag and found a barbecue fork and a circular steel blade, the complaint said. In a photo included in the complaint, the blade appeared to be a small pizza cutter wheel.

Anderson's driver's license listed an address in Mankato, Minnesota, about 65 miles (110 kilometers) southwest of Minneapolis. He moved to New York for a job opportunity and started working at a Bronx pizzeria when that fell through, the law enforcement official said. Court records indicate he had been living in the city at least since 2023, including at motels, a shelter and a Bronx apartment.

Acting as his own lawyer, he has filed handwritten lawsuits against the Pentagon, Chinese and Russian ambassadors and a Minnesota police department, all of which have been thrown out. Another lawsuit, alleging a Bronx pizzeria forced him to work 70 hours a week with no overtime, is still pending.

Mangione due in court Friday as death penalty ruling looms

The alleged attempt to free Mangione added a bizarre wrinkle to a critical stretch in his legal cases.

Hours before Anderson's arrest, the Manhattan district attorney's office sent a letter urging the judge in Mangione's state case, Gregory Carro, to set a July 1 trial date.

On Friday, Mangione will be in court for a conference in his federal case. The judge in that case, Margaret Garnett, is expected to rule soon whether prosecutors can seek the death penalty and whether they can use certain evidence against him.

Last week, Garnett scheduled jury selection in the federal case for Sept. 8, with the rest of the trial happening in October or January, depending on whether she allows prosecutors to seek the death penalty.

Mangione has pleaded not guilty in both cases. The state charges carry the possibility of life in prison.

A cause célèbre for people upset with the health insurance industry, Mangione has attracted legions of supporters, some of whom have regularly turned up at his court appearances donning green clothing — the color worn by the Mario Bros. video game character Luigi — as a symbol of solidarity. Some have brought signs and shirts with slogans such as "Free Luigi" and "No Death For Luigi Mangione."

Thompson, 50, was killed on Dec. 4, 2024, as he walked to a midtown Manhattan hotel for UnitedHealth Group's annual investor conference. Surveillance video showed a masked gunman shooting him from behind. Police say "delay," "deny" and "depose" were written on the ammunition, mimicking a phrase used to describe how insurers avoid paying claims.

Mangione, a 27-year-old Ivy League graduate from a wealthy Maryland family, was arrested five days later at a McDonald's in Altoona, Pennsylvania, about 230 miles (about 370 kilometers) west of Manhattan.

After several days of court proceedings in Pennsylvania, Mangione was whisked to New York and sent to the Metropolitan Detention Center.

The jail is also home to former Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores. Former inmates include hip-hop mogul Sean "Diddy" Combs and cryptocurrency fraudster Sam Bankman-Fried.

EU lists Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard as terrorist organization over protest crackdown

By SAM McNEIL and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — The European Union agreed Thursday to list Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard as a terrorist organization over Tehran's bloody crackdown on nationwide protests, the bloc's top diplomat said, in a largely symbolic move that adds to pressure on the Islamic Republic.

The EU's foreign policy chief, Kaja Kallas, said foreign ministers in the 27-nation bloc unanimously agreed on the designation, which she said will put the regime "on the same footing" with al-Qaida, Hamas and the Islamic State group.

"Those who operate through terror must be treated as terrorists," Kallas said.

Economic woes sparked the protests before they broadened into a challenge to the theocracy before the crackdown, which activists say has killed at least 6,479 people.

"Any regime that kills thousands of its own people is working toward its own demise," Kallas said.

Other countries, including the U.S. and Canada, have previously designated the Guard as a terrorist organization.

Iran also faces the threat of U.S. military action in response to the killing of peaceful demonstrators and over possible mass executions. The American military has moved the USS Abraham Lincoln and several guided-missile destroyers into the Mideast. It remains unclear whether President Donald Trump will decide to use force.

Iran issued a warning to ships at sea Thursday that it planned to run a drill next week that would include live firing in the Strait of Hormuz, potentially disrupting traffic through a waterway that sees 20% of all the world's oil pass through it.

Terrorist group label a 'symbolic act'

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi dismissed the designation as a "PR stunt" and said Europe would be affected if energy prices surge as a result of the sanctions.

"Several countries are presently attempting to avert the eruption of all-out war in our region. None of them are European," he wrote on X.

Kristina Kausch, a deputy director at the German Marshall Fund, said the listing was "a symbolic act" showing that for the EU "the dialogue path hasn't led anywhere, and now it's about isolation and containment as a priority."

"The designation of a state military arm, of an official pillar of the Iranian state, as a terrorist organization, is one step short of cutting diplomatic ties," she said.

The Revolutionary Guard now has time to comment before the listing is formally adopted, said Edouard Gergondet, a lawyer focused on sanctions with the firm Mayer Brown.

The EU on Thursday also sanctioned 15 top officials and six organizations in Iran, including those involved in monitoring online content, as the country remains gripped by a three-week internet blackout by authorities.

The sanctions mean that affected officials and organizations will have their assets frozen, and they will

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be banned from traveling to Europe, French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot said.

The Revolutionary Guard holds vast business interest across Iran, and sanctions could allow its assets in Europe to be seized.

Iran already struggles under the weight of international sanctions from multiple countries, including the U.S. and Britain.

Guard emerged from 1979 revolution

The Guard emerged from Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution as a force meant to protect its Shiite cleric-overseen government and was later enshrined in its constitution. It operated in parallel with the country's regular armed forces, growing in prominence and power during a long and ruinous war with Iraq in the 1980s. Though it faced possible disbandment after the war, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei granted it powers to expand into private enterprise, allowing it to thrive.

The Guard's Basij force likely was key in putting down the demonstrations, starting in earnest from Jan. 8, when authorities cut off the internet and international telephone calls for the nation of 85 million people. Videos that have come out of Iran via Starlink satellite dishes and other means show men likely belonging to its forces shooting and beating protesters.

Once they reach the age of 18, Iranian men are required to do up to two years of military service, and many find themselves conscripted into the Guard despite their own politics.

Strait of Hormuz drill planned

Meanwhile, a notice to mariners sent Thursday by radio warned that Iran planned to conduct "naval shooting" in the Strait of Hormuz on Sunday and Monday. Two Pakistani security officials, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to journalists, also confirmed the warning had been sent.

Iran did not immediately acknowledge the drill. The hard-line Keyhan newspaper raised the specter that Tehran could try to close the strait by force.

"Today, Iran and its allies have their finger on a trigger that, at the first enemy mistake, will sever the world's energy artery in the Strait of Hormuz and bury the hollow prestige of billion-dollar Yankee warships in the depths of the Persian Gulf," the newspaper said.

Such a move would likely invite U.S. military intervention. American military officials did not respond to a request for comment.

Elsewhere, Iranian opposition leader Mir Hossein Mousavi, whose Green Movement rose to challenge Iran's disputed 2009 presidential election, again called for a constitutional referendum to change the country's government. A previous call failed to take hold.

The World Health Organization also said at least five doctors have been detained and multiple health workers assaulted while treating injured patients in Iran since the protests began.

Death toll stands at over 6,400

The U.S.-based Human Rights Activists News Agency reported that the violence in Iran has killed at least 6,479 people in recent weeks, with many more feared dead. Its count included at least 6,092 protesters, 214 government-affiliated forces, 118 children and 55 civilians who were not demonstrating. More than 47,200 have been arrested, it added.

The group verifies each death and arrest with a network of activists on the ground, and it has been accurate in multiple rounds of previous unrest in Iran. The Associated Press has been unable to independently assess the death toll.

As of Jan. 21, Iran's government put the death toll at a far lower 3,117, saying 2,427 were civilians and security forces and labeling the rest "terrorists." In the past, Iran's theocracy has undercounted or not reported fatalities from unrest.

That death toll exceeds that of any other round of protest or unrest in Iran in decades and recalls the chaos surrounding the 1979 revolution.

FACT FOCUS: A look at false and misleading claims made during Trump's first Cabinet meeting of 2026

By The Associated Press undefined

President Donald Trump held his first Cabinet meeting of 2026 on Thursday, focusing on the economy, housing, energy, health initiatives and drug prices. But while he painted a rosy picture of his administration's accomplishments, some of his boasts — and that of other officials — were off the mark.

Here's a look at the facts.

Investments

TRUMP: "\$18 trillion is being invested now."

THE FACTS: Trump has presented no evidence that he's secured this much domestic or foreign investment in the U.S. Based on statements from various companies, foreign countries and the White House's own website, that figure appears to be exaggerated, highly speculative and far higher than the actual sum.

The White House website offers a far lower number, \$9.6 trillion, and that figure appears to include some investment commitments made during the Biden administration.

A study published Tuesday raises doubts about whether more than \$5 trillion in investment commitments made last year by many of America's biggest trading partners will actually materialize and questions how it would be spent if it did.

Housing

SCOTT TURNER, secretary of housing and urban development: "Because of your policy sir, home sales in December, they rose sharply to their strongest pace in three years."

