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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

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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.

Catherine O'Hara Dies

Comedy actress Catherine O'Hara, known for her iconic roles in "Beetlejuice" and "Home Alone," passed away in her Los Angeles home yesterday following a brief illness. She was 71.

O'Hara was born in 1954 to an Irish-Catholic family in Toronto. Her first acting role was as the Virgin Mary in a Nativity play, and following high school graduation, she began waitressing at Toronto's Second City theater. O'Hara joined the comedy troupe in 1974, after an unsuccessful first audition. She was a regular on the theater's first TV series, "Second City Television," for which she earned her first Emmy for writing. She won a second Emmy for acting—and her first Golden Globe—in her 60s for playing a former soap opera star in the sitcom "Schitt's Creek" alongside former "Second City Television" co-star and creative partner, Eugene Levy.

O'Hara is survived by her husband, Bo Welch—a production designer she met on the "Beetlejuice" set—and their two adult children, Luke and Matthew.

Government shuts down as officials await House vote.

Most of the federal government shut down at 12:01 am ET, despite the Senate passing a funding package yesterday. The deal must be approved by the House, which reconvenes Monday. Under the package, most agencies will be funded through September. The Department of Homeland Security will be funded at current levels until Feb. 13, as lawmakers negotiate immigration enforcement reforms.

Journalist Don Lemon arrested in connection with anti-ICE protest.

Federal authorities yesterday announced the former CNN anchor was arrested in Los Angeles, where he was covering the Grammy Awards. He faces charges of conspiracy and interfering with the First Amendment rights of worshippers stemming from his coverage of an anti-immigration enforcement protest at a church in St. Paul, Minnesota, this month. Another journalist and two protesters were also arrested in Minnesota yesterday in connection with the same protest.

President Donald Trump nominates Kevin Warsh as next Federal Reserve chair.

Trump considered Warsh for the role in 2017, before nominating current Chair Jerome Powell. An ex-Morgan Stanley executive, Warsh served on the Fed board from 2006 to 2011, including as a Wall Street liaison during the 2007-08 financial crisis. The Senate must confirm Warsh before he can replace Powell, whose term ends in May. Confirmation is uncertain after two Republicans vowed to oppose any Trump nominee unless the Justice Department drops its criminal probe into Powell.

Department of Justice opens civil rights probe into Alex Pretti's death.

The DOJ's Civil Rights Division will work alongside the FBI and a division of the Department of Homeland Security, which are already reviewing last weekend's fatal shooting of Alex Pretti by federal agents. The FBI is also leading an investigation into the fatal shooting of Renee Good by federal agents earlier this month; the DOJ has not opened a civil rights probe into the events surrounding her death.

Panama Supreme Court ousts Hong Kong company from Panama Canal.

The court found CK Hutchison's contract to manage both ends of the Panama Canal unconstitutional after a lawsuit alleging the company shortchanged Panama by roughly \$1.3B. A Danish shipping firm is expected to temporarily oversee the port while a new operator is selected. President Donald Trump has expressed interest in bringing the canal—handling roughly 5% of global seaborne trade—back under US control. The US ceded the canal to Panama on Dec. 31, 1999.

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Justice Department releases 3 million pages of Epstein files.

The documents were disclosed alongside over 2,000 videos and 180,000 images under the Epstein Files Transparency Act. The DOJ tasked hundreds of lawyers with reviewing records after missing the act's Dec. 19 deadline to release all investigative files tied to the late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. Authorities are allowed to redact information that could harm ongoing investigations or expose victims' identities.

NASA delays first Artemis moon shot due to extreme cold.

The first crewed flight to the moon since 1972 will now occur no earlier than Feb. 8, two days later than planned. The decision came after near-freezing temperatures at Florida's Kennedy Space Center forced NASA to call off a fueling test scheduled for today. The test is now set for Monday, weather permitting. A successful mission will mark the first woman and person of color on a lunar mission.

Australian Open wraps this weekend, with veteran Djokovic eyeing history.

Novak Djokovic, 38, became the oldest men's finalist in Australian Open history after defeating defending champion Jannik Sinner, 24, in yesterday's semifinals. He faces top-ranked Carlos Alcaraz, 22, tomorrow for a record 25th Grand Slam. But first, Aryna Sabalenka and Elena Rybakina meet in today's women's singles finals. Neither women's finalist has dropped a set—a feat unseen at the Australian Open since 2004.



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Sat., Jan. 31, 2026 - at Madison
Groton Area boys vs. Vermillion
2:45 p.m.

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Wolves Split I Hate Winter Weekend Opener Against Sioux Falls

Aberdeen, S.D. — It was a mixed opening to I Hate Winter Weekend at Wachs Arena for Northern State University, as the Wolves men fell to University of Sioux Falls on Friday night, while the women responded with a dramatic one-point victory to complete a weekend split against their in-state rival.

On the men's side, Northern State dropped an 81-65 decision to Sioux Falls as the Cougars jumped out early and maintained control throughout the contest. NSU shot 38.5% from the floor and struggled from beyond the arc at 14.8%, while Sioux Falls connected at a 46.5% clip overall. The Wolves were out-rebounded 46-38 but found success inside, scoring 34 points in the paint and adding 21 points off the bench.

Joshua Book led Northern with 17 points on 50% shooting and added seven rebounds, while Marshawn Smith chipped in 11 points and Simon Akena scored 10. Book and James Glenn each dished out three assists, with Glenn also recording a team-high two steals. Benjamin Bowen provided a spark off the bench with nine points and five rebounds in 25 minutes of action. The loss dropped the Wolves to 7-14 overall and 7-8 in NSIC play.

The Northern State women, however, delivered the highlight of the weekend with a thrilling 73-72 win over Sioux Falls, completing a season sweep of the Cougars. The contest featured seven ties and 10 lead changes, setting the stage for a dramatic finish. After Sioux Falls closed the game on an 11-2 run to take the lead with under a minute remaining, Morgan Fiedler answered by driving the lane and converting a tough finish to put the Wolves back in front.

Following a missed three-pointer by the Cougars, Sioux Falls had one final chance with 0.8 seconds remaining, but was unable to get a shot off, sealing Northern's victory. Fiedler finished with 10 points and four rebounds, while Izzy Moore turned in a dominant all-around performance with 26 points, nine rebounds, six assists and five steals. Reagan Rus added 12 points off the bench, and Megan Counts contributed eight points and six rebounds as the Wolves shot a season-high 91.3% from the free-throw line.

Both Northern State teams remain at home for the second day of I Hate Winter Weekend, welcoming Southwest Minnesota State University to Wachs Arena. The women tip off at 4 p.m., followed by the men at 6 p.m.

Krueger Claims Gold as Groton Area Competes at 2026 Girls Aberdeen Central Invitational

Groton Area girls wrestling saw a strong performance at the Aberdeen Central Invitational on Friday, highlighted by a championship run from Liza Krueger and valuable mat time for Gracelynn Decker.

At 105 pounds, Liza Krueger (36-2) turned in a dominant day, placing 1st and scoring 27.5 team points for Groton Area. Krueger opened the tournament with back-to-back falls, pinning Charlotte Koch of McCook Central/Montrose in 1:18 before sticking Olivia Borgen of Britton-Hecla in 1:15. In the semifinal round, Krueger battled past Kadee Frankfurth of Clark/Willow Lake with a hard-fought 4-3 decision. She capped off her championship run in emphatic fashion, earning a technical fall over Vanessa Anderson of Watertown, 15-0, at the 5:46 mark to secure the title.

Competing at 110 pounds, Gracelynn Decker (4-10) placed 7th and added 2.0 team points. Decker received a bye in the opening round before falling to Aubrey Fischer of Pierre T.F. Riggs by pin in the quarterfinals. She later returned to the mat after another bye but was pinned by Sawyer Opsahl of Ipswich in the consolation bracket. Decker closed the tournament by receiving a bye in the seventh-place match to finish the day.

Tiger grapplers beat Britton-Hecla, McLaughlin

The Groton Area Tigers put together a strong and complete night on the mat, earning dual victories over Britton-Hecla (51-28) and McLaughlin (75-4), with contributions coming from every weight class through a mix of contested wins, pins, and forfeit victories.

Groton Area was dominant in its first dual against McLaughlin, surrendering just one bout on the night. Preston Hinkelman set the tone at 106 with a fall over Aiden Spotted Horse, while Luke Gauer followed at 113 with a narrow 8-7 decision over Gabe Crow Ghost. At 120, Wyatt Hagen pinned Wambli White Tail in 2:00, and Kyson Kucker added another fall at 126, stopping Ryken McCloud in 1:46. Groton again benefited from forfeits at 132 and 138, awarded to Noah Scepaniak and Aiden Strom. At 144, Grayson Flores pinned Charles White Buffalo in 1:39, while Kason Oswald needed just 0:58 to pin Myron Kills In Water at 150. The pin streak continued at 157 as Donavon Block earned a fall over Wawokiya White Mountain in 1:33. Ben Hoeft (165) and Isaiah Scepaniak (175) both added forfeit wins, and Walker Zoellner returned to the win column at 190 with a pin of Jacoby Carry Moccasin in 2:57. McLaughlin's only points came at 215, where Layne Johnson was defeated by Quentin White Mountain via 10-1 major decision. Groton closed the night with another forfeit win from Gavin Englund at 285.

Against Britton-Hecla, Groton Area opened the dual by taking advantage of lineup gaps, receiving forfeit wins from Wyatt Hagen at 120 pounds, Kyson Kucker at 126, Noah Scepaniak at 132, and Aiden Strom at 138. In contested action, Grayson Flores delivered a solid performance at 144, earning a 10-3 decision over Corbin Dawson. At 150, Kason Oswald was pinned by Bryce Hawkinson in 1:21, while Donavon Block dropped a 23-9 major decision to Colton Chapin at 157. Groton responded with additional forfeit points from Ben Hoeft at 165 and Isaiah Scepaniak at 175. At 190, Walker Zoellner was pinned by Tucker Hardy in 3:06. The Tigers closed the dual strong as Layne Johnson pinned Liam Paxton in 1:49 at 215, and Gavin Englund secured a forfeit win at heavyweight. In the lighter weights, Preston Hinkelman was pinned by Lincoln Kilker at 106 in 2:51, and Bentley Ehresmann was pinned by Henry Kilker at 113 in 4:35, but Groton's depth carried them to the 51-28 team win.



Henry Kilker (Britton-Hecla) ended up scoring a pin over Bentley Ehresmann (Groton Area) in 4:35. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Donavon Block (Groton Area) scored a pin over Wawokiya White Mountain (McLaughlin) in 1:33. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Colton Chapin (Britton-Hecla) scored a major decision over Donavon Block (Groton Area), 23-9. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Coaches Darin Zoellner, Chris Ehresmann and Troy Zoellner cheer on their wrestlers from the sideline. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Grayson Flores (Groton Area) scored a decision over Corbin Dawson (Britton-Hecla), 10-3. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Luke Gauer (Groton Area) came from behind to score a decision over Gabe Crow Ghost (McLaughlin), 8-7. Gauer trailed, 6-1, going into the third period. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Wyatt Hagen (Groton Area) scored a pin over Wambli White Tail (McLaughlin) in 2:00.
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Kyson Kucker (Groton Area) pinned Ryken McCloud (McLaughlin), 1:46. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Quentin White Mountain (McLaughlin) scored a major decision over Layne Johnson (Groton Area), 10-1. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Layne Johnson (Groton Area) pinned Liam Paxton (Britton-Hecla), 1:49. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Kason Oswald (Groton Area) pinned Myron Kills In Water (McLaughlin) in 58 seconds.
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Preston Hinkelman (Groton Area) pinned Aiden Spotted Horse (McLaughlin). (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Lincoln Kilker (Britton-Hecla) pinned Preston Hinkelman (Groton Area), 2:51. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Walker Zoellner (Groton Area) pinned Jacoby Carry Moccasin (McLaughlin) in 2:57.
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



Tucker Hardy (Britton-Hecla) pinned Walker Zoellner (Groton Area) in 3:06. (Photo by Paul Kosel)


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Athletic trainer Brittany Hubbard and Patty Woods from the Groton Rescue Squad along with others tended to Jerrik Jones of Britton-Hecla. Jones suffered an arm injury that appeared to be broken. He was sent to a hospital in Aberdeen. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Clock is ticking on data center incentive proposal as elections loom

Governor candidates split on legislation that would provide sales tax breaks

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR AND MAKENZIE HUBER

The race for governor is on in South Dakota, and so is the race to determine the state's policy on data centers before the next governor is elected.

State Rep. Kent Roe, R-Hayti, wants to pass a bill this winter to spur the development of large data centers in South Dakota by giving them a local and state sales tax exemption on equipment and software purchases. He wants to do it before the June primary election, when a Republican candidate who doesn't support tax breaks for data centers could win the party's nomination.

"With any potential administrative change, they're going to want to put their own stamp on the procedure and they're going to assert their authority," Roe said.

There will be "all kinds of posturing regarding data centers" during this winter's legislative session because of the upcoming elections, Roe said. He's heard data centers called the "devil, the mark of the beast and all of these apocalyptic things."

Rooms or buildings full of computer servers have been storing cellphone pictures, emails and social media accounts for years. What's new are 100- to 1,000-acre warehouses full of servers for cryptocurrency and artificial intelligence. Those massive data centers, needing 30 to 1,000 megawatts of energy, have electricity consumption equivalent to 29,000 to 800,000 residential customers.

South Dakota's biggest data center consumes 30 megawatts, and the state has none of the vastly larger data centers that have proliferated elsewhere. Some of South Dakota's elected officials question whether the state should incentivize the industry as many other states have, due in part to the massive energy demands of large data centers and the potential impacts on the availability and cost of electricity for other customers.

At least 37 states offer some sort of data center incentive, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

An April 2025 report by the nonprofit Good Jobs First — which promotes "corporate and government accountability in economic development" — said there were 10 states that each granted more than \$100



Foreground: South Dakota Republican candidates for governor, from left, Gov. Larry Rhoden, U.S. Rep Dusty Johnson, state House Speaker Jon Hansen, and businessman Toby Doeden. Background: A rendering of a proposed data center near the South Dakota town of Toronto. (Data center rendering courtesy of Applied

Digital; candidate photos by South Dakota Searchlight; illustration by Joshua Haiar/South Dakota Searchlight)

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million of sales tax exemptions for data centers in the prior year. Texas and Virginia exempted about \$1 billion each, and Illinois exempted \$370 million.

Legislation details, data center proposals

The sales tax exemption in Roe's bill would run for 50 years. Eligibility would be determined by the state Department of Revenue.

While data centers would receive sales tax exemptions on hardware and software purchases, they would still pay the state's 4.2% sales tax on the electrical service they receive from their provider. Data centers would also pay any applicable local sales taxes on electricity.

Data centers would be required to have an electric service agreement that avoids shifting costs to other utility customers, and would be required to notify local water providers to ensure consumption is compatible for the location. Cooling systems that prevent data center servers from overheating often use large amounts of water. In 2023, U.S. data centers consumed about 17 billion gallons of water, according to a Berkeley Lab report commissioned by the U.S. Department of Energy.