THE FACTS: That overstates what's happening in the housing market, a persistent source of frustration for U.S. consumers.

The National Association of Realtors did report that the seasonally adjusted annual rate of home sales in December rose to 4.35 million units, "nearly" the highest in three years, as the trade association noted. But the sum was just a 1.4% year-over-year increase.

More importantly, it could have been a monthly blip as the association separately said that pending home sales in December had fallen 3% from a year ago.

Trump has said he wants to keep home prices high to increase people's net worth, but doing so will likely keep construction levels low and price out possible first-time buyers.

California wildfires

TRUMP, discussing state and local permitting for rebuilding homes destroyed in the 2025 wildfires around Los Angeles: "They have been unable to give permits. There are like three houses being built out of thousands and thousands. They have no permits."

THE FACTS: On Friday, Trump signed an executive order directing the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Small Business Administration to find a way to issue regulations that would preempt state and local rules for obtaining permits and allow builders to "self-certify" that they have complied with "substantive health, safety, and building standards."

According to Los Angeles county and city data, about 3,100 permits have been issued within the Palisades and Eaton fire zones as of Thursday. Fewer than a dozen residences have been rebuilt, but about 900 homes are under construction.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom responded to Trump on social media, saying local officials are moving at a fast pace. Newsom called on the Trump administration to approve the state's \$33.9 billion disaster aid request.

Survivor advocates also told The Associated Press that permits are not necessarily the primary obstacle for impacted households right now, as many still struggle to secure full insurance payouts, or face gaps of hundreds of thousands of dollars between what they've received and actual rebuilding costs.

Typically it takes about 18 months after a major wildfire for the permitting process to gain steam, according to Andrew Rumbach, co-lead of the Climate and Communities Program at the Urban Institute.

He pointed to the recovery pattern of a December 2021 blaze that erupted south of Boulder, Colorado,

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destroying more than 1,000 homes. After a year, the cleanup was mostly done and most permit applications were in. Then it took about six more months for the permits to be issued, he told the AP this month. The two California fires killed 31 people and destroyed about 13,000 residential properties.

TRUMP, discussing the effects of the 2025 Los Angeles wildfires: "They should have allowed the water to come down from the Pacific Northwest, which was very plentiful. But they didn't do that."

THE FACTS: Contrary to Trump's claim, no water supply from the Pacific Northwest connects to California's system.

Most of California's water comes from the northern part of the state, where it melts from mountain snow and runs into rivers that connect to the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta. From there, much of it is sent farther south to farmers and cities like Los Angeles through two large pumping and canal systems. One is run by the federal government and the other by the state.

Some Los Angeles fire hydrants ran dry during last year's wildfires, but local officials said the outages occurred because the municipal system was not designed to deal with such a massive disaster.

Kelly Loeffler, administrator of the Small Business Administration, also brought up Trump's claim about releasing water to fight the fires, claiming an executive order got "water to the scene in your earliest days of your presidency."

But the Jan. 24, 2025, executive order resulted in water going to a dry lake basin more than 100 miles from Los Angeles.

Trump repeats other false claims

TRUMP: "There's never been a first year like this, including the fact that we put out — extinguished — eight wars."

THE FACTS: This statistic is highly exaggerated. Although Trump has helped mediate relations among many nations, his impact isn't as clear-cut as he makes it seem.

TRUMP: "You're not allowed to say the word coal without preceding by saying clean, beautiful coal. Clean, beautiful coal."

THE FACTS: The production of coal is cleaner now than it has been historically, but that doesn't mean it's clean.

TRUMP, on China: "They make the windmills, but they don't have a lot of wind farms. That's — somebody's oughta look at that. How many wind farms do they have? Very, very few. They make them. They sell them. They make a fortune, but they don't use them."

THE FACTS: China is the world's largest manufacturer of wind turbines, producing more than half of the supply. It is also installing them at a record pace.

After a day of sharp swings, Wall Street ends nearly where it began

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — A day of dramatic swings on Wall Street, including Microsoft's worst drop in years and a sudden reversal for the price of gold, finished with only relatively modest moves on Thursday.

The S&P 500 slipped 0.1% after flirting with its record high in the morning and dropping by as much as 1.5% later in the day. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 55 points, or 0.1%, after erasing an earlier loss of more than 400 points, and the Nasdaq composite fell 0.7%.

Microsoft was the heaviest weight on the market by far, and the tech giant tumbled 10% even though it reported stronger profit and revenue for the latest quarter than analysts expected. Investors honed in instead on how much Microsoft is spending on investments, whether growth in its Azure cloud business will slow and how long its push into artificial-intelligence technology will take to turn into big profits.

It was the stock's worst day since the market's COVID crash in 2020.

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Tesla also weighed on the market after falling 3.5%. It delivered a bigger profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected, but the results were sharply lower than from a year earlier. Tesla's leader, Elon Musk, has been trying to get investors to focus less on its flagging car sales and more on the company's robotaxis and robots.

Companies across the market are under pressure to deliver at least solid growth in profits following record-setting runs for their stock prices. Stock prices tend to follow the path of corporate profits over the long term, and earnings need to rise to quiet criticism that stocks have grown too expensive.

ServiceNow dropped 9.9% even though it reported a stronger profit for the latest quarter than expected. Analysts praised the performance, but it wasn't enough to stop a slide for the stock that's been underway since the summer.

Still, more stocks rose within the S&P 500 than fell. Leading them was Meta Platforms, which rallied 10.4% after the company behind Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp topped profit expectations, even though it also said it will continue its massive investments in AI.

IBM was another winner and climbed 5.1% after surpassing analysts' expectations for profit and revenue. Southwest Airlines flew 18.7% higher even though its profit fell short of forecasts. It gave a forecast for earnings in 2026 that blew past analysts' expectations, saying it's seeing strong momentum after making changes like charging baggage fees and having assigned seating.

All told, the S&P 500 slipped 9.02 points to 6,969.01. The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 55.96 to 49,071.56, and the Nasdaq composite fell 172.33 to 23,685.12.

Some of the wildest action in financial markets was again for precious metals.

Gold's price rallied near \$5,600 per ounce in the morning before suddenly and briefly dropping back below \$5,200. It then steadied somewhat and rose modestly to another record.

It was only on Monday that gold's price topped \$5,000 for the first time, and it had nearly doubled over the last 12 months.

Silver, which has been zooming higher in its own feverish run, had a similar and sudden reversal of momentum before ticking higher again.

Prices for precious metals have been surging as investors look for safer things to own while weighing a wide range of risks, including a U.S. stock market that critics call expensive, political instability, threats of tariffs and heavy debt loads for governments worldwide.

But safety can come at a price when it's expensive. The huge runs for gold and silver raised criticism that their prices had gone too far, too fast and were due for a pullback. Bitcoin, which is pitched as a form of "digital gold," also fell sharply. It sank nearly 6% and dropped toward \$84,000.

The U.S. dollar has seen its value sink over the last year because of many of the same risks that drove gold's price higher, but the dollar held relatively steady against the British pound and euro Thursday.

Oil prices rose roughly 3.5% on worries about potentially rising tensions between the United States and Iran, which could ultimately constrict the flow of crude. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth warned the U.S. military "will be prepared to deliver whatever the president expects," just a day after President Donald Trump told Iran to "make a deal" on its nuclear program.

In the bond market, the yield on the 10-year Treasury dipped to 4.23% from 4.26% late Wednesday.

In stock markets abroad, indexes rose across much of the rest of the world.

South Korea's Kospi climbed 1% for one of the world's bigger moves, lifted to another record in part by chipmaker SK Hynix.

Man who squirted apple cider vinegar on Omar is charged with assaulting and intimidating her

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The Justice Department has charged a man who squirted apple cider vinegar on Democratic U.S. Rep. Ilhan Omar at an event in Minneapolis, according to court papers made public

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Thursday.

The man arrested for Tuesday's attack, Anthony Kazmierczak, faces a charge of forcibly assaulting, opposing, impeding and intimidating Omar, according to a complaint filed in federal court.

Authorities determined that the substance was water and apple cider vinegar, according to an affidavit. After Kazmierczak sprayed Omar with the liquid, he appeared to say, "She's not resigning. You're splitting Minnesotans apart," the affidavit says. Authorities also say that Kazmierczak told a close associate several years ago that "somebody should kill" Omar, court documents say.

Kazmierczak appeared briefly in federal court Thursday afternoon. His attorney, Jean Brandl, told the judge her client was unmedicated at the time of the incident and has not had access to the medications he needs to treat Parkinson's disease and other serious conditions he suffers from.

U.S. Magistrate Judge Dulce Foster ordered that Kazmierczak remain in custody and told officials he needs to see a nurse when he is transferred to the Sherburne County Jail.

Kazmierczak also faces state charges in Hennepin County for terroristic threats and fifth-degree assault, Hennepin County Attorney Mary Moriarty announced Thursday.