Roe's bill excludes data centers used for the mining of cryptocurrency, which is digital currency secured by cryptography. Cryptocurrencies such as bitcoin are "mined" into existence by continuously running computers solving complex numerical problems.

Projects proposed in SD

The push for data center incentives and the race for governor could influence pending proposals to build large data centers in the state.

On Jan. 5, the Sioux Falls City Council approved the rezoning needed for a proposed site on the edge of the city that would be developed for a data center to occupy. The company, Gemini, estimates it will spend up to \$1.9 billion to develop the site for a 500-megawatt data center. Opponents tried unsuccessfully to petition the decision to a citywide referendum election.

Meanwhile, a 430-megawatt, \$5 billion data center is proposed in the Deuel County town of Toronto.

The Toronto project could generate over \$10 million per year in state sales taxes on its electrical service, according to the company proposing the project, Applied Digital. The project could also result in a total of \$5.5 million in property taxes annually for Deuel County and Deubrook School District. Nick Phillips, vice president of the company, said the state would bring in about another \$19 million in one-time sales taxes associated with site development and construction.

The company loosely estimated \$500 million in sales tax relief from Roe's bill each time the data center updates its billions of dollars worth of hardware and software inside the building. That could happen every four to six years or so.

"But remember, that's sales tax revenue the state is currently not getting," Phillips said.

Other South Dakota communities are also taking actions that could aid data center development. The Madison City Commission greenlit an incentive program for data centers in November with Heartland Energy, hoping to attract cryptocurrency operations to the city by providing discounted energy rates, according to the Madison Daily Leader.

The largest data center already operating in South Dakota is a 30 megawatt facility near Onida. The project is planned to expand to 300 megawatts in the next few years, according to owner Big Watt Digital.

Where the candidates for governor stand

The race for the Republican nomination for governor includes Gov. Larry Rhoden, of Union Center — who is serving the remainder of former Gov. Kristi Noem's second term after she departed to serve in the Trump administration — plus U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, of Mitchell, Aberdeen businessman Toby Doeden, and state House Speaker Jon Hansen of Dell Rapids. The primary election in June will come on the heels of the annual legislative session, which ends in March.

Johnson says South Dakota needs a "builder" and fewer of what he calls "BANANAS" — people who want to "Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anything." He's been traveling the state promoting his "Data Centers Done Right" initiative.

Johnson has said data centers will help the U.S. win the artificial intelligence race, bring new industry and skilled jobs, provide steady demand for utilities, grow property-tax revenue for the counties where

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they're located, and raise sales tax revenue for the state.

Johnson's initiative says South Dakota should welcome data center projects that meet qualifications, including protections so they don't drive up electricity or water rates, requirements to create good-paying jobs, and expectations that the centers deliver substantial property, gross receipts and energy-related tax revenue. The initiative does not include specifics on instituting those guardrails.

At a "Data Centers Done Right" roundtable in October, seated next to Roe, Johnson criticized Rhoden's administration for not delivering on data incentives during the 2025 legislative session. Johnson said he supports Roe's bill. Rhoden's office of economic development spoke against a sales-tax exemption bill for data centers last winter, and the legislation failed.

"We need leaders willing to be the tip of the spear, charge forward, and bring that consensus into clarity, not wait for it to develop," Johnson said.

Rhoden's Governor's Office of Economic Development commissioner, Bill Even, told South Dakota Searchlight that his office does not plan to testify on Roe's bill, instead "letting the legislative process move forward."

Rhoden said he is "focused on getting things done," pointing to a data center roundtable he convened in September. He encouraged attendees to "come to consensus on a plan to do exactly what Dusty says he is doing."

"Although, I will say, I've seen his plan and the stuff he is suggesting in there, we already do," Rhoden said of Johnson's "Data Centers Done Right" initiative. "It was really kind of a framework."

Hansen has criticized tax incentive programs.

"Handing out taxpayer dollars to out-of-state corporations isn't pro-business; it's picking winners and losers at the expense of our own people," he told South Dakota Searchlight.

Hansen does not support the data center sales tax exemption bill.

Hansen and Senate President Pro Tempore Chris Karr, R-Sioux Falls, recently unveiled their "Data Center Bill of Rights," aimed at large data centers.

The two said the bill would bar new state sales tax breaks for data centers, protect utility customers from rate hikes caused by large power demands, require compatibility with local water supplies, and preserve local control over siting.

"Why would we be subsidizing some of the richest tech billionaires to build these data centers?" Hansen said. "If they want to come to South Dakota, they can come here and do that, but we don't think we should be having to subsidize these data centers."

Doeden said he agrees with President Donald Trump that the U.S. should dominate artificial intelligence — and that means building data centers — but "they have to come here on our terms."

"I will grow this economy more than any governor in the history of this state," Doeden said. "We don't have to subsidize for-profit data centers."

Opposition, other bills

Some South Dakotans are not convinced data centers are good for the state, and they'll be lobbying lawmakers during this year's legislative session.

Richard Bell is an engineer living in Rapid City, and a board member of the grassroots advocacy nonprofit Dakota Rural Action. It signed a letter from over 100 groups nationwide calling on Congress to halt data center construction until certain policies and regulations are put in place.

The letter says artificial intelligence is leading to more job loss and driving greater economic inequality. The groups call the artificial intelligence and cryptocurrency boom a major environmental threat because of its high electricity use, driving more fossil fuel pollution that further warms the planet.

Other legislators have their own ideas about how to regulate data centers. Sen. Taffy Howard, R-Rapid City, introduced two bills recently.

"There's a big push to have data centers in South Dakota," Howard said. "Before we jump on that bandwagon, we have to have common sense guardrails to protect our way of life and quality of life."

One bill would limit "nuisances" caused by data centers by restricting the facilities from being built

within a mile of a residential area and prohibit them from exceeding 45 decibels of noise at the nearest residential property line, which is equivalent to the humming of a refrigerator. Eighty-five decibels can cause hearing damage.

Another would define "large use customer" as an electric customer with at least 2 megawatts of demand and set regulations for water and electric use. The bill requires utilities to set rates for large-load customers to protect other customers from rate increases, requires a closed-loop cooling system, and requires regular water and electric use reports, among other regulations.

Howard said the state Public Utilities Commission is already working to ensure South Dakota energy rates for existing customers aren't unduly raised because of large-use customers coming online.

"We're doing the right thing, but there's nothing requiring that in statute," Howard said. "I think it's important to have that in statute."

The Public Utilities Commission is supporting a data center bill of its own. It would allow the commission to require data centers over 10 megawatts to pay for certain reviews associated with assessing those projects.

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

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

North Dakota town serves as an example of the promise and perils of data centers for South Dakota

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER AND JOSHUA HAIAR

Don Flaherty worries about the future of the data center industry "every single day."

During his four years as mayor of Ellendale, North Dakota, the town has welcomed a growing data center campus from Dallas-based Applied Digital.

If the company goes belly up, so could the town.

"Could it blow up in my face?" Flaherty said. "Absolutely."

For now, he said, "I have faith we're on the right track." He expects the city of about 1,100 people to grow by 500 or 700 residents in the next few years because of Applied Digital's campus, which includes three data center facilities expected to create up to 350 jobs in Ellendale.



Applied Digital, a digital infrastructure company specializing in data centers, is expanding its campus in Ellendale, North Dakota, to three buildings and up to 530 MW of energy demand. (Photo courtesy of Applied Digital)

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The total cost to build the campus is about \$5 billion.

Some data center boosters in South Dakota say Ellendale — which has more data center development than the entire state to its south — is an example to follow. But the data center boom has also brought challenges to the town, including rapidly rising housing costs.

Rooms or buildings full of computer servers have been storing cellphone pictures, emails, and social media accounts for years. What's new are 100- to 1,000-acre warehouses full of servers for cryptocurrency and artificial intelligence. Those massive data centers with 30- to 1,000-megawatt loads have energy consumption equivalent to 29,000 to 800,000 South Dakota residential customers.

South Dakota's biggest data center consumes 30 megawatts, and the state has none of the vastly larger data centers that have proliferated elsewhere. Some of South Dakota's elected officials question whether the state should incentivize the industry as many other states have, due in part to the massive energy demands of large data centers and the potential impacts on the availability and cost of electricity for other customers.

Ellendale mayor: Benefits outweigh data center growing pains

Applied Digital approached Ellendale in 2021 because the town is near a substation collecting electricity generated by several wind farms in North and South Dakota.

The company's first data center in Ellendale hired 35 people, a boon for a shrinking town, said Flaherty, whose son works at the facility.

Soon after, Applied Digital proposed expanding its operations. The two new facilities, once online, will increase the company's demand in Ellendale to 530 megawatts.

A data center with a peak load of 530 megawatts operating at its maximum load near continuously would consume the same amount of energy as about 370,000 South Dakota residential customers, based on an estimate from South Dakota Public Utilities Commission Utility Analyst Darren Kearney.

North Dakota created a program to help finance 20 new homes in Ellendale, through a partnership with Applied Digital and a private developer. Other developers have purchased land for more homes in the area, anticipating demand.

Applied Digital, which volunteered to be annexed into Ellendale, "nearly doubles" the town's tax base, Flaherty said.

Customers of Montana-Dakota Utilities, which is where Applied Digital purchases energy for its facilities, received credits on their energy bills due to data centers purchasing more energy from the grid and thereby increasing the utility's revenue. Regulated utilities in North Dakota are required to provide the credits because of a return on equity cap set by the North Dakota Public Service Commission.

Those credits are called transmission riders and Fuel and Purchased Power Adjustment credits, which appear in the utility's annual filings.

Electrical rates have stayed stable, there are no brownouts, and there is "more than enough power in our area to absorb what they're taking," Flaherty said.

North Dakota customers received \$7.6 million in transmission rider credits in 2023, \$9.8 million in 2024, and \$7.4 million in 2025. North Dakota customers have received another \$13 million in fuel and purchased power adjustment-related credits since 2023, according to a Montana-Dakota Utilities spokesperson.

The average Montana-Dakota Utilities customer saved about \$70 in 2025.

South Dakotans served by MDU also received transmission rider credits because of data centers in MDU's service area: \$495,000 in 2024 and \$619,000 in 2025.

South Dakota law does not mandate a return on equity cap like North Dakota, but the state Public Utilities Commission can call a company in for a general rate case "if it believes the company to be over-earning beyond the return authorized in the most recent rate case," according to South Dakota PUC Public Utilities Manager Patrick Steffensen.

Nick Phillips, vice president of Applied Digital, said the company is operating at 312 megawatts of its anticipated 530-megawatt load in Ellendale. He expects Ellendale residents will receive more credit as data centers become fully operational.

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"Because we're located where the power is generated, we're consuming power that wouldn't have been consumed otherwise," Phillips said. "We're generating more revenue for the utility, causing us to pay parts of the transmission fees, costs and overhead fees."

Mike Bockorny, CEO of the Economic Development Professionals Association of South Dakota and former CEO of the Aberdeen Development Corp., said Aberdeen reaps the benefit of Ellendale's development. As the closest urban area to Ellendale, more than 1,000 construction workers are living temporarily in Aberdeen, impacting the region's sales taxes, restaurant traffic and hotel stays.

Opportunity for some, problems for others

There are also construction workers living temporarily in Ellendale, said Jamie Walker, a former Ellendale resident. Walker was a property manager for an apartment complex in town until she moved away shortly after construction started on Applied Digital's operation.

Walker now lives in Mayville, North Dakota, but her ex-husband lives in Ellendale and works at Applied Digital as a security guard. She visits the town to pick up and drop off her children.

Walker said demand for housing from construction workers doubled the monthly rental rate of a one-bedroom apartment at the complex where she worked from around \$600 to more than \$1,200. The increase has made housing unaffordable for lower-income residents, she said, pointing to families who moved out of Ellendale because of the increases in rent.

The construction is "good money for the town," she said, but she worries about the long-term damage of dozens of families with children leaving Ellendale because of unaffordable housing prices.

"The regular Ellendale local is not winning as big as, say, Casey's or Cenex or the local bars," Walker said, referring to a pair of local gas stations. "The money from this is going to be very short-term and one-sided."

Most Ellendale residents, Flaherty said, are apathetic about Applied Digital. Others are supportive like him, and some have been critical. Concerns include traffic from increased construction workers, fears of increased crime, and worries of less day care access in the future due to the expected population increase.

Flaherty said a local business purchased a building to refurbish as a day care, traffic concerns are temporary, and there have not been any "unusual spikes" in crime.

The first data center, which is air-cooled, emits an audible hum on the edge of town or within a mile of the facility, Flaherty said. The second and third data centers will be water-cooled in a closed loop system, which is supposed to make them quieter and will not strain the local water supply as other data centers across the country have. Phillips said the closed loop system will use about one household's worth of water.

Flaherty said the town has had to handle an influx of other issues — ordinances for mobile home parks, peddlers and food trucks — but that "all of it is worth it, even in the short term."

"Even though some things are a headache, I can see how they'll benefit our community ultimately," Flaherty said. "The growth will help us survive so we'll be a thriving community well into the next century."

Data centers eyed for Deuel County, Sioux Falls, Madison

Applied Digital is attempting to build its first South Dakota location in Deuel County, near the small town of Toronto on the far eastern side of the state. The company believes South Dakota is a prime location for data centers because of its wind energy, its abundance of electrical power, and the potential for its cool climate to help data centers save on cooling costs.

The up to 430-megawatt, two-building Deuel County proposal is near Otter Tail Power's transmission lines and a natural gas-fired generation plant in Astoria. The location is also surrounded by farm ground, which could allow for future expansions.

Phillips said the company wants to expand to South Dakota so its data centers are spread across a wider footprint, creating less risk to operations. He expects the data center would employ 250 people in the county of roughly 4,300.

The Toronto project could generate over \$10 million per year in state sales taxes on its electrical service, according to Applied Digital. The project could also result in a total of \$5.5 million in property taxes annually for Deuel County and Deubrook School District. Phillips said the state would bring in about another \$19 million in one-time sales taxes associated with site development and construction.

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Applied Digital's proposed site is about 35 miles from where Republican South Dakota Rep. Kent Roe lives. He said there's a mix of support, opposition and skepticism among his constituents.

While artificial intelligence-led investments are driving the country's recent economic growth, the industry faces challenges with other technological advancements, such as quantum computing, which could revolutionize the way data is processed and stored, and potential supply chain disruptions due to more complex microchips and equipment with each upgrade.

Roe is confident that data centers will be valuable to their communities for at least the next few decades, given the level of investment needed and the decades-long contracts signed with energy companies. He's proposing state legislation that would make data center purchases of equipment and software exempt from state and local sales taxes.

"They're not going to roll into Deuel County, invest \$5 billion and walk away in three or four years," Roe said, adding, "I think we need to pull the future to us."

Roe can recall a time when Toronto intentionally burned down vacant houses due to population decline.

"It's a pathway out of this stasis that we're in right now," Roe said.

Phillips said Applied Digital is working with local leaders to potentially build apartment complexes for construction workers in Toronto and transition them to senior housing when construction workers leave. The town does not have a senior living facility for its aging residents.

"Construction workers and seniors kind of need the same thing: relatively small living quarters with community spaces," Phillips said. "Perhaps there's a way for us and the county to work together to build housing upfront for construction, with all of the costs being borne by Applied Digital, and then turn that into a benefit for the community."

Although Applied Digital is proposing building in Deuel County, the company has not started the permitting or zoning process, nor has it bought land for the roughly \$5 billion project. Phillips said the company is waiting to close on the land until the Legislature passes a data center sales tax exemption law.

Other South Dakota communities are also taking actions that could aid data center development. The Madison City Commission greenlit an incentive program for data centers in November with Heartland Energy, hoping to attract cryptocurrency operations to the city by providing discounted energy rates, according to the Madison Daily Leader.

Los Angeles-based real estate company Gemini Capital hopes to develop a 500-megawatt, \$1.9 billion facility, powered by Xcel Energy, in eastern Sioux Falls. The Sioux Falls City Council rezoned the property recently. Opponents tried unsuccessfully to petition the decision to a citywide referendum election.

The Lincoln County Commission will hold a public hearing on a proposed data center moratorium on Feb. 24. State law would cap any adopted moratorium at one year unless renewed, and it would only apply to Lincoln County's unincorporated areas.

At least one large data center is already operating in South Dakota: a 30 megawatt facility near Onida. The project is planned to expand to 300 megawatts in the next few years, according to owner Big Watt Digital.

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 inches toward studying nuclear power as data center energy demands loom

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER AND JOSHUA HAIAR

-South Dakota Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden's proposed \$300,000 nuclear energy study is a step toward the inevitable, energy and economic development professionals say.

"We're going to ultimately have to get to nuclear," said CEO and President of North-Western Energy Brian Bird during a panel discussion in Sioux Falls in October.

Emerging industries including data centers, Bird said, will "need a tremendous amount of energy to do what they need to do."

A South Dakota Searchlight series examining the impact, barriers and concerns regarding efforts to build data centers in the state. [Read more >](#)

It takes two coal or natural gas plants, or three to four renewable resource-based plants, such as wind, water or renewable natural gas, to generate the same amount of electricity as one typical nuclear reactor, according to a 2023 South Dakota Legislative Research Council memo.

Rhoden is seeking funding for the study in the next state budget. The study was proposed by his Governor's Resilience and Infrastructure Task Force. A November news release said the task force was recommending the study "to ensure an all-of-the-above energy approach" because "more energy flexibility leads to a more stable energy supply."

Rhoden expressed interest in nuclear energy — especially in the cheaper, small, modular reactors gaining interest across the nation — during the Tri-State Governors Conference in North Sioux City last summer, when he referenced heightened needs for power in the age of data centers and artificial intelligence.

"I think the time has come to revisit nuclear power, given the advancements in technology that have been made," Rhoden said.

Rooms or buildings full of computer servers have been storing cellphone pictures, emails and social media accounts for years. What's new are 100- to 1,000-acre warehouses full of servers for cryptocurrency and artificial intelligence. Those massive data centers with 30- to 1,000-megawatt loads have energy consumption equivalent to 29,000 to 800,000 residential customers.

South Dakota's biggest data center consumes 30 megawatts, and the state has none of the vastly larger data centers that have proliferated elsewhere. Some of South Dakota's elected officials question whether the state should incentivize the industry as many other states have, due in part to the massive energy demands of large data centers and the potential impacts on the availability and cost of electricity for other



The shuttered Three Mile Island nuclear power plant near Middletown, Pennsylvania, pictured on Oct. 10, 2024. (Photo by Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images)

customers.

Data center energy demands

Data centers make up 4.4% of annual U.S. electricity consumption, a figure that could triple by the end of the decade, according to a U.S. Congressional report.

South Dakota Public Utilities Commissioner Chris Nelson said a new power plant won't have to be built to service every data center. The commission regulates investor-owned utility companies across the state.

Nelson said gigawatts of available electricity exist across the U.S. grid most of the time, which could be used to power data centers. The problem comes during extreme weather or peak hours, when supply gets tight.

To prevent rate and reliability impacts, data centers are increasingly required to be "interruptible customers," shutting down or switching to backup power during peak hours, Nelson explained.

"Any data center that's going to be built is going to have a complete backup generator on site," Nelson said, which would likely be diesel or natural gas.

Governor's Office of Economic Development Commissioner Bill Even said if South Dakota pursues data centers and other industries requiring more electricity — which includes value-added agriculture, such as a soybean processing plant that opened recently in Mitchell — then South Dakota will need to invest in renewable energy like wind or improved hydroelectric generation in the short term and nuclear in the long term. Utilities will likely purchase power from other areas of the United States in the meantime. North Dakota, for example, produces a significant amount of natural gas.

"If you're trying to get online quickly and want that base load power, you're probably going to be looking at natural gas," Even said.

NorthWestern considering sites for nuclear project

Data center critics worry ushering the industry into South Dakota will increase electricity rates as utilities build more power plants and pass the costs on to customers.

Small, modular nuclear reactors could offer scalable, localized power for high-load users like data centers, minimizing costs and risk to the grid, Bird said. Ideally, he added, the reactors could be placed next to high-load users.

"They can pay the upfront cost of the nuclear power, and the consumers would be much less harmed," Bird said.

The company is evaluating potential vendors and project sites for a small, modular reactor, aiming for a 2030 construction date. NorthWestern would also explore federal grants and financing to "keep customer rates affordable," a spokesperson with the company said. If other on-demand energy resources are retired, such as coal, a nuclear reactor "could be a cost-effective alternative."

Rhoden's proposed study will look at the regulatory hurdles in pursuing nuclear energy, environmental concerns, costs, types of equipment or infrastructure needed, and other barriers at the state or local level.

South Dakota does not produce any nuclear energy, but 4% of electricity consumed in the state comes from nuclear power produced elsewhere.

South Dakota is one of 11 states that has not signed an agreement with the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission to take over authority of radioactive materials, including issuing licenses, conducting inspections and enforcing safety regulations over the industrial, medical and academic uses of radioactive material.

If lawmakers approve the study, Lt. Gov. Tony Venhuizen said a "reasonable timeframe" would be to hire a consultant by the end of spring 2026 with results reported by the end of 2026.

"This is a topic that once you move past studying and into implementing, it becomes more controversial," Venhuizen said. "You have to look at the recommendations and ask if it's something to move forward with."

Addressing supply chain and nuclear waste

The United States is the largest producer of nuclear energy in the world, though China is rapidly expanding and expected to surpass the U.S.

Uranium is mined, processed and enriched into nuclear fuel. There were three uranium mines operating in the U.S. in 2021, sourcing a fraction of the country's need. That's up to 10 today.

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About 20% of electricity in the United States comes from nuclear energy, and nuclear power plant operators in the country source 99.8% of their uranium from other countries, including Canada, Kazakhstan and Russia, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

President Donald Trump issued executive orders regarding uranium last year to streamline permitting, expedite environmental reviews and impose tariffs on imports that compete with American products.

EnCore Energy is one of the companies hoping to mine for uranium on the southern edge of South Dakota's Black Hills. Janet Lee-Sheriff, head of communications for enCore, said the country has a "natural interest" in being self-reliant with energy.

"What is happening in your neighborhood can contribute to a solution needed for the state and country," Lee-Sheriff said.

After uranium is mined, processed, enriched and used in nuclear power generation, radioactive waste is produced.

Eric Meyer, executive director of Generation Atomic, told attendees at the Sioux Metro Growth Alliance's annual Growth Summit that nuclear waste is safely stored in "some of the most robust containers known to man," adding that the containers are tested by dropping missiles on them.

Generation Atomic is a nuclear energy advocacy organization. Meyer's presentation at the summit aimed to address concerns regarding nuclear energy, including environmental and economic impacts from such projects.

There are about 90,000 tons of nuclear waste stored at over 100 sites in 39 states. Nuclear waste is stored on the power plant's property before being removed, dried and sealed in welded stainless steel canisters that are stored outdoors in concrete vaults on concrete pads, according to Gerald Frankel, a materials science and engineering professor at The Ohio State University. As of 2024, there were more than 315,000 bundles of spent nuclear fuel rods in the U.S., and more than 3,800 dry storage casks in concrete vaults above ground, located at current and former power plants across the country.

The United States has been working toward building a permanent disposal site for nuclear waste in Nevada since 1987, but the work has been delayed by political and legal challenges.

Bill Even, the head of the South Dakota Governor's Office of Economic Development, said nuclear power is "arguably safer" than it used to be, and the state needs information about how it could help meet growing energy demands.

"Advancements in science and technology are marching forward at a fast pace," Even said, "and let's keep an open mind to what the future may hold around new technology."

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.

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.

Start your engines: Trump greenlights IndyCar race around D.C. monuments

BY: JACOB FISCHLER

The nation's capital will host an autorace through its streets this summer, President Donald Trump said Friday.

The IndyCar race, which Trump compared to the Indianapolis 500, will take place Aug. 23, with preliminary events such as practice sessions occurring for two days before, Trump said during an Oval Office announcement.

It will be free for spectators to attend and broadcast by Fox.

The event, dubbed the Freedom 250 Grand Prix, is one of several Trump's White House has planned to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence this summer. The celebration is also scheduled to include an Ultimate Fighting Championship match at the White House.



U.S. President Donald Trump holds up a signed executive order alongside Secretary of Transportation Sean Duffy, Roger Penske, chair of the Penske Corporation, Bud Denker, President of Penske Corporation, and U.S. Interior Secretary Doug Burgum, in the Oval Office of the White House on Jan. 30, 2026 in Washington, DC. Trump signed an order aimed at bringing an IndyCar race to the District of Columbia this summer as part of the celebration of America's 250th birthday.

(Photo by Alex Wong/Getty Images)

The race track will go around "our iconic national monuments in celebration of America's 250th birthday," according to an executive order Trump signed. The exact route will be finalized by Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy and Interior Secretary Doug Burgum within the next two weeks, according to the order.

Trump implied that the site of the race had already been chosen, saying that he urged organizers to choose "the best site," no matter the permitting difficulties. The order directs Duffy and Burgum to ensure all permits are secured.

Duffy, Burgum, and representatives of the Penske Corp., which owns the Indianapolis Motor Speedway in Indiana that hosts the sport's premiere event, flanked Trump during the Oval Office signing.

Trump noted that Penske executives had long sought a race in Washington, D.C., but had not made progress with lawmakers they'd lobbied. Trump approved the plan after "half a meeting," he said.

"They've been coming here for years, and everybody wanted it," he said. "Every senator wants it, every Congress, everybody wants it, but they don't get things done. Trump gets things done."

Officials at the White House Friday lauded the plan.

"To think of 190 miles an hour down Pennsylvania Avenue, this is going to be wild," said Duffy, a former member of Congress from Wisconsin. "Freedom, America, speed and road racing. It doesn't get more American than that, Mr. President."

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

Trump to nominate former Fed governor to replace Powell as chair

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump's new Federal Reserve chair pick likely faces headwinds in the U.S. Senate, as a key lawmaker opposes the administration's ongoing criminal probe of current Fed leader Jerome Powell.

Trump announced early Friday he's tapped Kevin Warsh to lead the central bank after Powell's term ends in May. Warsh sat on the Federal Reserve Board of Governors from 2006 to 2011 after being nominated by President George W. Bush and is a visiting scholar at Stanford University's business school and the university's conservative think tank, the Hoover Institution.

"I have known Kevin for a long period of time, and have no doubt that he will go down as one of the GREAT Fed Chairmen, maybe the best," Trump wrote on his own platform, Truth Social. "On top of everything else, he is 'central casting,' and he will never let you down."

But the president is one vote short needed to push the nominee through the tightly divided Senate Banking Committee if all Democrats on the panel vote against.

Sen. Thom Tillis, R-N.C., a member of the Banking Committee, praised Warsh as a "qualified nominee with a deep understanding of monetary policy."

But Tillis, who is retiring after this term, said he won't vote for the pick if Trump continues to investigate Powell on accusations that he lied to Congress over the cost of renovations to the Fed's Washington, D.C., headquarters.



Kevin Warsh, second from left, listens during a panel discussion at the Semafor 2024 World Economy Summit on April 18, 2024, in Washington, D.C. (Photo by Tasos Katopodis/Getty Images for Semafor)

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"Protecting the independence of the Federal Reserve from political interference or legal intimidation is non-negotiable. My position has not changed: I will oppose the confirmation of any Federal Reserve nominee, including for the position of Chairman, until the DOJ's inquiry into Chairman Powell is fully and transparently resolved," Tillis wrote on social media Friday morning.

The Federal Reserve holds significant influence over the nation's economy, and numerous experts advise separating monetary policy from political influence. Adjusting interest rates, to cool inflation or stimulate the economy, is one tool the central bank uses to accomplish maximum employment and price stability.

Threats to Powell

Trump has publicly threatened to fire Powell multiple times if the chair did not lower interest rates more aggressively.

Powell revealed in mid-January that he received a federal grand jury subpoena from the Department of Justice for a probe into whether he lied to Congress about construction costs.

Powell said in a rare video statement at the time that the investigation was not purely about oversight but rather about "setting interest rates based on our best assessment of what will serve the public, rather than following the preferences of the president."

Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche declined to comment on the status of the subpoenas Friday when asked if Trump's nomination process would speed up the investigation into Powell.

"I don't think the timing of President Trump's decision to nominate somebody is a controlling factor in any investigation," he told reporters at an unrelated press conference at the Justice Department.

No commitment to lower rates

Trump praised Warsh on social media Friday morning, upon announcing his decision.

Warsh, a former New York banker and economic adviser to Bush, served on the Fed board through the tumultuous global financial crisis.

Trump told reporters Friday afternoon that he hasn't asked Warsh about a commitment to lower interest rates.

"I don't want to ask him that question. I think it's inappropriate. Probably, probably would be allowed, but I want to keep it nice and pure. But he certainly wants to cut rates. I've been watching him for a long time," Trump said.

When asked about Tillis's opposition, Trump called the senator an "obstructionist."

"I mean, you know, if he doesn't approve, we just have to wait till somebody comes in that will approve it, right?" Trump said.

Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., a member of the Senate Banking Committee, urged her Republican colleagues on the panel to oppose Trump's pick.

"Trump can't appoint his next puppet to the Fed all by himself. The Senate has to approve it. Any senator who claims to care about the independence of the Fed, including my Republican colleagues, should refuse to move forward with this nomination period until Trump drops his witch hunts," Warren said in a video message posted on social media Friday afternoon.

Powell has not been Trump's only target on the Federal Reserve. The president is awaiting a ruling from the U.S. Supreme Court on whether he violated the law when he fired Federal Reserve Board Gov. Lisa Cook, a President Joe Biden appointee, via social media over the summer.

Jacob Fischler and Shauneen Miranda contributed to this report.

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

DOJ releases 3 million pages of Epstein files, taking in 180,000 images and 2,000 videos

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Justice released more than 3 million pages of documents Friday related to the late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

The release, which in the 3 million pages includes more than 2,000 videos and 180,000 images, comes more than 40 days after the agency was legally required to release the full set of files involving the disgraced financier, in compliance with federal law.

The department instead opted for a piecemeal roll-out of the files, prompting backlash.

U.S. Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche said Friday's release marks the end of a "very comprehensive" records review process to "ensure transparency to the American people and compliance" with the federal law — known as the Epstein Files Transparency Act — mandating the release.