"This was a disturbing assault on Rep. Omar, who is frequently the target of vilifying language by fellow elected officials and members of the public," Moriarty said. "The trust of our community in the federal government keeping politics out of public safety has been eroded by their actions. A state-level conviction is not subject to a presidential pardon now or in the future."

The attack came during a perilous political moment in Minneapolis, where two people have been fatally shot by federal agents during the White House's aggressive immigration crackdown.

Kazmierczak has a criminal history and has made online posts supportive of President Donald Trump, a Republican.

Omar, a refugee from Somalia, has long been a fixture of Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric. After she was elected seven years ago, Trump said she should "go back" to her country. He recently described her as "garbage" and said she should be investigated. During a speech in Iowa earlier this week, shortly before Omar was attacked, he said immigrants need to be proud of the United States — "not like Ilhan Omar."

Omar blamed Trump on Wednesday for threats to her safety.

"Every time the president of the United States has chosen to use hateful rhetoric to talk about me and the community that I represent, my death threats skyrocket," Omar told reporters.

Trump accused Omar of staging the attack, telling ABC News, "She probably had herself sprayed, knowing her."

The Council on American-Islamic Relations, a leading Muslim civil rights group, praised federal prosecutors' decision to file charges against Kazmierczak.

"We welcome these federal charges for the attack on Representative Ilhan Omar as an important step toward accountability and justice," CAIR National Executive Director Nihad Awad said in a statement. "The dangerous climate of dehumanization that inevitably leads to such violent acts puts public servants and entire communities at risk."

Kazmierczak was convicted of felony auto theft in 1989, has been arrested multiple times for driving under the influence and has had numerous traffic citations, Minnesota court records show. There are also indications he has had significant financial problems, including two bankruptcy filings.

In social media posts, Kazmierczak criticized former President Joe Biden and referred to Democrats as "angry and liars." Trump "wants the US is stronger and more prosperous," he wrote. "Stop other countries from stealing from us."

In another post, Kazmierczak asked, "When will descendants of slaves pay restitution to Union soldiers' families for freeing them/dying for them, and not sending them back to Africa?"

Threats against members of Congress have increased in recent years, peaking in 2021 following the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol by a mob of Trump supporters before dipping slightly, only to climb again, according to the most recent figures from the U.S. Capitol Police.

Officials said they investigated nearly 15,000 "concerning statements, behaviors, and communications directed against Members of Congress, their families, staff, and the Capitol Complex" in 2025.

A former Illinois deputy is sentenced to 20 years in prison for killing Sonya Massey

By JOHN O'CONNOR Associated Press

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. (AP) — A former Illinois sheriff's deputy was sentenced Thursday to 20 years in prison for fatally shooting Sonya Massey, a Black woman who had dialed 911 to report a possible prowler outside her Springfield home.

Sean Grayson, who is white, was convicted in October of second-degree murder in a police brutality case that prompted protests over systemic racism and led to a U.S. Department of Justice inquiry. Grayson, 31, testified at trial that he feared Massey was about to scald him with a pot of steaming hot water that she had removed from the stove.

Grayson, who has been incarcerated since he was charged, received the maximum possible sentence.

He apologized in court, saying he wished he could bring Massey back and spare her family the pain he caused. His attorney sought a sentence of six years, noting that Grayson has late stage colon cancer that has spread to his liver and lungs.

"I made a lot of mistakes that night. There were points when I should've acted, and I didn't. I froze," Grayson said. "I made terrible decisions that night. I'm sorry."

'It rocked the country'

Massey's parents and two teenage children, who lobbied for the maximum sentence, said their lives had changed dramatically since her death. Her children said they had to grow up without a mother, while Massey's mother said she lived in fear.

"I cry every day," Massey's mother, Donna Massey, said.

"I'm afraid to call the police in fear that I might end up like Sonya," she told the court.

State's Attorney John Milhiser argued that Massey would still be alive if someone else from the sheriff's department had responded to her 911 call.

"Sonya Massey's death rocked her family, but it rocked the community, it rocked the country," State's Attorney John Milhiser said. "We have to do whatever we can to ensure it never happens again."

The family reacted with a loud cheer — "Yes!" — after Judge Ryan Cadagin read the sentence. He admonished them for the outburst.

"Twenty years is not enough, but they did what they could do," Massey's 16-year-old daughter Summer told reporters after the hearing.

With a day shaved off his sentence for every day of good behavior, plus credit for nearly 19 months already spent behind bars, Grayson could be released in just under 8 1/2 years.

The day of the shooting

In the early morning hours of July 6, 2024, Massey — a 36-year-old single mother who struggled with mental health issues — summoned emergency responders because she feared there was a prowler outside her Springfield home.

According to body camera footage, Grayson and sheriff's Deputy Dawson Farley, who was not charged, searched outside Massey's home before meeting her at her door. Massey appeared confused and repeatedly said, "Please, God."

The deputies entered her house, Grayson noticed the pot on the stove and ordered Farley to move it. Instead, Massey went to the stove, retrieved the pot and teased Grayson for moving away from "the hot, steaming water."

From this moment, the exchange quickly escalated.

Massey said: "I rebuke you in the name of Jesus."

Grayson drew his sidearm and yelled at her to drop the pan. She set the pot down and ducked behind a counter. But she appeared to pick it up again.

That's when Grayson opened fire, shooting Massey in the face.

Convicted of downgraded charges at trial

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Grayson was charged with three counts of first-degree murder, which could have led to a life sentence, but a jury convicted him of the lesser charge. Illinois allows for a second-degree murder conviction if evidence shows the defendant honestly thought he was in danger, even if that fear was unreasonable.

Massey's family was outraged by the verdict.

"The justice system did exactly what it's designed to do today. It's not meant for us," her cousin Sontae Massey said after the verdict.

On Thursday, the same cousin said he was "thankful." He said there is "a long way to go" to eliminate the environment that "perpetuated, created this situation. We have to work on these outdated laws. We have to get them off the books."

Grayson told the court he understood the Massey family's anger and begged for their forgiveness while acknowledging that wouldn't come "any time soon."

James Wilburn, who ended his statement to the court by quoting his daughter — "Sean Grayson, I rebuke you in the name of Jesus" — said later Thursday he understands the value of forgiveness, but that he cannot reconcile Grayson's apology with his claim at trial that his daughter was the aggressor.

After the shooting

Massey's killing raised new questions about U.S. law enforcement shootings of Black people in their homes. Civil rights attorney Ben Crump negotiated a \$10 million settlement with Sangamon County for Massey's relatives.

The case also generated a U.S. Justice Department inquiry that was settled when the county agreed to implement more de-escalation training and collect more use-of-force data. The sheriff who hired Grayson was forced to retire, and the case prompted a change in Illinois law requiring fuller transparency on the backgrounds of candidates for law enforcement jobs. Wilburn said that law should be implemented at the federal level.

Trump's border czar suggests a possible drawdown in Minnesota, but only after 'cooperation'

By GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO and REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The Trump administration could reduce the number of immigration enforcement officers in Minnesota, but only if state and local officials cooperate, the president's border czar said Thursday, noting he has "zero tolerance" for protesters who assault federal officers or impede the ongoing Twin Cities operation.

Tom Homan addressed reporters for the first time since the president sent him to Minneapolis following last weekend's fatal shooting of protester Alex Pretti, the second this month by federal officers carrying out the operation. His comments came after President Donald Trump seemed to signal a willingness to ease tensions in the Minneapolis and St. Paul area and as the administration ended its "enhanced operations" in Maine.

Homan, who said he wouldn't address the shootings, emphasized that the administration isn't relenting on its immigration crackdown and warned that protesters could face consequences if they interfere with federal officers.

But he seemed to acknowledge there had been missteps.

"I do not want to hear that everything that's been done here has been perfect. Nothing's ever perfect," he said.

A possible downsizing

Homan hinted at the prospect of pulling out many of the roughly 3,000 federal officers taking part in the operation, but he seemed to tie that to cooperation from state and local leaders and a reduction in protester interference.

"The drawdown is going to happen based on these agreements," he said. "But the drawdown can happen even more if the hateful rhetoric and the impediment and interference will stop."

He also said he would oversee internal changes in federal immigration law enforcement, but he gave

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few specifics.

"The mission is going to improve because of the changes we're making internally," he said. "No agency organization is perfect. And President Trump and I, along with others in the administration, have recognized that certain improvements could and should be made."

Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey told reporters in Washington on Thursday he was "hopeful" that the number of federal officers in the city would be reduced. He said police would do their jobs but not "somebody else's," referring to federal law enforcement.

Despite Trump softening his rhetoric about Minnesota officials — he said this week they were on a "similar wavelength" — there has been no visible sign of any big changes to the operation. On Thursday, as the Justice Department charged a man accused of squirting vinegar on Democratic Rep. Ilhan Omar, a smattering of protesters braved the frigid temperatures to demonstrate outside of the federal facility that has been serving as the operation's main hub.

Pretti, 37, was fatally shot Saturday during a scuffle with the Border Patrol. Earlier this month, 37-year-old Renee Good was shot in her vehicle by an Immigration and Customs Enforcement officer.

A plea for cooperation

Homan doubled down on the need for jails to alert ICE to inmates who could be deported, saying transferring such inmates to the agency is safer because it means fewer officers have to be out looking for people in the country illegally.

The White House has long blamed problems arresting criminal immigrants on so-called sanctuary jurisdictions, a term generally applied to state and local governments that limit law enforcement cooperation with the Department of Homeland Security.

Homan reiterated that, saying, "Give us access to illegal aliens, public safety threats in the safety and security of a jail."

But Minnesota officials say this is already happening.

"At best, DHS fundamentally misunderstands Minnesota's correctional system," Paul Schnell, chief of the state Department of Corrections, told reporters last week, pushing back against the federal narrative. "At worst, it is pure propaganda."

State prisons, he noted, always honor "detainers," or federal requests to hold an arrested immigrant until agents can take custody of them.

"This occurs every time without exception," he said, noting that "the vast majority," of the state's county sheriffs also cooperate with immigration authorities about immigrants in their jails.

Some do not, including the jails in Hennepin County, which serves Minneapolis, and Ramsey County, which serves St. Paul. However, both do hand over inmates to federal authorities if an arrest warrant has been signed by a judge.

A targeted approach to arrests

Homan, whose arrival followed the departure of the Trump administration's on-the-ground leader of the operation, Border Patrol chief Greg Bovino, also seemed to suggest a renewed focus on what ICE calls "targeted operations" focused on apprehending immigrants who have committed crimes. He said the agency would conduct "targeted strategic enforcement operations" prioritizing "public safety threats."

It remains to be seen whether ICE's renewed focus on "targeted operations" might reduce tensions.

ICE and Homan have long said the Trump administration's primary focus is to arrest people in the country illegally who have a criminal history or pose a threat to public safety. But they acknowledge they'll also arrest anyone else found to be in the U.S. illegally.

They argue that ICE operations target specific people, as opposed to carrying out indiscriminate raids where officers round up everyone and demand their papers.

Sameera Hafiz, policy director with the Immigrant Legal Resource Center, said Homan's comments seemed to reflect a recognition that public opinion has turned against ICE, but she questioned his argument that carrying out targeted operations would make the country safer.

"His comments still seem to be based on the false premise that deporting people or deportation will make our community safer," she said. "All the evidence and data has shown that deportations don't make

our communities safer. They destabilize families, they tear communities apart, they hurt our economy.”

Homan didn't give a specific timeline for how long he would stay in Minnesota.

“I'm staying until the problem's gone,” he said, adding that he has met with community, law enforcement and elected leaders in the hopes of finding common ground and suggested that he's made some progress.

One Tech Tip: Escape the AI junk crowding your social media and music streams

By KELVIN CHAN AP Business Writer

AI slop seems to be everywhere. Low-quality digital content made with artificial intelligence has flooded our feeds, screens and speakers. Is there anything we can do about it?

If you want fewer cartoonish videos of dead celebrities, creepy or absurd images or fake bands playing synthetic tunes, a few platforms have rolled out settings and features to help minimize AI-generated content.

Here is a guide on how to use them. But first, a caveat from Henry Ajder, who advises businesses and governments on AI and has been studying deepfakes since 2018. He warned that it's “incredibly difficult” to entirely remove AI slop content entirely from all your feeds.

He compared AI slop to the smog generated from the industrial revolution, when there weren't any pollution controls in place.

“It's going to be very, very hard for people to avoid inhaling, in this analogy.”

Pinterest

Pinterest's move to lean into the AI boom made it something of a poster child for the AI slop problem, as user complained that the online moodboard for pinning inspirational material by themes has become overrun with AI content.

So Pinterest recently rolled out a “tuner” that lets users adjust the amount of AI content they see in their feeds.

It rolled out first on Android and desktop operating systems, before starting on a more gradual roll out on iOS.

“Now, users can dial down the AI and add more of a human touch,” Pinterest said, adding that it would initially cover some categories that are “highly prone to AI modification or generation” such as beauty, art, fashion and home decor.

More categories have since been added, including architecture, art, beauty, entertainment, men's, women's and children's fashion, health, home décor, and sport, food and drink.

To use the tuner, go to Settings and then to “refine your recommendations.” and then tap on GenAI interests, where you can use toggles to indicate the categories you'd like to see less AI-content.

TikTok

It's no surprise that AI-generated videos proliferate on TikTok, the short-video sharing app. The company says there are at least 1.3 billion video clips on its platform it has labeled as AI-generated.

TikTok said in November it was testing an update to give users more control of the AI-generated content in their For You feeds. It's not clear when it will be widely available. TikTok did not respond to requests for comment.

To see if you have it on the TikTok mobile app, go to Settings, then Content Preferences, then to Manage Topics where you'll see a set of sliders to control various types of content, such as dance, humor, lifestyle and nature.

You can also access the controls from the For You feed, by tapping the Share button on the side of a post, then tap Why this Video, then Adjust your For You, and then Manage topics.

There should be a new slider that allows you to dial down — or turn up — the amount of AI-generated content that you receive. If you don't see it yet, it might be because you haven't received the update yet. TikTok said late last year that it would start testing the feature in coming weeks.

These controls are not available on the desktop browser interface.

You won't be able to get rid of AI content altogether — TikTok says the controls are used to tailor the

content rather than removing or replacing it entirely from feeds.

"This means that people who love AI-generated history content can see more of this content, while those who'd rather see less can choose to dial things down," it said.

Deezer

Song generation tools like Suno and Udio let users create music merely by typing some ideas into a chatbot window. Anyone can use them to spit out polished pop songs, but it also means streaming services have been flooded with AI tunes, often by accounts masquerading as real artists.

Among the music streaming platforms, only Deezer, a smaller European-based player, gives listeners a way to tell them apart by labeling songs as AI.

"Deezer has been really, really pushing the anti-AI generation music narrative," said Henry Ajder.

Deezer says 60,000 fully AI-generated tracks, or more than 39% of the daily total, are uploaded to its platform every day and last year it detected and labeled more than 13.4 million AI tracks. The company says the people doing it are trying to make money by fraudulent streams.

Change your platform

If you can tear yourself away from Big Tech platforms, there are a new generation of apps targeting users who want to avoid AI.

Cara is a portfolio-sharing platform for artists that bans AI-generated work. Pixelfed is an ad-free Instagram rival where users can join different servers, or communities, including one for art that does not allow AI-generated content. Spread is a new social media platform with content for people who want to "access human ideas" and "escape the flood of AI slop."

Watch out for the upcoming launch of diVine, a reboot of Twitter founder Jack Dorsey's defunct short form video app Vine. The app has only been available as a limited prerelease for Apple iOS. It promises "No AI Slop" and uses multiple approaches to detect AI. An Android beta app is expected soon. The company plans to launch it in app stores soon but needs more time to get ready for unexpectedly high demand.

Israel returns Palestinian bodies, marking last exchange between Israel and Hamas

By WAFAA SHURAFU and TOQA EZZIDIN Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israel turned over the bodies of 15 Palestinians on Thursday, just days after recovering the remains of the last Israeli hostage, a Gaza Health Ministry official said.

It marks the last hostage-detainee exchange between Israel and Hamas carried out as part of the first phase of the U.S.-brokered ceasefire reached in October.

The Red Cross said that it helped facilitate the return of the bodies. They were taken to Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, health ministry spokesperson Zaher al-Wahidi said.

The return of all remaining hostages, living or dead, had been a key part of the first phase in the ceasefire that paused the war.

Israel agreed to return 15 Palestinian bodies for each hostage recovered, according to the ceasefire terms. It's unclear if the bodies released Thursday were of Palestinian detainees who died in Israeli custody or bodies taken from Gaza by Israeli troops during the war.

Israel has released roughly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners under the ceasefire deal, many of whom were seized by Israeli troops during the more than two-year war and held without being charged. It also has released the bodies of 360 Palestinians back to Gaza, where officials have struggled to identify them.

The Gaza health ministry, part of the Hamas-run government, has posted photos of the deceased for families to identify. Of the bodies handed back by Israel, about 100 have been identified by families, al-Wahidi said.

On Monday, Israel announced that it found and identified the remains of the last Israeli hostage, police officer Ran Gvili, following an extensive search at a cemetery in northern Gaza.

The attack by Hamas-led militants on Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, which launched the war, killed about 1,200 people and saw 251 taken hostage. Gvili, a 24-year-old police officer known affectionately as "Rani," was

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killed while fighting Hamas militants.

The return of his body closed a painful chapter for the country and cleared the way for the next and more challenging phase of the ceasefire, which calls for deploying an international security force, disarming Hamas, pulling back Israeli soldiers and rebuilding Gaza.