"After submitting the final report to Congress as required under the act and publishing the written justifications for redactions in the Federal Register, the department's obligations under the act will be completed," he said.

In total, the DOJ has now released approximately 3.5 million pages in adherence with the federal law.

President Donald Trump signed a bill into law in November requiring the DOJ to make publicly available "all unclassified records, documents, communications, and investigative materials in DOJ's possession that relate to the investigation and prosecution of Jeffrey Epstein," including materials related to Epstein's accomplice Ghislaine Maxwell.

GOP Rep. Thomas Massie of Kentucky and Democratic Rep. Ro Khanna of California co-sponsored the measure — which gave the department 30 days after the bill was enacted into law to release the files, or Dec. 19.

Trump, who has appeared in several of the files, had a well-documented friendship with Epstein, but has maintained he had a falling-out with the disgraced financier and was never involved in any alleged crimes.

"There's a hunger or a thirst for information that I do not think will be satisfied by the review of these documents," Blanche said.

"There's nothing I can do about that."

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



U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York Geoffrey Berman announces charges against Jeffrey Epstein on July 8, 2019 in New York City. (Photo by Stephanie Keith/Getty Images)

Sully County, home to SD's largest data center, would welcome more with 'open arms,' official says

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER AND JOSHUA HAIAR

Citizens crowded county commission meetings and city council rooms in recent months, expressing concerns about potential data centers near Sioux Falls and the small South Dakota town of Toronto.

Three years ago, residents of Sully County did the same when a 30 megawatt data center was proposed near the hydroelectric power generated by the Oahe Dam on the Missouri River, Sully County Planning and Zoning Board Chair Austin Gross told state lawmakers last winter.

"The meetings we had with the data center on the agenda were some of the highest attended meetings publicly that we've had since I've been on the board," Gross said.

The Sully County facility is now the largest data center in South Dakota. It's expected to expand to 300 megawatts in the coming years.

Running near continuously, that would be the same amount of energy as nearly 209,000 South Dakota residential customers, based on an estimate from South Dakota Public Utilities Commission Utility Analyst Darren Kearney. For comparison, Sioux Falls, the state's largest city, has 92,477 housing units, according to the city's Planning and Zoning Department.

Rooms or buildings full of computer servers have been storing cellphone pictures, emails and social media accounts for years. What's new are 100- to 1,000-acre warehouses full of servers for cryptocurrency and artificial intelligence. Those massive data centers with 30- to 1,000-megawatt loads consume the equivalent amount of energy as 29,000 to 800,000 South Dakota residential customers.

South Dakota has none of the vastly larger data centers that have proliferated elsewhere. Some of South Dakota's elected officials question whether the state should incentivize the industry as many other states have, due in part to the massive energy demands of large data centers and the potential impacts on the availability and cost of electricity for other customers.

The Sully County facility is for cryptocurrency mining, which uses continuously running computers and other digital infrastructure to record transactions and solve complex numerical problems that "mine" new digital currency. The facility is located about 23 miles north of Pierre and is owned by Big Watt Digital, which is based in Pierre. Big Watt Digital employs less than 20 people. Gross said the company's planned



A portion of a data center owned by Big Watt Digital north of Pierre, pictured on Dec. 23, 2025. (Photo by Meghan O'Brien/South Dakota Searchlight)

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expansion in Sully County could lead to 100 full-time jobs and another 300 construction jobs.

That may be small to other communities, Gross said, but growth is the biggest challenge for the state's fifth least-populated county.

"The opportunity to combat these issues are ever-fleeting," Gross said. "You almost never find something like this to help a small town and community like ours."

The new jobs also contribute to "Main Street spending," County Commissioner Caleb Shepherd told lawmakers last year.

"Any additional data facilities we can attract to South Dakota will be met with open arms in Sully County," Shepherd said.

Substantial wind and hydroelectric power are accessible at the site, in addition to plenty of rural land for expansions. The new load from the data center, Oahe Electric CEO Jordan Lamb told South Dakota Searchlight, helps retire old energy generation assets more quickly than if the co-op only served homes, small businesses and agriculture operations.

That ultimately benefits ratepayers because the co-op can pay off its existing equipment more quickly, Lamb added. For example, Big Watt paid to have a substation adjacent to the operation rebuilt.

The data center has become a major revenue source for the local school district, providing around \$850,000 a year in gross receipts taxes, Lamb added.

The new revenue effectively turns the data center into a source of property tax relief, said Agar-Blunt-Onida Superintendent Jeremy Chicoine.

The district dropped its capital outlay request, which is a property tax fund for equipment and building upgrades, by \$600,000 last year. That's nearly 13% of total education property taxes paid in the district in fiscal year 2024.

The school district plans to reduce its general fund mill levy later this year if gross receipts revenue from Oahe Electric and Big Watt Digital continue to bring in such large revenues.

As the geographically largest school district east of the Missouri River, Agar-Blunt-Onida qualifies for sparsity funding from the state, with less than 250 students enrolled in the district. The school district, Chicoine said, would sacrifice roughly \$85,000 in sparsity funding – since sparse school districts have to set their general fund mill levy at their maximum rate.

The reduction would provide continued property tax relief for residents while still meeting needs of the students, Chicoine said.

"We're a fat school district for our enrollment size," he added.

Agar-Blunt-Onida offers several programs normally not available at such small, rural schools because of the sizable gross receipts tax revenue, including career and technical education programs and music, physical education and art for all grade levels.

He added that the school district will start a public school preschool program with the extra funding next school year. The decision is in response to a local private preschool closing.

The school district is one of six in South Dakota that doesn't rely on state funding, since its budget is covered entirely by local tax collections — property taxes, gross receipts and other taxes.

"We're not out there to fleece tax dollars," Chicoine said. "We're trying to invest in our kids and community in a responsible fashion that doesn't rake the taxpayer over the coals."

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.

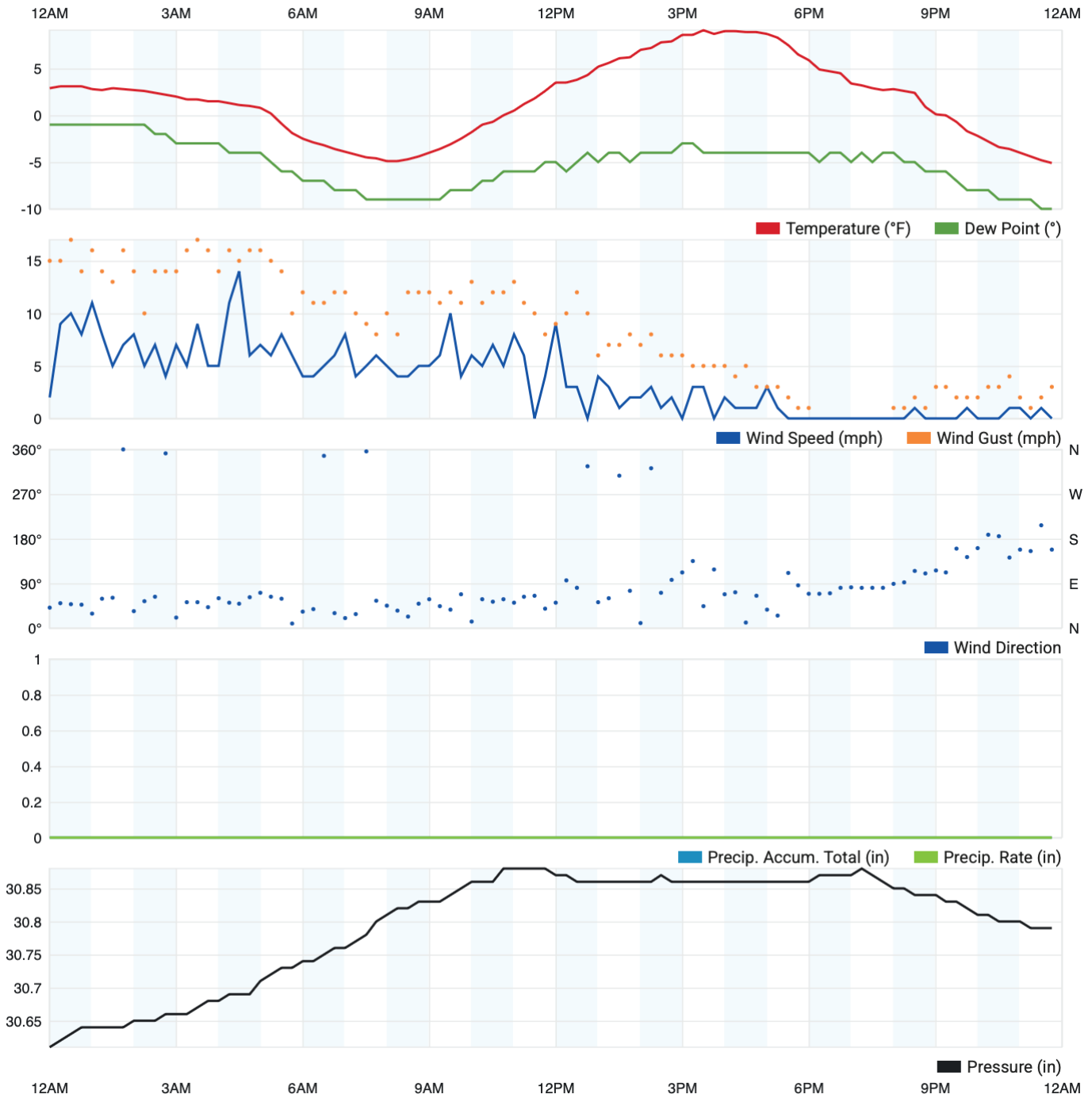
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

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Today

Tonight

Sunday

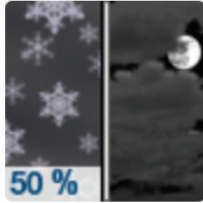
Sunday Night

Monday



High: 25 °F

Snow and Patchy Blowing Snow



Low: 20 °F↑

Chance Snow then Mostly Cloudy



High: 33 °F

Mostly Cloudy



Low: 12 °F

Mostly Cloudy



High: 22 °F

Mostly Cloudy



Light Snow Saturday Through Early Sunday

January 30, 2026
2:28 PM

Wintry mix with light freezing rain mixing in over central South Dakota.

Key Messages

- Wintry mix, including **freezing rain**, over central SD Saturday morning with **snow** across northeastern SD & west central MN in the afternoon.
- Increasing **winds** out of the south, with gusts of 30-40 mph. Gusts up to 50 mph possible along the eastern slopes of the Sisseton Hills.
- **Strong winds combining with the falling snow may lead to blowing snow, reducing visibility at times, especially over the Sisseton Hills.**

NEW

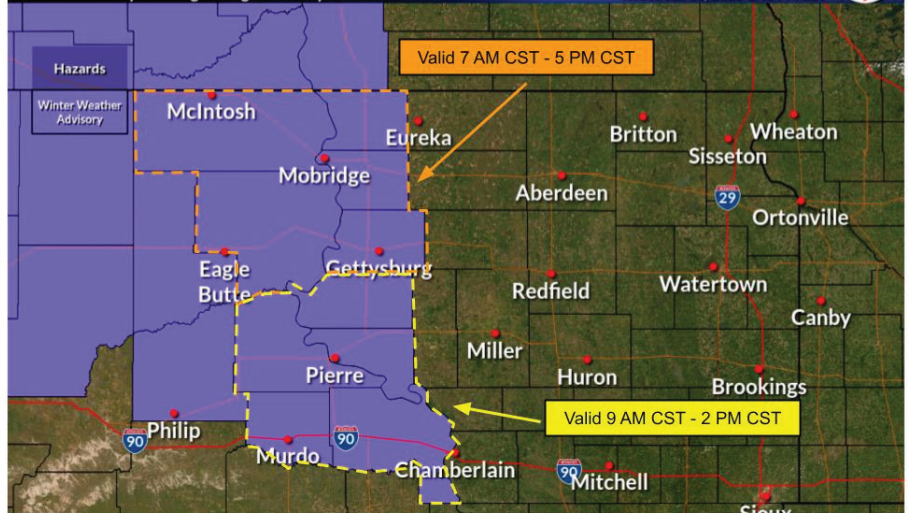
Important Updates

- Winter Weather Advisory has been issued for central SD Saturday morning through Saturday afternoon.

Winter Weather Advisory

In effect Saturday morning through Saturday afternoon.

Weather Forecast Office
Aberdeen, SD
Issued Jan 30, 2026 1:45 PM CST



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Wintry mix, including freezing rain, will move in over central SD Saturday morning with mainly snow across northeastern SD & west central MN by the afternoon. Precipitation will track eastward and exiting far northeastern SD/western MN by early Sunday morning. A glaze of ice is possible for portions of central SD where a Winter Weather Advisory has been issued.

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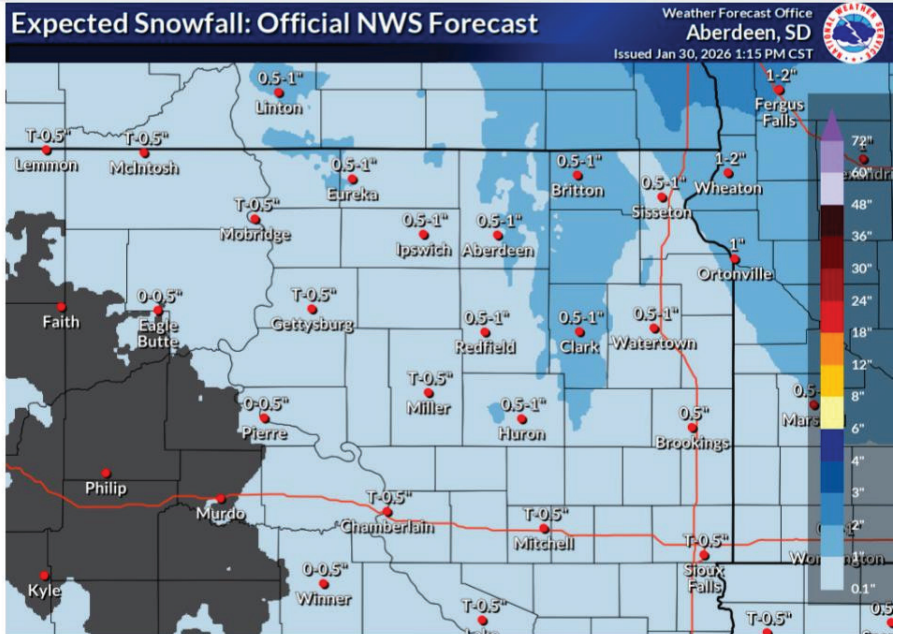
Snow Accumulation Saturday - Early Sunday

January 30, 2026
2:37 PM CST

An inch or more in accumulation possible over northeast SD and western MN.

- Snow accumulation of an inch or more will be possible over northeastern South Dakota and west central Minnesota.
 - Less than a half inch of snow accumulation is expected for central South Dakota.
- The heaviest snow is expected to fall Saturday afternoon and evening.
- The combination of strong winds and falling snow may reduce visibility at times.
 - Visibility reductions will occur mainly in the James Valley and eastward, especially over the Sisseton Hills.