Deaths continue in Gaza

While U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff announced the launch of the second phase of the ceasefire deal earlier this month, Israeli fire and strikes continue to kill Palestinians across Gaza almost daily.

Israeli fire killed two Palestinians on Thursday in southern Gaza's Khan Younis area, according to Nasser hospital, where the bodies were taken. Health officials said that the two men were killed in areas that aren't Israeli-controlled.

Another Israeli strike in central Gaza killed one Palestinian and wounded others, according to Al-Aqsa martyrs hospital, where the casualties were taken.

Israel's military said it carried out a "precise strike" on Thursday that targeted a suspect planning to attack troops in the southern Gaza Strip and killed a person who crossed the ceasefire line and approached troops.

The Gaza Health Ministry said that 492 Palestinians have been killed since the ceasefire. The ministry doesn't distinguish between civilians and combatants in its figures. The ministry maintains detailed casualty records that are seen as generally reliable by U.N. agencies and independent experts.

Rafah border crossing

For Palestinians separated from their families by the war and the tens of thousands of people outside Gaza seeking to return home, the reopening of the Rafah crossing along the border with Egypt can't come soon enough.

The crossing is expected to reopen soon, Israeli officials have said, but how many people will be allowed to enter and leave Gaza remains unclear.

Preparations are underway to allow the departure of a limited number of medical evacuees who were wounded in the war and need to travel abroad for medical care.

But Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said that crossing won't be open to goods for now. The crossing, Gaza's main gateway to the outside world, has been largely closed since May 2024.

Trump says Venezuelan airspace will reopen to commercial travel and Americans soon can visit

By MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said Thursday he has informed Venezuela's acting president, Delcy Rodríguez, that he will open up all commercial airspace over Venezuela and Americans will soon be able to visit.

Trump said he instructed his transportation secretary, Sean Duffy, and U.S. military leaders to take steps to open the airspace for travel by the end of the day.

"American citizens will be very shortly able to go to Venezuela, and they'll be safe there," the Republican president said.

Venezuela's government did not immediately comment.

While the State Department continued warning Americans against traveling to Venezuela, at least one U.S. airline announced its intention to resume direct flights between the countries soon.

American Airlines was the last U.S. airline flying to Venezuela when in 2019 it suspended flights between Miami and the capital, Caracas, as well as the oil hub city of Maracaibo. The airline said Thursday it would share additional details about the return to service in the coming months as it works with federal authorities on security assessments and necessary permissions.

"We have a more than 30-year history connecting Venezuelanos to the U.S., and we are ready to renew that incredible relationship," Nat Pieper, American's chief commercial officer, said in a statement. "By restarting service to Venezuela, American will offer customers the opportunity to reunite with families and

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create new business and commerce with the United States.”

Before Venezuela came undone in the mid-2010s, it was not uncommon for Venezuelans to take weekend leisure trips to Miami. U.S. airlines stopped flying to Venezuela before the Department of Homeland Security in 2019 ordered an indefinite suspension, arguing that conditions in Venezuela threatened the “safety and security of passengers, aircraft, and crew.”

Earlier this week, Trump’s administration notified Congress that it was taking the first steps to possibly reopen the shuttered U.S. Embassy in Caracas as it explores restoring relations with the country after the U.S. military raid that ousted then-President Nicolás Maduro. In a notice to lawmakers dated Monday and obtained by The Associated Press, the State Department said it was sending in a regular and growing contingent of temporary staffers to conduct “select” diplomatic functions.

Diplomatic relations between the two countries collapsed in 2019.

Even as Trump suggested Americans will be safe in Venezuela, his State Department kept in place its highest-level travel advisory: “Do not travel,” a warning of a high risk of wrongful detention, torture, kidnapping and more.

The department did not immediately respond to a message inquiring whether it would be changing that warning.

In November, as Trump was ramping up pressure on Maduro, the American president said the airspace “above and surrounding” Venezuela should be considered as “closed in its entirety.”

The Federal Aviation Administration, which has jurisdiction generally over the United States and its territories, told pilots to be cautious flying around Venezuela because of heightened military activity.

After that FAA warning, international airlines began canceling flights to Venezuela.

The FAA issued a similar 60-day warning in January, urging U.S. aircraft operators to “exercise caution” when flying over the eastern Pacific Ocean near Mexico, Central America and parts of South America. The warning was issued after Maduro’s capture but as the U.S. threatened to continue military strikes on alleged drug trafficking boats in the area.

The FAA on Thursday said it was lifting four Notices to Airmen (NOTAMs) for the region that it said were “issued as precautionary measures and are no longer necessary.”

“Safety remains our top priority,” the FAA said in a statement, “And we look forward to facilitating the return of regular travel between the U.S. and Venezuela.”

German leader hails Europe as an ‘alternative to imperialism and autocracy’

By GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — German Chancellor Friedrich Merz hailed the European Union on Thursday as an “alternative to imperialism and autocracy” that can forge deals with like-minded partners in a world of increasing great power rivalry.

Merz underlined the continuing value of a NATO in which Europe will intensify its defense efforts, and said it will always seek cooperation with the United States — but not as a “subordinate.” He also joined other European leaders in pushing back against U.S. President Donald Trump’s assertion that troops from non-U.S. NATO countries avoided the front line during the war in Afghanistan.

Merz spoke to the German parliament about foreign policy a week after Trump withdrew a threat of new tariffs against Germany and seven other European countries to press for U.S. control over Greenland, a semiautonomous territory of NATO ally and EU member Denmark.

“We are seeing increasingly clearly in the last few weeks that a world of great powers is beginning to form,” Merz said. “A harsh wind is blowing in this world, and we will be feeling it for the foreseeable future.”

But that also opens opportunities for Europe, he said, as democracies with open and growing markets “seek what we have to offer them, namely partnerships on the basis of mutual respect, trust and reliability.”

“We should not underestimate how attractive this European model can be for new partners and new alliances,” Merz told lawmakers. “We are also a normative alternative to imperialism and autocracy in the

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world.”

He emphasized the value of unity in the sometimes fractious 27-nation EU, saying the bloc had shown last week that it could act fast. “We agreed that we would not be intimidated again by tariff threats,” he said.

But he said that Europe also needs to “learn the language of power politics” to assert itself in a changing world, for example by taking greater responsibility for its security, striving for greater “technological independence” and boosting its economic growth.

Merz is a strong backer of the EU making more trade deals, including one with South America’s Mercosur bloc and another struck this week with India.

While seeking new alliances, “it is also clear for us and for me that we should not carelessly jeopardize existing alliances,” Merz said, adding that “trans-Atlantic trust is a value in itself even today.”

He said that Europeans want to preserve NATO and make it stronger, and “we will always reach out the hand of cooperation to the United States of America.”

“At the same time, the basis of this guiding principle remains ... as democracies, we are partners and allies and not subordinates,” he added.

Merz noted that 59 German troops died in Afghanistan during the country’s nearly 20-year deployment in Afghanistan, and well over 100 were wounded.

He did not directly reference an interview by Trump last week when the president said he wasn’t sure the other 31 nations in NATO would be there to support the United States if and when requested and that troops from those countries stayed “a little off the front lines” in Afghanistan.

Merz said that “we will not allow this deployment, which we also performed in the interest of our ally, the United States of America, to be disparaged and demeaned today.”

US life expectancy hit an all-time high in 2024, CDC says

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. life expectancy rose to 79 years in 2024 — the highest mark in American history. It’s the result of not only the dissipation of the COVID-19 pandemic, but also waning death rates from all the nation’s top killers, including heart disease, cancer and drug overdoses.

What’s more, preliminary statistics suggest a continued improvement in 2025.

“It’s pretty much good news all the way around,” said Robert Anderson, of the National Center for Health Statistics at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which released the 2024 data on Thursday.

Life expectancy, a fundamental measure of a population’s health, is an estimate of the average number of years a baby born in a given year might expect to live, given death rates at that time.

For decades, U.S. life expectancy rose at least a little bit almost every year, thanks to medical advances and public health measures. It peaked in 2014, just shy of 79 years.

It was relatively flat for several years before plunging as the COVID-19 pandemic killed more than 1.2 million Americans. In 2021, life expectancy fell to just under 76 1/2 years. It has been rebounding since.

The data reflect not only a complete turnaround from the pandemic but also a lasting improvement in the drug overdose epidemic, said Andrew Stokes, a researcher at Boston University.

The bad news is that the U.S. still ranks below dozens of other countries, Stokes noted.

“There’s a lot more to be done,” he said.

In 2024, about 3.07 million U.S. residents died, about 18,000 fewer than the year before. Death rates declined across all racial and ethnic groups, and in both men and women.

Heart disease remained the nation’s leading cause of death, but the death rate due to it dropped by about 3% for the second year in a row. A combination of factors are likely at play, including advances in medical treatments and weight management, said Dr. Sadiya Khan, who treats and studies heart disease at Northwestern University.