Expected Snowfall: Official NWS Forecast



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

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



Blowing Snow Potential

January 30, 2026
2:40 PM CST

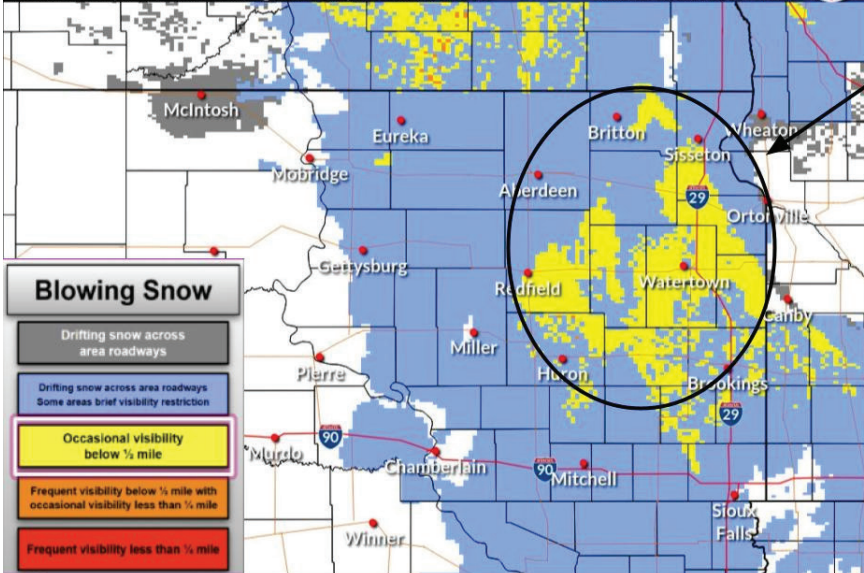
Mainly in the James Valley and eastward, with the greatest threat across the Sisseton Hills.

Maximum Blowing Snow Forecast (12-Hourly)

Valid Sat Jan 31, 2026 12:00PM through Sun Feb 1, 2026 12:00AM CST

Weather Forecast Office
Aberdeen, SD

Issued Jan 30, 2026 12:19 PM CST



- Southerly winds increase Saturday morning, with gusts potentially above 45 mph along the eastern slopes of the Sisseton Hills.
- **The combination of falling snow and gusty winds may lead to blowing snow, occasionally reducing visibilities at times below a 1/2 mile (in yellow).**

Maximum Wind Gust Forecast (mph)

	1/31 Sat						2/1 Sun	
	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	Maximum
Aberdeen	28↑	33↑	35↑	33↑	29↑	22↑	20↑	35
Britton	28↑	38↑	46↑	45↑	40↑	35↑	29↑	46
Clark	25↑	36↑	44↑	43↑	40↑	35↑	28↑	44
Clear Lake	21↑	32↑	41↑	43↑	43↑	40↑	36↑	43
Frederick	28↑	33↑	37↑	36↑	29↑	23↑	23↑	37
Milbank	15↑	26↑	35↑	36↑	32↑	30↑	26↑	36
Redfield	29↑	36↑	38↑	38↑	30↑	23↑	22↑	38
Sisseton	20↑	31↑	40↑	40↑	36↑	32↑	30↑	40
Watertown	21↑	32↑	40↑	41↑	39↑	36↑	30↑	41
Webster	25↑	37↑	44↑	44↑	40↑	36↑	30↑	44
Wheaton	18↑	24↑	29↑	29↑	28↑	25↑	22↑	29

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

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

Groton Daily Independent

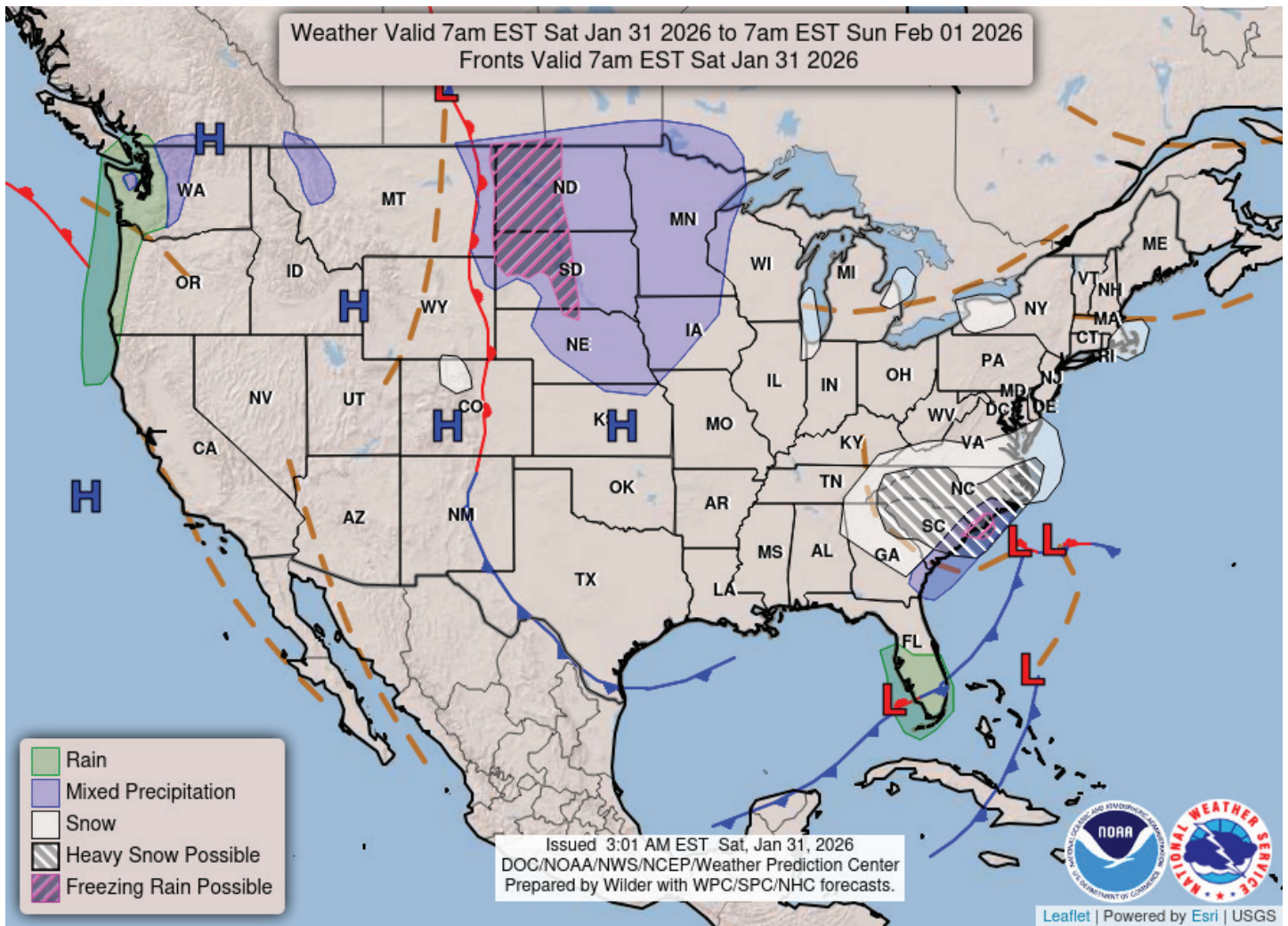
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 9 °F at 3:49 PM
Low Temp: -5 °F at 7:55 AM
Wind: 18 mph at 12:25 AM
Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 51 in 1924
Record Low: -32 in 1996
Average High: 25
Average Low: 2
Average Precip in Jan.: .55
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 0.55
Precip Year to Date: 0.00
Sunset Tonight: 5:37 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:53 am



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Today in Weather History

January 31, 1969: Minnesota experienced many winter storms throughout the month of 1969, where several people had died from heart attacks and auto accidents. Many roads were blocked or iced over several times during the month. Considerable snow during January and frequent periods of strong winds resulted in many days of blowing and drifting snow across northeast South Dakota. There were also many days with freezing rain. The most significant icing occurred on the 22nd and the 27th. There were numerous days where the traffic was at a standstill due to blocked roads and closed airports. Many school closings occurred throughout the month, with many activities canceled. Many rural roads went long periods without being opened, resulting in hardships for farmers. Days of blowing snow were the 8th, 19th, 22nd, 23th, 24th, 26th, 27th, and 31st. Days of freezing rain were the 5th, 14th, 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th, and the 22nd.

1911: Tamarack, California, was without snow the first eight days of the month, but by the end of January, they had been buried under 390 inches of snow, a record monthly total for the United States. By March 11, 1911, Tamarack had a record snow depth of 451 inches.

1949 — The temperature at San Antonio, TX, plunged to a record low of one degree below zero. Helena MT reached 42 degrees below zero. (David Ludlum)

1950: Seattle, Washington experienced their coldest temperature on record with a reading of zero degrees.

1966 — A blizzard struck the northeastern U.S. When the storm came to an end, twenty inches of snow covered the ground at Washington D.C. (David Ludlum)

1969 — Minnesota experienced many winter storms throughout the month of 1969, where several people had died from heart attacks and auto accidents. Many roads were blocked or iced over several times during the month. Considerable snow during January and frequent periods of strong winds resulted in many days of blowing and drifting snow across northeast South Dakota. There were also many days with freezing rain. The most significant icing occurred on the 22nd and the 27th. There were numerous days where the traffic was at a standstill due to blocked roads and closed airports. Many school closings occurred throughout the month, with many activities canceled. Many rural roads went long periods without being opened, resulting in hardships for farmers.

1979: A winter storm that started on the previous day and ended on this day spread 2 to 4 inches of rainfall in 24 hours over much of coastal Southern California and two inches of snow in Palm Springs. Snow fell heavily in Palm Springs, and 8 inches fell at Lancaster. All major interstates into Los Angeles were closed. Snow drifts shut down Interstate 10 on both sides of Palm Springs, isolating the city.

1982 — A snowstorm struck Missouri, Illinois and Indiana. Twenty-five inches of snow at Greenville IL, located east of Saint Louis, paralyzed the community. The storm left 4000 motorists stranded for two days. (David Ludlum)

1987 — A storm in the Pacific Northwest produced wind gusts to 85 mph in Oregon, and nearly two inches of rain in twelve hours in the Puget Sound area of Washington State. Ten inches of snow at Stampede Pass WA brought their total snow cover to 84 inches. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — Thirty-one cities in the central and northeastern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date, with many occurring during the early morning hours. Temperatures in western New York State reached the 60s early in the day. Strong northerly winds in the north central U.S. produced wind chill readings as cold as 60 degrees below zero in North Dakota. (National Weather Summary)

1989: The barometric pressure at Norway, Alaska, reached 31.85 inches (1078.4 mb) establishing an all-time record for the North American Continent. The temperature at the time of the record was about 46 degrees below zero. The severe arctic cold began to invade the north-central U.S. The temperature at Grand Fall, Montana, plunged 85 degrees in 36 hours. Valentine, Nebraska plummeted from a record high of 70 degrees to zero in just nine hours. Northwest winds gusted to 86 mph at Lander WY, and wind chill readings of 80 degrees below zero were reported in Montana. Sixty-four cities in the central U.S. reported record highs for the date as readings reached the 60s in Michigan and the 80s in Kansas.

1990 — High winds in Montana on the 28th, gusting to 77 mph at Judith Gap, were followed by three days of snow. Heavy snow fell over northwest Montana, with up to 24 inches reported in the mountains. An avalanche covered the road near Essex with six feet of snow. Snow and high winds also plagued parts of the southwestern U.S. Winds gusted to 54 mph at Show Low AZ, and Flagstaff AZ was blanketed with eight inches of snow. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

A Living Hope

Christ's words are always true, and His promises are never broken.

1 Peter 1:3-5: 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Believers are born into a living hope, a true foundation for their expectations and desires. Many people today live with a false sense of security. They assume that what's important in this life is the physical and material. But there is no safety in temporal things (Matthew 6:19-20). Those who pursue wealth and health rather than God find that their dreams either go unfulfilled or fail to satisfy.

Christians anchor their hope on the solid rock of Jesus Christ. His words are always true and His promises are never broken. The Lord does not disappoint those who seek His will. Don't misunderstand that statement—we might feel temporarily let down when something we hope for is not in God's plan. But He doesn't go back on the promise to give His followers what's best (Isaiah 48:17; Isaiah 64:4). When one door closes, there is another about to open with something more fitting behind it. And remember, it's impossible for the Lord to be outdone. We can't even wish ourselves as much good as God has in store.

The best choice a Christian can make is to fix his or her hope on Christ. Welcome whatever fits His will for your life, and turn away from what does not. Circumstances may shift and change, but Jesus never does. He is a living hope who never disappoints.

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:
01.30.26

11 34 36 43 63 13

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$323,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

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: 15 Hrs 7 Mins 19
Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
01.30.26

3 4 17 35 45 5

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 22 Mins 19
Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
01.28.26

5 13 14 20 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$233,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 22 Mins 19
Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
01.28.26

3 27 34 42 47 3

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 51 Mins 20
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: 15 Hrs 51 Mins 20
Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

News from the **AP** Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Christian 32, Sunshine Bible Academy 21
Brandon Valley 66, Yankton 38
Britton-Hecla 58, Aberdeen Roncalli 15
Canton 49, Baltic 29
Chester 44, Dell Rapids St Mary's 34
DeSmet 64, Colman-Egan 46
Elkton-Lake Benton 62, Oldham-Ramona-Rutland 39
Ethan 52, Howard 38
Flandreau Indian 51, Tiospa Zina 41
Gettysburg 55, Faith 40
Hay Springs, Neb. 60, Edgemont 34
Herreid-Selby 49, Ipswich 35
Jones County 44, Gregory 35
Langford 45, Northwestern 36
Mahpiya Luta Red Cloud 59, Sturgis Brown High School 23
McCook Central-Montrose 56, Canistota 21
Mitchell 51, Sioux Falls Lincoln 7
Mobridge-Pollock 64, Chamberlain 20
North Central 43, Strasburg, N.D. 13
Parkston 57, Miller 40
Rapid City Central 51, Brookings 36
Rapid City Christian 56, Deubrook 54
Rapid City Stevens 62, Watertown 32
Sioux Falls Jefferson 65, Millard North, Neb. 41
Sioux Falls O'Gorman 81, T F Riggs High School 25
Sioux Valley 66, Lakota Tech 63
Tripp-Delmont-Armour 54, Burke 51
White River 53, St. Francis Indian 47
Winner 50, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 48
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=
Kadoka vs. Bison, ppd.

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

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Baltic 75, Canton 58
Brandon Valley 52, Yankton 47
Burke 67, Tripp-Delmont-Armour 58
Chamberlain 52, Mobridge-Pollock 50
Clark-Willow Lake 84, Redfield 28
DeSmet 63, Colman-Egan 27
Dell Rapids St Mary's 54, Chester 46
Estelline-Hendricks 96, Arlington 41
Flandreau Indian 85, Tiospa Zina 44
Freeman 77, Avon 57

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Gettysburg 65, Faith 55
Gregory 59, Jones County 50
Harrisburg 63, T F Riggs High School 38
Hay Springs, Neb. 61, Edgemont 26
Howard 52, Ethan 39
Kimball-White Lake 65, Sunshine Bible Academy 46
Mahpiya Luta Red Cloud 62, Sturgis Brown High School 47
McCook Central-Montrose 56, Canistota 25
Miller 60, Parkston 48
North Central 49, Strasburg, N.D. 20
Northwestern 44, Langford 36
Rapid City Central 59, Brookings 54
Rapid City Stevens 69, Watertown 52
Sioux Falls Lincoln 68, Mitchell 37
West Central 72, Flandreau 42
Winner 53, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 38
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=
Kadoka vs. Bison, ppd.

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

First-of-its-kind South Dakota cohousing development finds its place in Vermillion

By MOLLY WETSCH/South Dakota News Watch South Dakota News Watch

In this college town of 11,000, a handful of long-time residents are building the state's first-ever cohousing development, which they hope provides a new way of living for them and frees up traditional homes for others.

"Cohousing doesn't just create houses. It creates a community. And it does that very intentionally," said Betty Smith, a founding member of the group.

Cohousing is a method of living that prioritizes community connection and growth. Residents live in small houses with a large common house as the centerpiece where community events and regular shared meals are a cornerstone of the living style. Common houses usually contain large kitchens, dining and living rooms and are central gathering places for the residents.

At the Vermillion development, called Dakota Prairie Commons, there will also be an emphasis on walkability, with footpaths connecting houses. The campus itself will be vehicle-free. Parking and garages will sit at the periphery of the development, Smith said. And while residents will have their own homes, they will be encouraged to rely on others for many day-to-day activities.

"One of my favorite stories is going to Iowa City's cohousing and walking in, and I compliment this woman's dog. I said, 'Oh, what a wonderful dog.' And she says, 'Oh, that's not my dog. That's my neighbor's dog. I'm taking care of it this week.' And then somebody else says, 'Oh, and I have the dog next week. I'm so excited.' It's that easy. But it's also significant things. Like if somebody breaks an arm, you know, you've got close-by neighbors," Smith said.

The concept also helps to combat isolation and loneliness as residents get to know their neighbors and begin to feel like part of the community, Smith said.

"Isolation and depression is a national thing right now. It's a huge health issue," Smith said. "And this really responds to those needs. Everybody knows everyone else and is willing to be part of the community and support one another. That's huge."

Response: Years of planning equals placemaking

Smith, a former professor at the University of South Dakota, taught classes on city planning and zoning,

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which is how she came across the concept of cohousing. It has been more than a decade since she first started to consider the idea as a viable living solution in Vermillion.

Now, after years of planning, the group has officially found both its land and a developer to work on it. The site is comprised of 5 acres of a total 15-acre plot purchased by AMS Building Systems just east of downtown Vermillion. It will eventually feature 28 homes, which will open in stages over the next few years, Smith said.

Ten equity members have already put up a financial stake and are confirmed to move into the development when it opens. Other members, which the group calls "explorers," have made small financial commitments to have access to planning and other community information as they decide whether cohousing is right for them.

Besides providing a new type of living for its residents, Dakota Prairie Commons will help ease Vermillion's housing crunch by adding freed-up homes to the market.

One real estate broker has already offered discounts on brokerage fees to those moving into cohousing and looking to sell their house in the Vermillion area, Smith said.

"One of the advantages of building something like this in a town like Vermillion is there's a real housing shortage here. A 2022 housing study showed that we are missing housing for people who work here, for faculty (at USD), for senior citizens. There are a lot of gaps in housing and it's really hard to attract developers who will develop out this way," Smith said.

"New faculty members come and often wait two years before a house comes on the market for them. Well, we're all going to be selling our houses."

Evidence: Interest in Vermillion and from elsewhere

While many of the future residents are older, the community is decidedly not a senior citizens complex – a discussion that was brought on when a younger professor at USD said they were interested in moving in, Smith said.

The project is also drawing outside interest. Someone who currently lives in North Carolina plans to move to Vermillion when the development is completed, she said.

"One of the things I didn't realize when (Smith) first started talking to me about this is we would not need to find 28 households of people from Vermillion," Becky Rider, another equity member, told News Watch.

"People will move from other parts of the country to where there's cohousing because the community to them is more important than exactly where it's located."

The Vermillion community as a whole has also embraced the concept, Smith said.

The group recently hosted an open house event where city residents had the chance to ask questions about cohousing and the development itself, which Smith said was well-attended.

Ph.D. students studying sustainability at USD have also offered to do research on the site, assisting with native grass design, composting and recycling systems, Smith said.

"It's cool that nobody's done this yet in the area. They're still trying to wrap their head around what cohousing really is, but they have a much better idea after listening to all of us going through the process," she said.

Insights: Ongoing conversations create collaborative environment

Members of the cohousing group met recently to discuss what features were most important to them via small-circle conversations and brainstorming sessions.

That collaboration is one of the key features of cohousing that makes it different from traditional development, Smith said. During those discussions, there were themes that emerged that were very different from the traditional cohousing path – especially considering that many existing cohousing communities are located in much more temperate coastal towns, far from South Dakota's sub-zero winters.

"We like to say we're doing it the Vermillion way," Smith said. "We're not following a strictly cohousing path as many of the long-time communities on the coasts have. We're branching out and doing it our way."

Priorities of future residents were varied but had specific focus on elements that involved people coming together: fire pits, community gardens, outdoor classrooms.

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Diane Leja, an equity member of Dakota Prairie Commons, said she envisions a space in the common house where residents can share items that are useful but only needed occasionally, so members rely on each other more and consider themselves part of the community.

The concept of shared goods is especially important when considering that Dakota Prairie Commons hopes to focus on sustainability, said Susanne Skyrm, another equity member.

"It's so much more sustainable than everybody having a great big house and a great big yard. Building these days is not always done with efficiency in mind. That's definitely one of our prerogatives is building it so it is sustainable," Skyrm said.

"Everybody doesn't need their own turkey roaster. You can have one in the common house and everybody else can use it. You're sharing things and not having everybody buying something they only use once a year."

Limitations: Some higher costs require a reminder of rewards

The housing model allows for greater community building, better connections with neighbors and extra support when it's needed. So why has it not caught on more across the country?

"Well, it's a lot of work," Rider said. "And we are the ones that have been doing the work over the years. I mean, this is years in the making already. It's much different than just building a regular neighborhood."

And in some cases, residents may have to make some financial trade-offs to join cohousing communities, especially in the early stages.

"By the time you pay for land and a portion of the common house and your own house, it's not inexpensive. We live in a house that would be a good starter house for somebody when we move out, but it's going to very likely cost us more to move into the cohousing," Rider said. "So while we're trying to keep it affordable, we're not thinking of subsidizing our building costs or anything. It's affordable with a small 'a' right now."

But the payoff, especially for these longtime Vermillion residents, some of whom have been in the community for decades, will be worth it, Leja said.

"I think in some ways we're going back to older models. It's a throwback in a lot of ways. Your neighbors, you used to do things together. I mean, we grew up having block parties and barbecues with our neighbors on our street. And that doesn't happen very much anymore," Leja said.

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

Israeli strikes kill 29 Palestinians, including children, as Gaza ceasefire inches forward

By WAFAA SHURAF, SAMY MAGDY and SAM METZ Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Hospitals in Gaza said Israeli strikes killed at least 29 Palestinians Saturday, one of the highest tolls since the October ceasefire aimed at stopping the fighting.

A day after Israel accused Hamas of new ceasefire violations, strikes hit locations throughout Gaza, including lethal ones on an apartment building in Gaza City and a tent camp in Khan Younis, officials at hospitals that received the bodies said. The casualties included two women and six children from two different families. An airstrike also hit a police station in Gaza City, killing at least 14 and wounding others, Shifa Hospital director Mohamed Abu Selmiya said.

The series of strikes also came a day before the Rafah crossing along the border with Egypt is set to open in Gaza's southernmost city. All of the territory's border crossings have been closed throughout almost the entire war. Palestinians see Rafah as a lifeline for the tens of thousands in need of treatment outside the territory, where the majority of medical infrastructure has been destroyed.

The crossing's opening, limited at first, marks the first major step in the second phase of the U.S.-brokered ceasefire. Reopening borders is among the challenging issues on the agenda for the phase now underway, which also include demilitarizing the strip after nearly two decades of Hamas rule and installing

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a new government to oversee reconstruction.

Still, Saturday's strikes are a reminder that the death toll in Gaza is still rising even as the ceasefire agreement inches forward.

Nasser Hospital said the strike on the tent camp caused a fire to break out, killing seven, including a father, his three children and three grandchildren. Meanwhile, Shifa Hospital said the Gaza City apartment building strike killed three children, their aunt and grandmother on Saturday morning, while the strike on the police station killed at least 14 — officers, including four policewomen, and inmates held at the station. The Hamas-run Interior Ministry said Palestinian civilians were also killed in the strike.

Hamas called Saturday's strikes "a renewed flagrant violation" and urged the United States and other mediating countries to push Israel to stop strikes.

Israel's military, which has struck targets on both sides of the ceasefire's dividing line, said its attacks since October have been responses to violations of the agreement. It said in a statement that Saturday's strikes followed what it described as ceasefire violations a day earlier, when the army killed at least four militants emerging from a tunnel in an Israeli-controlled area of Rafah.

Gaza's Health Ministry has recorded 509 Palestinians killed by Israeli fire since the start of the ceasefire on Oct. 10. The ministry, which is part of the Hamas-led government, maintains detailed casualty records that are seen as generally reliable by U.N. agencies and independent experts.

Mine collapses in eastern Congo, leaving at least 200 dead

By JUSTIN KABUMBA, RUTH ALONGA AND MARK BANCHEREAU Associated Press

GOMA, Congo (AP) — A landslide earlier this week collapsed several mines at a major coltan mining site in eastern Congo, leaving at least 200 people dead, rebel authorities said Saturday.

The collapse took place Wednesday at the Rubaya mines, which are controlled by the M23 rebels, Lumumba Kambere Muyisa, the spokesperson of the rebel-appointed governor of North-Kivu province told The Associated Press. He said the landslide was caused by heavy rains.

"For now, there are more than 200 dead, some of whom are still in the mud and have not yet been recovered," Muyisa said. He added that several others were injured and taken to three health facilities in the town of Rubaya, while ambulances were expected to transfer the wounded Saturday to Goma, the nearest city around 50 kilometers (30 miles) away.

The rebel-appointed governor of North Kivu has temporarily halted artisanal mining on the site and ordered the relocation of residents who had built shelters near the mine, Muyisa said.

A former miner at the site told The Associated Press there have been repeated landslides because the tunnels are dug by hand, poorly constructed, and left without maintenance.

"People dig everywhere, without control or safety measures. In a single pit, there can be as many as 500 miners, and because the tunnels run parallel, one collapse can affect many pits at once," Clovis Mafare said.

Rubaya lies in the heart of eastern Congo, a mineral-rich part of the Central African nation which for decades has been ripped apart by violence from government forces and different armed groups, including the Rwanda-backed M23, whose recent resurgence has escalated the conflict, worsening an already acute humanitarian crisis.

Congo is a major supplier of coltan, a black metallic ore that contains the rare metal tantalum, a key component in the production of smartphones, computers and aircraft engines.

The country produced about 40 percent of the world's coltan in 2023, according to the U.S. Geological Survey, with Australia, Canada and Brazil being other big suppliers. Over 15% of the world's supply of tantalum from Rubaya's mines.

In May 2024, M23 seized the town and took control of its mines. According to a U.N. report, since seizing Rubaya, the rebels have imposed taxes on the trade and transport of coltan, generating at least \$800,000 a month.

Eastern Congo has been in and out of crisis for decades. Various conflicts have created one of the world's largest humanitarian crises with more than 7 million people displaced, including more than 300,000 who

have fled their homes since December.

Despite the signing of a deal between the Congolese and Rwandan governments brokered by the U.S. and ongoing negotiations between rebels and Congo, fighting continues on several fronts in eastern Congo, continuing to claim numerous civilian and military casualties.

The deal between Congo and Rwanda also opens up access to critical minerals for the U.S. government and American companies.

A Sudanese doctor recounts his harrowing escape from a Darfur city under rebel bombardment

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Dr. Mohamed Ibrahim dashed from building to building, desperate for places to hide. He ran through streets littered with bodies. Around him, the capital of Sudan's North Darfur province lay enveloped in smoke and fire.

Explosions, shelling and gunfire thundered from every direction.

After 18 months of battling, paramilitary fighters had overrun el-Fasher, the Sudanese army's only remaining stronghold in the Darfur region. Ibrahim, who fled the city's last functioning hospital with a colleague, said he feared he would not live to see the sun go down.

"All around we saw people running and falling to the ground in front of us," the 28-year-old physician told The Associated Press, recounting the assault that began Oct. 26 and lasted three days. "We moved from house to house, from wall to wall under non-stop bombardment. Bullets were flying from all directions."

Three months later, the brutality inflicted by the militant Rapid Support Forces is only now becoming clear. United Nations officials say thousands of civilians were killed but have no precise death toll. They say only 40% of the city's 260,000 residents managed to flee the onslaught alive, thousands of whom were wounded. The fate of the rest remains unknown.

The violence, including mass killings, turned el-Fasher into a "massive crime scene," U.N. officials and independent observers said. When a humanitarian team finally gained access in late December, they found the city largely deserted, with few signs of life. A Doctors Without Borders team that visited this month described it as a "ghost town" largely emptied of the people who once lived there.

Nazhat Shameem Khan, deputy prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, said war crimes and crimes against humanity were committed in el-Fasher "as a culmination of the city's siege by the Rapid Support Forces."

"The picture that's emerging is appalling," she told the U.N. Security Council last week, adding that "organized, widespread mass criminality" has been used "to assert control."

With el-Fasher cut off, details of the attack remain scarce. Speaking with the AP from the town of Tawila, about 70 kilometers (43 miles) from the defeated capital, Ibrahim provided a rare, detailed first-person account.

As fighters swarmed in, they opened fire on civilians scrambling over walls and hiding in trenches in a vain effort to escape, while mowing down others with vehicles, Ibrahim said. Seeing so many killed felt like he was running toward his own death.

"It was a despicable feeling," he said. "How can el-Fasher fall? Is it over? I saw people running in terror. ... It was like judgment day."

The Rapid Support Forces didn't respond to phone calls and emails from the AP with detailed questions about the brutal attack and Ibrahim's account. RSF commander Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo acknowledged abuses by his fighters but disputed the scale of atrocities.

Prelude to the assault

When the military toppled Sudan's civilian-led government in a 2021 coup, it counted the Rapid Support Forces — descended from the country's notorious Janjaweed militias — as its ally.

But the army and militants quickly became rivals. By late October, they'd fought fiercely for over two years in Darfur, already infamous for genocide and other atrocities in the early 2000s.

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The army's last stronghold was strategically-located el-Fasher. But the RSF, accused by the Biden administration of carrying out genocide in the ongoing war, had the city surrounded. As paramilitary forces tightened the noose, residents pressed into a small area on the city's western side.

Civilians were forced to eat animal fodder as food gave out, Ibrahim said. His family fled after their home was shelled in April, wounding his mother. But with few health workers left, Ibrahim stayed, working at the Saudi Maternity Hospital as the RSF closed in.