Deaths from unintentional injuries — a category that includes drug overdoses — fell the most, dropping more than 14% in 2024. COVID-19, which only a few years ago was the nation’s No. 3 killer, in 2024 dropped out of the top 10.

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COVID-19's fall meant suicide moved into the top 10, even though suicides in 2024 declined. Homicides fell that year, too, this week's report said.

Deaths statistics for 2025 are not finalized, but preliminary data suggest around 3.05 million deaths have been recorded. That number may grow as more death certificates are rounded up and analyzed, but Anderson said he expects last year will end up at least a slight improvement over the 2024.

Africa has the worst road safety record in the world. Here's what to know

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — A deadly car crash in Nigeria involving former heavyweight boxing champion Anthony Joshua and two minibus accidents in South Africa days apart that killed at least 25 people have underlined Africa's poor road safety record.

The continent has the highest road fatality rate in the world despite having only about 3% of the world's vehicles. Here's what to know:

Worst in the world

Road crashes and fatality rates are disproportionately high in Africa, with 26 road deaths per 100,000 people on the continent compared with a global average of around 18, according to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. The rate in Europe is less than 10.

More than 300,000 people a year are killed in road crashes in Africa.

A 2024 World Health Organization report said road deaths had decreased globally but increased in Africa, which is home to some 1.5 billion people. The U.N. health agency called road accidents "a serious public health concern for African countries, with hundreds of thousands of lives being lost unnecessarily."

Pedestrians, bicycles and motorbikes

Africa has low car numbers comparatively because of the need for cheaper options, but that sometimes creates a packed and chaotic picture on African roads, with pedestrians, bicycles and motorbikes vying for space with cars, buses and trucks. Many countries don't have separate spaces for pedestrians or bikes.

Around 40% of road deaths in Africa are pedestrians — twice as many as the global average — and the figure is almost 50% in some African countries.

Failure to address causes

The 2024 WHO report said few countries in Africa have made progress to establish transport systems that cater to those alternative modes of transport.

Limited public transport systems give millions of Africans no choice but to travel in overloaded buses that may not be roadworthy or on other dangerous forms of transport like motorcycle taxis.

In South Africa, around 70% of commuters travel to and from work in minibus taxis, translating to more than 10 million people a day out of a population of 62 million using the minibuses. Authorities often struggle to properly regulate the minibuses and ensure the drivers are licensed and obey road laws, and to establish that their vehicles are roadworthy.

Enforcement of road laws is generally weak, while WHO said road infrastructure safety ratings are also notably low in Africa, with only a small percentage of the continent's road network meeting acceptable standards.

Extra dangerous times

The December to January holiday period is a notoriously dangerous time when large numbers of people travel on strained road systems.

Authorities in South Africa, which has one of the continent's better road systems, reported this month that they had seen a welcome but small decrease in their holiday season road deaths.

But for the period Dec. 1, 2025, to Jan. 11, 2026, Africa's most advanced economy still recorded 1,427 road deaths at an average of more than 30 a day.

Trump eyes basing his new Board of Peace at a Washington

building in legal limbo

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration is looking at basing the new Board of Peace, which is tied to both the Gaza ceasefire and larger international ambitions, in the Washington building that formerly housed the U.S. Institute of Peace, according to four administration officials.

The officials, who spoke Thursday on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations, said the topic has been a matter of serious discussion, but they stressed that a final decision has not yet been made about where the board's administrative staff will be located.

The building is the subject of litigation brought by former employees and executives of the nonprofit think tank after the Republican administration seized the facility last year and fired almost all the institute's staff. The building has since been renamed the Donald J. Trump U.S. Institute of Peace, but its name and status remain in legal limbo.

A federal judge had ruled that the U.S. Institute of Peace, as an independent nongovernmental organization established by Congress, is not subject to executive branch control and that the takeover was illegal. Enforcement of that decision was put on hold after the government appealed.

"A stay is not permission for the loser of a case to hijack the property of the winning party," said George Foote, counsel for former USIP leadership and staff. "The government does not have a license to rename the USIP headquarters building or lease it out for ten years."

"It certainly has no right to open the building to a new international organization like the proposed Board of Peace," Foote said in a statement.

Rumors that Trump planned to use the building for the Board of Peace began to circulate after the administration used the board's logo over an image of the USIP building and its distinctive domed roof.

That was shown when Trump unveiled the Board of Peace last week at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. The board currently has 27 "founding members" made up of world leaders whose initial task is to oversee Trump's Gaza ceasefire plan.

But Trump appears to have greater ambitions for the board, and its charter says it will look to take on and resolve other global conflicts. Many of America's top allies in Europe and elsewhere have declined to join what they suspect may be an attempt to rival the U.N. Security Council.

Responders recall a mission of recovery and grief a year after the midair collision near DC

By GARY FIELDS, JOSH FUNK and NATHAN ELLGREN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — For some, it was the children's luggage and small ice skates that became indelible memories of the night a passenger plane and a helicopter collided over the murky Potomac River. Others remember boats navigating debris and shallow water to bring victims' bodies ashore. And there was the suddenness: people seconds from landing, gone.

Families of those on board American Airlines Flight 5342 and an Army Black Hawk helicopter are marking Thursday as the one-year anniversary of the deadliest plane crash on U.S. soil in more than 20 years. Another group is reliving that night and the days, weeks and months that followed: the emergency responders who dove repeatedly into the river with nearly zero visibility, braving cold water, jet fuel and jagged wreckage in the hope of rescuing survivors.

But there were no miracles, just the bodies of daughters, sons, wives, husbands, mothers and fathers to pull from the water, identify and return to their families.

Sixty-four passengers and crew of the airliner traveling from Wichita, Kansas, to Washington were moments from touchdown when the plane collided with the Black Hawk helicopter and its crew of three. All 67 died in the crash on Jan. 29, 2025.

"We knew at the one-hour mark there weren't going to be any survivors," said the District of Columbia's Fire and EMS chief, John Donnelly. The priority became recovering the bodies and the personal belongings

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and returning them to their families while gathering evidence for crash investigators.

Over nearly a week, divers and other emergency personnel recovered all of the victims from about 8 feet (2.5 meters) of water and undertook the painstaking task of identification. Others spent months scouring the river for personal effects.

"If you've ever been out on the Potomac, it's not a pleasant place to dive under the best conditions," said Tim Lilley, whose son Sam, 28, was the co-pilot of the American flight. "But on that night, the fact that they're getting in the water and doing everything that they could was amazing."

Tim Lilley, a former Black Hawk pilot, said that later in the spring, first responders took him and his wife, Sheri, out on the river so they could lay flowers at the places where the two aircraft came to rest.

"We were able to talk to the actual person that helped pull my son out of the water. It was a huge emotional experience, and it was so healing."

Hundreds of responders raced to the scene

The first call — "crash crash crash" — came from the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport control tower at 8:48 p.m.

That and subsequent alerts triggered the region's largest emergency response since hijackers flew a plane into the Pentagon on Sept. 11, 2001. By midnight, about 350 responders from dozens of agencies were on scene, including 20 to 30 divers from harbor patrol units.

"The first time you hear it, like anything else, your stomach drops," said Metropolitan Police Department scuba diver Robert Varga, a 16-year member of the department who was at home when the call came and was in the water within the hour. "We know it's going to be a serious scene if they're going to call us."

The last major crash on the Potomac had been in January 1982, when an Air Florida flight clipped a bridge on takeoff and plunged into the river, killing 78.

"It was total chaos," said Washington fire rescue squad Lt. Sam Short who, along with two divers from his team, were among the first on the scene. He said he witnessed gruesome sights.

"There's a lot of different things that we saw and did that night. You just can't describe it to people," he said.

When the responders arrived at the frozen river, the plane's fuselage was partially submerged and suitcases and other possessions were strewn about. The heavy smell of jet fuel wafted in the air.

Police officer and diver Jeffrey Leslie was getting his elementary school-age kids to bed when he got a text.

On a visit to the area last week, Leslie navigated one of the unit's boats to the crash site almost on instinct as planes took off and landed in the background. He steered to the end of Runway 33, where Flight 5342 was supposed to land but instead became one of the areas where they brought victims.

Leslie, who spent hours at the crash site last year and returned multiple times over the following months, said his memory of that night can be triggered by cold weather and sometimes by the white ice skates in his daughter's closet. Young figure skaters returning from a meet were among the plane's passengers.

Personal effects recovered offered some closure

Donnelly, the fire chief, said his priorities were the families, the investigation and the safety of the responders who were braving dangerous temperatures and jet fuel.

His emotions hit him when he met with families hoping for some positive news, to give them updates on the recovery efforts. "Then it becomes very personal and you can feel other people's grief and pain," he said.

A memorial in Washington on Wednesday honored the families and the responders. Some family members attending a National Transportation Safety Board hearing on the crash this week wore shirts with the names of responder units.

Lt. Andrew Horos, the harbor master for district's police department, said mental health is tantamount for the responders. "You can't really prepare your members or anyone for that," he said.