The Saudi-financed hospital was el-Fasher's last functioning medical center. But months of RSF shelling and drone strikes had driven away most of its staff, leaving just 11 doctors.

"We worked endless shifts and supplies dwindled to nothing," Ibrahim said.

He was treating patients around 5 a.m. on Oct. 26 when shelling intensified. Civilians sheltering near the hospital began fleeing toward a nearby military base.

"People were running in every direction," he said. "It was obvious that the city was falling."

Searching for a way out

Around 7 a.m., he and another doctor decided to flee, setting out on foot for the army base about 1.5 kilometers (a mile) away. An hour later, RSF fighters attacked the hospital, killing a nurse and wounding three others. Two days later, the militants stormed the facility again, killing at least 460 people and abducting six health workers, according to the World Health Organization.

Ibrahim and his colleague darted from house to house, passing four corpses and many wounded civilians, before reaching a dormitory at the University of el-Fasher. Thirty minutes later, RSF artillery began pounding the area.

Separated from his colleague, Ibrahim sprinted across an open area where "anything could happen to you — a drone strike, a vehicle ramming over you, or RSF chasing you," he said.

He moved between buildings to another dormitory. Hiding inside an empty water tank, he heard the screams of people chased by gunmen amid two hours of nonstop shelling.

When the bombardment slowed, he headed to the university's medical school, jumping from roof to roof to avoid being seen. He found a broken wall behind the school's morgue and took cover for nearly an hour. By then it was noon and RSF fighters rampaged across el-Fasher.

Ibrahim ran past 25 to 30 more dead before finally reaching the army base around 4 p.m. and reuniting with his coworker.

Thousands, mostly women, children or older people, were taking refuge there. Many sheltered in trenches; scores were injured and bleeding. Ibrahim used clothing scraps to dress wounds, stabilizing one man's broken wrist with a sling made from a shirt.

The road out

Around 8 p.m., Ibrahim and about 200 others, mostly women and children, left the base for Tawila, a town swelled by the influx of tens of thousands fleeing the fighting. Guides led the way under a bright moon.

When they heard trucks, or spotted fighters on camels in the distance, they dropped to the ground. When threats passed they continued on.

Eventually the group reached a trench the militants built on the outskirts of el-Fasher to tighten the blockade. They helped each other scale the 3-meter-high (10-foot-high) trench. But when the group reached a second and then a third trench, some struggled and turned back. Their fate remains unknown.

At the last trench, those ahead of Ibrahim came under fire as they climbed out. Ibrahim and his colleague lay flat in the trench until the shooting subsided.

Finally, around 1 a.m., they ventured into the darkness. Five from the group lay dead, with many others wounded.

'You're doctors. You have money.'

The survivors walked for hours toward Tawila. Around noon on Oct. 27, they were stopped by RSF fighters on motorcycles and trucks mounted with weapons.

Encircling the group, the militants fatally shot two men and took the doctors and others captive. The fighters separated Ibrahim, his colleague and three others, chained them to motorcycles and forced them

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to sprint behind.

At an RSF-controlled village, fighters chained the prisoners to trees and interrogated them. At first Ibrahim and his friend told them they were ordinary civilians.

"I didn't want to tell them I was a doctor, because they exploited doctors," he said. "But my friend admitted he was a doctor, so I had to."

That evening the fighters met with a commander, Brig. Gen. Al-Fateh Abdulla Idris, who has been identified in videos executing unarmed captives.

Ibrahim and his colleague were brought out in chains then taken back to the village, where the fighters demanded ransom for their release.

"They said, 'You are doctors. You have money. The organizations give you money, a lot of money,'" he said.

The fighters handed them a cellphone to call their families for ransom. At first, the gunmen demanded \$20,000 each. Ibrahim was so stunned by the amount that he laughed, and the fighters beat him with their rifles.

"My entire family don't have that," he told them.

After hours of abuse, the militants asked Ibrahim how much he could pay. When he offered \$500, they "started beating me again," he said. "They said we will be killed."

The fighters turned to Ibrahim's friend, repeating the demands and beatings.

Ibrahim said his colleague eventually agreed to \$8,000 each — an enormous sum in a country where the average monthly salary is \$30 to \$50.

"I almost hit him. ... I didn't trust them to let us go," Ibrahim said.

With little choice, Ibrahim called his family. After they transferred the money, the fighters separated the doctors, keeping them blindfolded. Eventually, they were moved to vehicles filled with fighters who told them they were being taken to Tawila.

Instead, they were dropped off in an RSF-controlled area, prompting fears they would be recaptured. When they spotted fighters, the doctors hid in the brush. They emerged an hour later, spotted tracks of horse-drawn carts and began following them.

Alive but haunted

Three hours later, they spotted the flag of the Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid, a rebel group not involved in fighting between the RSF and government troops.

The rebels allowed them entry. They were met by a Sudanese-American Physicians Association team, which provides care for those fleeing el-Fasher, then continued on.

When they finally reached Tawila, Ibrahim was reunited with survivors, including another Saudi hospital physician. The man said he had seen video of the doctors' capture on Facebook and was sure they had been killed.

"He embraced me and we both wept," Ibrahim said. "He didn't imagine I was still alive. It was a miracle."

America is drinking more coffee but less of it from Starbucks

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Americans are drinking more coffee than they have in decades. But fewer of them are getting it from Starbucks.

The company that revolutionized the United States' coffee culture remains America's biggest player, with nearly 17,000 U.S. stores and plans to open hundreds more. But it's facing unprecedented competition, which will make it harder to win back the customers it already lost.

Starbucks' share of spending at all U.S. coffee shops fell in 2024 and 2025; it now stands at 48%, down from 52% in 2023, according to Technomic, a food industry consulting firm. Dunkin', a perennial rival that just opened its 10,000th U.S. store, gained market share in both of those years.

Starbucks has other challengers, like the fast-growing drive-thru chains 7 Brew, Scooter's Coffee and Dutch Bros. Chinese chains like Luckin Coffee and Mixue are opening U.S. stores. High-end coffee shop Blue Bottle, which has 78 U.S. stores, has opened two more since the start of the year. Even McDonald's

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and Taco Bell are bolstering their beverage offerings.

"People haven't fallen out of love with Starbucks, but they're now polyamorous in their coffee choices," said Chris Kayes, chair of the management department in the George Washington University School of Business. "People are now experimenting with other coffees, and they're seeing what's out there."

Caffeination nation

Americans love coffee. In both 2024 and 2025, an estimated 66% of Americans reported drinking coffee every day, up 7% from 2020, according to the National Coffee Association, an industry trade group.

Coffee chains are racing to cash in on that demand. The number of chain coffee stores in the U.S. jumped 19% to more than 34,500 over the last six years, according to Technomic, a consulting firm that researches the foodservice industry.

Seattle-based Starbucks was a small, regional chain when former CEO Howard Schultz acquired it in 1987. Now, other small chains are seeing explosive growth. Nebraska-based Scooter's Coffee had 200 locations in 2019; it now has more than 850. Arkansas-based 7 Brew, which had 14 locations in 2019, now has more than 600.

"There's too much supply relative to demand," said Neil Saunders, a managing director and retail analyst at consulting firm GlobalData Retail

Saunders said Starbucks' size is somewhat of a disadvantage, since it has less ability to grow sales by opening new locations.

"Honestly, they're pretty saturated," Saunders said. "They're a very mature business."

From grande to venti

Starbucks is undaunted. At a conference for investors on Thursday, the company said an ongoing effort to improve service while making stores warmer and more welcoming was boosting U.S. store traffic. It plans to add 25,000 seats to its U.S. cafes by this fall.

"Growth doesn't require us to become something new. It requires us to be exceptionally good at what we already are," Starbucks Chief Operating Officer Mike Grams said.

Starbucks expects to open more than 575 new U.S. stores over the next three years. It developed a smaller-format store that is cheaper to build but still has indoor seating, drive-thru lanes and mobile pickup. The company said the reduced scale would allow Starbucks stores to operate in locations they couldn't before.

Starbucks is also adding new products, like updated pastries and snackable foods that are high in protein and fiber, to try to win back customers.

What's on the menu

Lack of menu innovation is one reason Starbucks has struggled, especially among younger consumers who like novelty and will try new places to find it, Saunders said.

Arizona-based Dutch Bros, for example, added protein coffee drinks in January 2024, nearly two years before Starbucks did. Energy drinks make up 25% of Dutch Bros' business almost 14 years after the chain introduced them. Starbucks offered iced energy drinks for a limited time in 2024; executives said Thursday that customizable energy drinks would appear on the Starbucks menu soon.

Dutch Bros, which is led by former Starbucks executive Christine Barone, has just over 1,000 shops in the U.S. and hopes to double that number by 2029. It's betting that customers want speed and convenience; nearly all of its stores are drive-thrus with walk-up windows.

Dutch Bros also focuses on value. In a recent meeting with investors, Barone pointed out that Dutch Bros' medium drinks are 24 ounces; at Starbucks, a medium drink is 16 ounces.

Luckin, whose app brims with coupons and promotions, is also value-oriented. On a recent afternoon, one of its nine New York stores buzzed with customers picking up mobile orders. The tiny shop had no seating.

Xunyi Xie, who was visiting New York from his home in Delaware, said he stopped by to try a Velvet Latte because Luckin had a \$1.99 drink promotion. Xie said he normally brews his own espresso, but if Luckin opened a store that was on his way to work, he would go there.

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As for Starbucks? "I think it's overpriced," Xie said.

Starbucks' future

In 2024, the average customer spent \$9.34 at Starbucks, compared to \$8.44 at Dutch Bros and \$4.68 at Dunkin', according to an analysis by the investment research company Morningstar.

Starbucks didn't raise prices in its 2025 fiscal year and has vowed to be judicious about future increases. But Ari Felhandler, an equity analyst with Morningstar, said it would be a mistake for Starbucks to try to win over customers with discounts because competitors will always go lower.

"Keep your prices the same and try to justify them," Felhandler said. He thinks Starbucks' store redesigns and new menu items will bring back traffic.

Grams, Starbucks' chief operating officer, said the company firmly believes its best way forward is not drive-thru-only stores or mobile pickup kiosks. It's building cafes with comfortable seating — the "soul of Starbucks," as he put it — that also serve mobile, drive-thru and delivery customers. Customers sometimes want something convenient, and they sometimes want to dwell, he said.

"There's always going to be competition. We're aware of it, we keep an eye on it for sure, but we don't try to be them," Grams told The Associated Press. "We offer something that most people don't, which is a legitimate space to sit down, enjoy and use it for a variety of different reasons."

But Kayes, of George Washington University, wonders if that strategy will be enough to keep Starbucks on top, or if customers who want a cozy or premium experience have already moved on to independent coffee shops or upscale chains like Blue Bottle.

"In some ways, I think they are a victim of their own success," Kayes said. "I do think that the aura of Starbucks as being something special and unique and exciting isn't there anymore."

America is drinking more coffee but less of it from Starbucks

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Americans are drinking more coffee than they have in decades. But fewer of them are getting it from Starbucks.

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Starbucks has other challengers, like the fast-growing drive-thru chains 7 Brew, Scooter's Coffee and Dutch Bros. Chinese chains like Luckin Coffee and Mixue are opening U.S. stores. High-end coffee shop Blue Bottle, which has 78 U.S. stores, has opened two more since the start of the year. Even McDonald's and Taco Bell are bolstering their beverage offerings.

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ICE claim that a man shattered his skull running into wall triggers tension at a Minnesota hospital

By JACK BROOK, JIM MUSTIAN and MICHAEL BIESECKER Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Intensive care nurses immediately doubted the word of federal immigration officers when they arrived at a Minneapolis hospital with a Mexican immigrant who had broken bones in his face and skull.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents initially claimed Alberto Castañeda Mondragón had tried to flee while handcuffed and “purposefully ran headfirst into a brick wall,” according to court documents filed by a lawyer seeking his release.

But staff members at Hennepin County Medical Center determined that could not possibly account for the fractures and bleeding throughout the 31-year-old’s brain, said three nurses familiar with the case.

“It was laughable, if there was something to laugh about,” said one of the nurses, who spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss patient care. “There was no way this person ran headfirst into a wall.”

The explanation from ICE is an example of recent run-ins between immigration officers and health care workers that have contributed to mounting friction at Minneapolis hospitals. Workers at the Hennepin County facility say ICE officers have restrained patients in defiance of hospital rules and stayed at their sides for days. The agents have also lingered around the campus and pressed people for proof of citizenship.

Since the start of Operation Metro Surge, President Donald Trump’s immigration crackdown in Minnesota, ICE officers have become such a fixture at the hospital that administrators issued new protocols for how employees should engage with them. Some employees complain that they have been intimidated to the point that they avoid crossing paths with agents while at work and use encrypted communications to guard against any electronic eavesdropping.

Similar operations have been carried out by federal agents in Los Angeles, Chicago and other cities, where opponents have criticized what they say are overly aggressive tactics. It’s not clear how many people have required hospital care while in detention.

Injuries appeared inconsistent with ICE account

The AP interviewed a doctor and five nurses who work at HCMC, who spoke on condition of anonymity to talk about Castañeda Mondragón’s case. AP also consulted with an outside physician, and they all affirmed that his injuries were inconsistent with an accidental fall or running into a wall.

ICE’s account of how he was hurt evolved during the time that federal officers were at his bedside. At least one ICE officer told caregivers that Castañeda Mondragón “got his (expletive) rocked” after his Jan. 8 arrest near a St. Paul shopping center, the court filings and a hospital staff member said. His arrest happened a day after the first of two fatal shootings in Minneapolis by immigration officers.

The situation reached a head when ICE insisted on using handcuffs to shackle his ankles to the bed, prompting a heated encounter with hospital staff, according to the court records and the hospital employees familiar with the incident.

At the time, Castañeda Mondragón was so disoriented he did not know what year it was and could not recall how he was injured, one of the nurses said. ICE officers believed he was attempting to escape after he got up and took a few steps.

“We were basically trying to explain to ICE that this is how someone with a traumatic brain injury is — they’re impulsive,” the nurse said. “We didn’t think he was making a run for the door.”

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Security responded to the scene, followed by the hospital's CEO and attorney, who huddled in a doctor's office to discuss options for dealing with ICE, the nurse said.

"We eventually agreed with ICE that we would have a nursing assistant sit with the patient to prevent him from leaving," the nurse said. "They agreed a little while later to take the shackles off."

The Department of Homeland Security, which includes ICE, did not respond to repeated requests for comment on Castañeda Mondragón's injuries. A deportation officer skirted the issue in the court documents, saying that during the intake process at an ICE detention center, it was determined he "had a head injury that required emergency medical treatment."

Gregorio Castañeda Mondragón said his older brother is from Veracruz, Mexico, and worked as a roofer. He has a 10-year-old daughter living in his hometown he helps support.

According to his lawyers, Alberto Castañeda Mondragón entered the U.S. in 2022 with valid immigration documents. Minnesota incorporation filings show he founded a company called Castañeda Mondragón the following year with an address listed in St. Paul.