Edward Kelly, president of the International Association of Fire Fighters, said the union sent 12 peer support personnel to the city in the aftermath and they met with 75% of the firefighters and paramedics

who responded to the crash. One goal was "to let them know what to look for in themselves, how to see if traumatic stress is manifested in them and where to go if they need help," he said.

That is particularly important in an incident involving so many children, he said. "A lot of those people that respond, firefighters, the paramedics, the police officers, a lot of us are parents. We have young kids."

"It's been a struggle," said the rescue squad's Short, who also responded to the 2001 attack on the Pentagon and lost a close colleague days before the crash. "A couple of our guys have been out numerous months over the last year because of this."

Donnelly said the department also is monitoring the divers' health because of hazardous materials they may have encountered.

Leslie, the police diver, said recovering earrings, wedding bands and children's skates and returning them to the grieving families provided a therapy of sorts.

"They appreciated every single thing we could get back," Horos said.

Varga, the scuba diver, said if he could say anything to the families it would be that emergency personnel did their best to save, then return the passengers to their families.

"And then in the months after that, we were out there as often as we could trying to recover personal effects for the families, because each thing that we did find, we knew was important to the family members," he said.

"We hope that we were able to provide just a sliver of closure to them."

Sabalenka into fourth straight Australian Open final and facing Rybakina again

By JOHN PYE AP Sports Writer

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Not even a point penalty for hindrance slowed Aryna Sabalenka's run to a fourth consecutive Australian Open final.

The top-ranked Sabalenka overpowered Elina Svitolina 6-2, 6-3 Thursday night to move within one victory of a third Australian Open title in four years.

A rematch of the 2023 final against Elena Rybakina was set up when the No. 5 seed ousted No. 6 Jessica Pegula 6-3, 7-6 (7) in the second semifinal.

Her semifinal was mostly one way until Rybakina had match point. The 2022 Wimbledon champion missed three match points on Pegula's serve and then was broken twice while serving for the match.

Pegula rallied and had two set points in the tiebreaker but wasn't able to convert, and Rybakina finally clinched it 29 minutes after her first match point.

"Really, really stressful," Rybakina said. She admitted to flashbacks from the 2024 Open when she lost the longest women's tiebreaker ever at a Grand Slam to Anna Blinkova 22-20 in a three-set defeat.

"I'm proud no matter the situation. It got very tight, I stayed there," she said of the win over Pegula. "I was fighting for each point."

For Pegula, it became a matter of swing or miss out.

"Sometimes when you're on the brink of losing everything you get a little clarity because you're kind of just like, 'Screw it, I'm just going to try and stay in this,'" she said. "I played a couple of really good points to save the match points, and, you know, she missed a couple short balls ... a couple free points to take some pressure off."

All four players reached the semifinals without dropping a set — in Australia for the first time in 56 years — and Sabalenka and Svitolina were each on 10-match winning streaks to start the season after titles in warmup events.

Sabalenka kept both of her streaks alive. As has become customary for Ukrainians against players from Russia and Belarus, there was no handshakes at the net. There was also no group photo before the match.

Sabalenka is the third woman in the Open era to reach four consecutive singles finals at the Australian Open after Evonne Goolagong Cawley and Martina Hingis.

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"It's an incredible achievement but the job's not done yet," an emotional Sabalenka said in her on-court TV interview. "I've been watching her game, (Svitolina) was playing incredible. I felt like I had to step in and put as much pressure as I could back on her. I'm glad the level was there. I think I played great tennis."

The hindrance call

The only hiccup was the hindrance to start the fourth game. Hindrance is called for a distraction that prevents a player from making a shot, and can include an opponent's loud noise.

Umpire Louise Azemar Engzell deemed Sabalenka made a prolonged grunt after she shanked a forehand. The shot seemed to be going long but landed inside the baseline, giving Svitolina the chance to play on. That's when the umpire intervened.

Sabalenka asked for a video review but, after going to the tape, Azemar Engzell confirmed her decision that the grunt was more elongated than usual.

"That's actually never happened to me ... especially with my grunting," Sabalenka said. "Then she called it, and I was, like, 'What? What is wrong with you?'"

Sabalenka said it worked as motivation — she broke serve in that game.

"It actually helped me — I was more aggressive. I was not happy with the call, and it really helped me to get that game," Sabalenka said. She added with a laugh, "So if she (Azemar Engzell) ever wants to do it again — like, I want to make sure that she's not afraid of it — go ahead, call it. It's going to help me."

Rematch

Rybakina is back into a major final for the first time since '23, and says she learned a lot from that match. She's also coming off a win over Sabalenka in the deciding match of the WTA Finals last November, when she picked up a record \$5.2 million in prize money.

"I could take only positive from that week," she said. "This is what I'm trying to do ... remembering some good stuff from this WTA Final."

Svitolina's exit

After reaching her first semifinal in Australia and winning a title in a warmup tournament in New Zealand, Svitolina will return to the top 10 for the first time since she took a maternity break in 2022.

The Auckland title was her first foray back on tour after an early end to the 2025 season for a mental health break. She said the rest and time out prolonged her career.

"Definitely very, very happy with the two weeks here and in New Zealand, as well, winning," she said. "Gutted to not make it through tonight but it's very difficult when you're playing the world No. 1, who is really on fire."

"It was really complicated for me today," she added, "but, yeah, I just want to take positives from the past weeks and just carry them through for the season."

Escape from Washington? Senators look to start new chapters as governors

By MAYA SWEEDLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — There's increasingly one place that U.S. senators want to be — anywhere but Washington.

Democrat Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota became the fourth sitting senator to seek leadership of a home state in 2026 when she announced her campaign on Thursday. That's the most in recent history, according to an Associated Press analysis of congressional retirements.

She joins Colorado Democrat Michael Bennet, Tennessee Republican Marsha Blackburn and Alabama Republican Tommy Tuberville, who are all doing the same thing.

The increase in senators looking toward statehouses underscores how sharply the balance of political ambition has shifted away from Washington. Although the Senate was once seen as the capstone of a long political career or a premier perch for launching presidential bids, it has become increasingly stagnant and dysfunctional.

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What's the allure of the governor's office?

Governorships now offer what the Senate usually cannot — the ability to govern, build a record and shape a national profile.

"Everybody asks me, 'Why are you doing this?'" Tuberville recently told the AP. "Because I think I can do more good in that seat than I can in this one."

The four senators who have already announced their campaigns are part of a broader exodus from Congress' upper chamber. Eleven have announced their intent to retire next year, which includes nine in the final year of their term.

Bennet has long voiced frustration at glacial progress in Washington, but his decision to run for Colorado governor still surprised many politicians in his home state.

In an interview, he said there's no way to address problems like affordability from the Senate.

"Donald Trump's Washington, D.C. will never be responsive to those challenges," Bennet said. "He's literally hanging gold on the walls of the Oval Office."

Bennet also noted that Trump, a Republican, has "declared war" on Colorado, vowing to make the state pay for continuing to imprison a county clerk who was convicted of breaking the law while trying to help prove the bogus claim that the 2020 election was mired by fraud. Trump, who lost the 2020 election to Democrat Joe Biden, also recently vetoed a water project intended to help the state's rural areas.

The concerns reflect how national partisan battles have increasingly defined even state-level politics, which used to revolve around local issues and have less of a partisan tinge. Bennet and his Democratic primary rival, state attorney general Phil Weiser, have each argued they're best equipped to push back against Trump.

"It's very important to have people who understand those national fights and who won't cower in the face of that," Bennet said.

Highest turnover in the Senate in more than a decade

Tuberville, who was first elected in 2020, said he didn't think there's any common denominator among the senators running for governor.

"You know, the reason I'm going back is, I think I can do more in the short term than I can in the long term up here," he said. He added that, as governor, "you're CEO of the state, and your vote counts more," while in the Senate, "you're one of 100."

Even if no more senators were to retire, this cycle would still have the highest turnover in the Senate in more than a decade. The last time more than a dozen senators left in one year was after the 113th Congress, when — in part due to President Barack Obama tapping senators for positions in his Democratic administration — 13 senators retired, resigned or died.

Senate becomes 'a more noxious place for lawmakers'

"There's a push and a pull factor," said Matt Dallek, a political historian at George Washington University. "The push factor is the Senate in particular has become a more noxious place for lawmakers, because all the downsides to serving in public office and in the Senate are no longer mitigated in a significant way by the upsides of passing legislation."

"Being governor, aside from the obvious fact that you're chief executive as opposed to one of 100, is increasingly alluring," Dallek said. "At the state level, a lot more can get done. Often states have to balance their budgets, they need to work on bipartisan legislation, and I think that there's a sense among lawmakers that it's in the states — these so-called labs of democracy — where governance is possible."

He pointed to Gov. Greg Abbott of Texas and Gov. Ron DeSantis in Florida, both Republicans, as examples of governing templates on topics ranging from immigration to cultural issues.

According to the U.S. Senate Historical Office, 22 senators have served as governors after leaving the Senate since the direct election of senators began in 1913. Of those, seven moved directly to the governor's mansion from the U.S. Senate.

Most recently, Mike Braun of Indiana won his state's governor's race in 2024 while serving as the state's junior senator.

New videos show Alex Pretti scuffle with federal officers in Minneapolis 11 days before his death

By MICHAEL BIESECKER and JESSE BEDAYN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Alex Pretti was forcefully taken to the ground by federal immigration agents after kicking out the tail light of their vehicle during a Minneapolis protest 11 days before he was shot and killed by Border Patrol officers, videos that emerged Wednesday show.

The Jan. 13 scuffle was captured in a pair of videos that show Pretti shouting an expletive at the federal officers and struggling with them. His winter coat comes off when he's on the ground and he either breaks free or the officers let him go and he scurries away.

When he turns his back to the camera, what appears to be a handgun is visible in his waistband. At no point do the videos show Pretti reaching for the gun and it is unclear whether the federal agents saw it.

A person with knowledge of the incident confirmed to The Associated Press that the man in the videos is Pretti and that he had told his family of the confrontation. The person spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss matters sensitive to the family.

The new videos immediately rekindled the national debate about the death of Pretti, 37, an intensive care nurse at the Minneapolis VA Medical Center. Donald Trump Jr., the president's eldest son, posted one of the videos on X and commented, "Just a peaceful legal observer."

Lawyer says new videos don't excuse shooting

Steve Schleicher, a Minneapolis-based attorney representing Pretti's parents, said the earlier altercation in no way justified the officers fatally shooting Pretti on Saturday.

"A week before Alex was gunned down in the street — despite posing no threat to anyone — he was violently assaulted by a group of (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) agents," Schleicher said in a written statement. "Nothing that happened a full week before could possibly have justified Alex's killing at the hands of ICE on Jan 24."

Homeland Security Investigations is reviewing the new videos and incident, a spokesperson with the department said. It's not known if any of the officers involved were also there when Pretti was killed.

Last weekend's fatal shooting occurred on a sidewalk next to the street where Pretti had been videoing immigration officers. In video taken by bystanders, one officer pushes him, then Pretti is taken to the ground and a half-dozen officers try to subdue him. One spots Pretti's weapon, which he was licensed to carry, and shouts, "He's got a gun." Two officers then open fire and Pretti is killed.

Trump administration officials quickly reacted, saying Pretti had approached officers with a gun and attacked them.

The altercation and shooting was captured in multiple videos and showed Pretti never brandished his gun and didn't assault any officer. He was holding his phone when he was shot in the back while on the ground.

The new videos from the week prior to the shooting came from two sources. One, published by the Minnesota Star Tribune and later obtained by the AP, was taken by Max Shapiro, a witness who filmed the interaction. The second was by a crew for The News Movement, an online media outlet.

Confrontation came amid whistles and shouts

Shapiro, an attorney in Minneapolis, recounted in an interview Wednesday that he saw over a Signal chat that immigration enforcement was in the area. Driving over, Shapiro parked half a block from officers and got out.

"The observers were pretty distraught and screaming," he said, adding that the officers began trying to get the crowd back, but their directives were largely drowned out in whistles and shouts.

The video from The News Movement shows Pretti wearing glasses, a dark baseball cap and a winter coat yelling at federal vehicles, at one point appearing to spit and yell "trash" toward the driver's side of a dark Ford Expedition with flashing red and blue lights.

As the vehicle pulls slowly away, Pretti kicks at the taillight and then delivers a second kick that shatters

the red plastic and leaves the taillight dangling.

Shapiro began filming on his phone just after Pretti kicked out the taillight.

Both videos capture the rear door of the SUV swinging open and an immigration officer wearing a gas mask and helmet getting out. He starts walking toward Pretti.

The officer grabs Pretti's shirt at his chest, pulling him back toward the vehicle as Pretti's arms flail. The officer pulls Pretti back onto the street and down onto his knees, falling over Pretti in the scuffle.

Other masked and helmeted officers surround them and try to subdue Pretti. Others stand guard between them and a screaming crowd, before the officers set off tear gas canisters and withdraw.

After Pretti stumbles away, Shapiro walks over and hugs Pretti, asking if he is OK.

Pretti affirms that he is, before turning to others involved in the melee and asking: "Are we all OK? Are we all safe?"

Shapiro said he understands some will use the videos to try to vilify Pretti, but that he seemed like someone who cared deeply about what was happening to the people caught up in the Trump Administration's deportation push.

"I'm no immigration policy expert," Shapiro said. "But there has to be a better way to go about this."

Car rams into Chabad headquarters in New York City, damaging doors

By HALLIE GOLDEN Associated Press

A man was arrested after repeatedly crashing his car into the Chabad Lubavitch world headquarters in New York City on Wednesday night while people were gathered for prayer at the deeply revered Hasidic Jewish site.

No one was injured when the driver struck a door of a building in the complex before reversing and striking it several more times. Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch said that while it was too early in the investigation to speculate on the driver's motives, the incident was being investigated as a possible hate crime.

"This is deeply alarming, especially given the deep meaning and the history of the institution to so many in New York and around the world," said New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani, who called the crash "intentional."

Video of the crash that was posted online shows a car with New Jersey license plates moving forward and backward on an icy driveway leading to a building in the complex and ramming its basement-level doors.

The driver, who is wearing shorts, emerges, shouts to bystanders that "It slipped" and says something to police about trying to park.

Chabad Lubavitch spokesperson Motti Seligson said some of the doors were damaged in the crash.

The Chabad Lubavitch headquarters and synagogue in Brooklyn's Crown Heights neighborhood receives thousands of visitors annually. Its Gothic Revival facade is very recognizable to adherents of the Chabad movement and has inspired dozens of replicas across the world.

Commonly referred to as 770, a nod to the Eastern Parkway address of the complex's original building, the headquarters encompasses multiple adjacent structures.

Brooklyn District Attorney Eric Gonzalez called the crash "disturbing and unacceptable."

"This could have been much worse and I'm grateful that no one was hurt," he said in a post on social platform X. "My office is working closely with the NYPD to ensure justice is done and the community is safe."

Neither bombs nor any other weapons were found in the car that hit the building, according to Tisch. She said it was also too early in the investigation to comment on the driver's mental state.

The incident happened on the 75th anniversary of the date that Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson became the leader of the Lubavitch movement. Schneerson died in 1994 but remains a revered figure globally.

There has been a near constant police presence around 770 Eastern Parkway for years.

The site was at the epicenter of the Crown Heights riots in 1991, when Black residents of the neighborhood attacked Jews after a child was killed by a car traveling in Schneerson's motorcade. In 2014, a

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disturbed man entered the synagogue and stabbed a rabbinical student, wounding him, before being shot dead by police.

Today in History: January 30, Gandhi assassinated in New Delhi

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Friday, Jan. 30, the 30th day of 2026. There are 335 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Jan. 30, 1948, Indian political and spiritual leader Mohandas K. Gandhi, 78, was shot and killed in New Delhi by Nathuram Godse (neh-too-RAHM' gahd-SAY'), a Hindu extremist.

Also on this date:

In 1649, England's King Charles I was executed for high treason.

In 1835, in the first-known attempt to assassinate a U.S. president, an unemployed house painter tried to kill President Andrew Jackson, but both of the attacker's pistols misfired and he was tackled as Jackson was safely hustled away.

In 1933, Adolf Hitler was named chancellor of Germany.

In 1945, during World War II, a Soviet submarine torpedoed the German ship MV Wilhelm Gustloff in the Baltic Sea, killing over 9,000 people, most of them war refugees; roughly 1,000 people survived.

In 1968, the Tet Offensive began during the Vietnam War as Communist forces launched surprise attacks against South Vietnamese towns and cities.

In 1969, The Beatles staged an unannounced concert atop Apple headquarters in London that would be their last public performance.

In 1972, 13 Catholic civil rights marchers were shot and killed by British soldiers in Northern Ireland on what became known as "Bloody Sunday."

In 2017, President Donald Trump fired Acting U.S. Attorney General Sally Yates after she publicly questioned the constitutionality of his refugee and immigration ban and refused to defend it in court.

In 2020, health officials reported the first known case in which the new coronavirus was spread from one person to another in the United States.

Today's birthdays: Actor Vanessa Redgrave is 89. Musician Phil Collins is 75. Actor Charles S. Dutton ("Roc") is 75. Golf Hall of Famer Curtis Strange is 71. Actor Ann Dowd ("The Handmaid's Tale") is 70. Comedian Brett Butler ("Grace Under Fire") is 68. Singer Jody Watley is 67. U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson is 54. Actor Christian Bale is 52. Actor Olivia Colman is 52. Actor Wilmer Valderrama ("That '70s Show") is 46. Rapper-musician Kid Cudi is 42. Pop singer Tyla is 24.