He appears to have no criminal record. His lawyers told a court that Castañeda Mondragón was racially profiled during the crackdown, and that officers determined only after his arrest that he had overstayed his visa.

"He was a brown-skinned, Latino Spanish speaker at a location immigration agents arbitrarily decided to target," his lawyers wrote in a petition seeking his release from ICE custody.

Hours after arrest, immigrant has eight skull fractures

Castañeda Mondragón was initially taken to an ICE processing center at the edge of Minneapolis. Court records include an arrest warrant signed upon his arrival by an ICE officer, not an immigration judge.

About four hours after his arrest, he was taken to a hospital emergency room in suburban Edina with swelling and bruising around his right eye and bleeding. A CT scan revealed at least eight skull fractures and life-threatening hemorrhages in at least five areas of his brain, according to court documents. He was then transferred to HCMC.

Castañeda Mondragón was alert and speaking, telling staff he was "dragged and mistreated by federal agents," though his condition quickly deteriorated, the documents show.

The following week, a Jan. 16 court filing described his condition as minimally responsive and communicative, disoriented and heavily sedated.

AP shared the details of Castañeda Mondragón's injuries with Dr. Lindsey C. Thomas, a board-certified forensic pathologist who worked as a medical examiner in Minnesota for more than 30 years. She agreed with the assessment of hospital staff.

"I am pretty sure a person could not get these kinds of extensive injuries from running into a wall," Thomas said, adding that she would need to see the CT scans to make a more definitive finding.

"I almost think one doesn't have to be a physician to conclude that a person can't get skull fractures on both the right and left sides of their head and from front to back by running themselves into a wall," she said.

ICE officers stay with hospitalized detainees for days

ICE officers have entered the hospital with seriously injured detainees and stayed at their bedside day after day, staffers said. The crackdown has been unsettling to hospital employees, who said ICE agents have been seen loitering on hospital grounds and asking patients and employees for proof of citizenship.

Hospital staff members said they were uncomfortable with the presence of armed agents they did not trust and who appeared to be untrained.

The nurses interviewed by AP said they felt intimidated by ICE's presence in the critical care unit and had even been told to avoid a certain bathroom to minimize encounters with officers. They said staff members are using an encrypted messaging app to compare notes and share information out of fear that the government might be monitoring their communications.

The hospital reminded employees that ICE officers are not permitted to access patients or protected information without a warrant or court order.

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"Patients under federal custody are first and foremost patients," hospital officials wrote in a bulletin outlining new protocols. The hospital's written policy also states that no shackles or other restraints should be used unless medically necessary.

"We have our policies, but ICE personnel as federal officers don't necessarily comply with those, and that introduces tension," said a doctor who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to comment for the hospital.

Hospital spokeswoman Alisa Harris said ICE agents "have not entered our facilities looking for individuals."

On Saturday, more than two weeks after Castañeda Mondragón was arrested, a U.S. District Court judge ordered him released from ICE custody.

"We are encouraged by the court's order, which affirms that the rule of law applies to all people, in every corner of our country, including federal officers," said Jeanette Boerner, director of Hennepin County Adult Representation Services, which filed the lawsuit on Castañeda Mondragón's behalf.

To the surprise of some who treated him, Castañeda Mondragón was discharged from the hospital Tuesday. A hospital spokeswoman said she had no information about him.

The Justice Department filed court documents this week affirming Castañeda Mondragón is no longer in custody. Prosecutors did not respond to a request for comment on the man's injuries.

Castañeda Mondragón has no family in Minnesota and coworkers have taken him in, the man's brother said. He has significant memory loss and a long recovery ahead. He won't be able to work for the foreseeable future, and his friends and family worry about paying for his care.

"He still doesn't remember things that happened. I think (he remembers) 20% of the 100% he had," said Gregorio Castañeda Mondragón, who lives in Mexico. "It's sad that instead of having good memories of the United States, you're left with a bad taste in your mouth about that country because they're treating them like animals."

Journalist Don Lemon charged with federal civil rights crimes after covering anti-ICE church protest

By JAIMIE DING, ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Journalist Don Lemon was released from custody Friday after he was arrested and hit with federal civil rights charges over his coverage of an anti-immigration enforcement protest that disrupted a service at a Minnesota church.

Lemon was arrested overnight in Los Angeles, while another independent journalist and two protest participants were arrested in Minnesota. He struck a confident, defiant tone while speaking to reporters after a court appearance in California, declaring: "I will not be silenced."

"I have spent my entire career covering the news. I will not stop now," Lemon said. "In fact there is no more important time than right now, this very moment, for a free and independent media that shines a light on the truth and holds those in power accountable."

The arrests brought sharp criticism from news media advocates and civil rights activists including the Rev. Al Sharpton, who said the administration of President Donald Trump is taking a "sledgehammer" to "the knees of the First Amendment."

A grand jury in Minnesota indicted Lemon and others on charges of conspiracy and interfering with the First Amendment rights of worshippers during the Jan. 18 protest at the Cities Church in St. Paul, where a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement official is a pastor.

In court in Los Angeles, Assistant U.S. Attorney Alexander Robbins argued for a \$100,000 bond, telling a judge that Lemon "knowingly joined a mob that stormed into a church." He was released, however, without having to post money and was granted permission to travel to France in June while the case is pending.

Defense attorney Marilyn Bednarski said Lemon plans to plead not guilty and fight the charges in Minnesota.

Lemon, who was fired from CNN in 2023 following a bumpy run as a morning host, has said he has no

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affiliation to the organization that went into the church and he was there as a solo journalist chronicling protesters.

"Don has been a journalist for 30 years, and his constitutionally protected work in Minneapolis was no different than what he has always done," his lawyer, Abbe Lowell, said in a statement earlier Friday.

Attorney General Pam Bondi promoted the arrests on social media.

"Make no mistake. Under President Trump's leadership and this administration, you have the right to worship freely and safely," Bondi said in a video posted online. "And if I haven't been clear already, if you violate that sacred right, we are coming after you."

Indictment describes Lemon's livestream

Since he left CNN, Lemon has joined the legion of journalists who have gone into business for themselves. He posts regularly on YouTube and has not hidden his disdain for Trump.

Yet during his online show from the church, he stressed: "I'm not here as an activist. I'm here as a journalist." He described the scene before him and interviewed churchgoers and demonstrators.

The indictment names nine defendants including Lemon. It says two of them posted their planned action on social media the day before and gave the others instructions in a shopping center parking lot the following morning.

Lemon started livestreaming and told the audience he was with a group gearing up for a "resistance" operation against federal immigration policies, according to the document. Lemon "took steps to maintain operational secrecy by reminding co-conspirators to not disclose the target of their operation," the indictment says, and stepped away so his microphone would not accidentally divulge the planning.

During the briefing before the operation, prosecutors say, Lemon thanked an activist who is among the nine indicted for what she was doing and assured her he was not saying what was going on.

Inside the church the defendants shouted slogans and blew whistles after the pastor was about to begin the sermon and gestured in a hostile and aggressive manner, according to prosecutors, and the pastor and congregants perceived "threats of violence."

Lemon told the livestream he saw a young man who was frightened, sad and crying and it was understandable because the experience was traumatic and uncomfortable, the indictment says. The defendants then surrounded the pastor and Lemon "peppered him with questions to promote the operation's message."

'Keep trying'

Last week a magistrate judge rejected prosecutors' initial bid to charge Lemon. Shortly afterward he predicted on his show that the administration would try again.

"And guess what," Lemon said. "Here I am. Keep trying. That's not going to stop me from being a journalist. That's not going to diminish my voice. Go ahead, make me into the new Jimmy Kimmel if you want. Just do it. Because I'm not going anywhere."

Independent journalist Georgia Fort livestreamed the moments before her arrest, telling viewers that agents were at her door and her First Amendment right as a journalist was being diminished.

A judge released Fort, Trahern Crews and Jamael Lundy on bond, rejecting the Justice Department's attempt to keep them in custody. Not guilty pleas were entered. Fort's supporters in the courtroom clapped and whooped.

"It's a sinister turn of events in this country," Fort's attorney, Kevin Riach, said in court.

Discouraging scrutiny

Jane Kirtley, a media law and ethics expert at the University of Minnesota, said the federal laws cited by the government were not intended to apply to reporters gathering news.

The charges against Lemon and Fort, she said, are "pure intimidation and government overreach."

Some experts and activists said the charges are not only an attack on press freedoms but also a strike against Black Americans who count on Black journalists to bear witness to injustice and oppression.

The National Association of Black Journalists said it was "outraged and deeply alarmed" and warned of an effort to "criminalize and threaten press freedom under the guise of law enforcement."

Crews is a leader of Black Lives Matter Minnesota who has led many protests and actions for racial justice, particularly following George Floyd's killing in Minneapolis in 2020.

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"All the greats have been to jail, MLK, Malcom X — people who stood up for justice get attacked," Crews told The Associated Press. "We were just practicing our First Amendment rights."

Church leaders praise arrests in protest

A prominent civil rights attorney and two other people involved in the protest were arrested last week. Prosecutors have accused them of civil rights violations for disrupting the Cities Church service.

The Justice Department launched an investigation after the group interrupted services by chanting "ICE out" and "Justice for Renee Good," referring to the 37-year-old mother of three who was fatally shot by an ICE officer in Minneapolis.

Cities Church belongs to the Southern Baptist Convention and lists one of its pastors as David Easterwood, who leads ICE's St. Paul field office.

"We are grateful that the Department of Justice acted swiftly to protect Cities Church so that we can continue to faithfully live out the church's mission to worship Jesus and make him known," lead pastor Jonathan Parnell said.

Gone are the days of the \$1 buffet in Las Vegas. Now \$175 buffets offer luxury dining

By JESSICA HILL Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Eighty years ago, the first Las Vegas buffet opened with the \$1 western-themed Buckaroo Buffet that offered cold cuts and cheese. Today, visitors can drop \$175 on luxury buffets with lobster tail, prime rib and limitless drinks.

The old Las Vegas buffets didn't make much money, but they allowed people to eat cheaply and quickly, giving them more time to spend their money on the casino floor.

But the number of buffets has dwindled to around a dozen on the Las Vegas Strip. Many shuttered during the COVID-19 pandemic and elected not to reopen with rising prices.

Before the Carnival World Buffet at the Rio closed in 2020 and was replaced with the Canteen Food Hall, it touted itself as Las Vegas' largest buffet with over 300 international dishes to choose from. It had just about everything you could eat for around \$30, said Jim Higgins, a Las Vegas food tour guide.

ARIA's buffet, which stood out in its offering of Indian dishes and fresh-baked naan, also closed for good in 2020 and reopened as the Proper Eats Food Hall. The food hall offers several options, including ramen, sushi and burgers. Last March, the pyramid-shaped Luxor's ancient Egypt-themed buffet closed. It had cost around \$32, but many people ate for free with a casino comp.

Many of the city's old-school buffets have been replaced by trendy food halls and pricey celebrity chef-driven restaurants — and the so-called luxury buffet, making it now an attraction in and of itself. The rise of Las Vegas as a foodie town drove demands for higher quality dining, said Al Mancini, a longtime food journalist in Las Vegas and the creator of a food guide called Neonfest.

Longtime Las Vegas visitors liken the decline of buffets to the disappearance of the 99-cent shrimp cocktail, another iconic offering that had contributed to the city's reputation as an affordable vacation spot.

"You wander in, you eat, you stuff your face, and then you stumble on out to a slot machine. It's just part of the culture, and it's sad to see that change," Arizona resident and frequent Las Vegas visitor Ryan Bohac said.

History professor and Las Vegas native Michael Green remembers the days of the \$1.99 buffet, where he'd pile his plate with fried chicken, corn and desserts. An advertisement for the Old West-themed casino Silver Slipper's buffet painted that picture of plenty with the line "Tomorrow the diet, today the great buffet."

The Las Vegas icon

Las Vegas is a city where visitors like to pretend they have more money than they do, and buffets allow people to live like a king, giving them a "visceral thrill" when loading up a plate with crab legs, Mancini said.

Jeff Gordon, a frequent Las Vegas visitor from California, likes the "grand spectacle" of the high-end buffets like the Wynn's buffet or the Bacchanal at Caesars Palace, which display mountains of crab legs and elaborate carving stations with prime rib and smoked brisket.

Still, Gordon misses the affordable buffets that were once plentiful.

"It's like going to Costco and buying a \$1.50 hot dog," Gordon said. "You may not just buy that \$1.50 hot dog, but you may be spending like \$150 in Costco and other things that maybe you do need, maybe you don't need."

He thinks the decline in affordable buffets has contributed to the city's growing reputation as becoming too expensive. Gordon thinks it's hurting tourism as a whole, and discouraging middle-class Americans from visiting.

Locals say buffets have adapted to meet the needs of a city that is constantly changing.

"It was a great option in its day," said Jim Higgins, a Las Vegas food tour guide. "I think the city has just moved on."

A luxury experience

"A Las Vegas buffet is an attraction at this point, and you're going to pay for an attraction," he said. "You're not going there to get deals."

At the Palms' A.Y.C.E Buffet, visitors can pay \$80 for endless lobster, shrimp cocktail, sushi, snow crab legs and fresh pasta like lobster mac 'n' cheese. They offer specialty themed nights where hula dancers or mariachi perform. Occasionally a lobster mascot walks around.

It's almost like a circus, said Marcus O'Brien, the executive chef at Palms Casino Resort.

Mancini said buffets will always be part of some visitors' Las Vegas experience, and they'll evolve alongside the restaurant scene around them in order to succeed.

"The Las Vegas buffet will never die," he said.

Justice Department releases largest batch yet of Epstein documents, says it totals 3 million pages

By ERIC TUCKER, MICHAEL R. SISAK and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The Justice Department on Friday released many more records from its investigative files on Jeffrey Epstein, resuming disclosures under a law intended to reveal what the government knew about the millionaire financier's sexual abuse of young girls and his interactions with rich and powerful people such as Donald Trump and Bill Clinton.

Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche said the department would be releasing more than 3 million pages of documents along with more than 2,000 videos and 180,000 images. The files, posted to the department's website, include some of the several million pages of records that officials said were withheld from an initial release in December.

Included were documents concerning some of Epstein's famous associates, including Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, formerly known as Britain's Prince Andrew, and email correspondence between Epstein and Elon Musk and other prominent contacts from across the political spectrum.

The documents were disclosed under the Epstein Files Transparency Act, the law enacted after months of public and political pressure that requires the government to open its files on the late financier and his confidant and onetime girlfriend, Ghislaine Maxwell. Lawmakers complained when the Justice Department made only a limited release last month, but officials said more time was needed to review additional documents that were discovered and to ensure no sensitive information about victims was released.

Friday's disclosure represents the largest document dump to date about a saga the Trump administration has struggled to shake because of the president's previous association with Epstein. Criminal investigations into the financier have long animated online sleuths, conspiracy theorists and others who have suspected government cover-ups and clamored for a full accounting, demands that Blanche acknowledged might not be satisfied by the latest release.

"There's a hunger, or a thirst, for information that I don't think will be satisfied by the review of these documents," he said.

After missing a Dec. 19 deadline set by Congress to release all the files, the Justice Department said it tasked hundreds of lawyers with reviewing the records to determine what needed to be redacted, or

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blacked out. It denied any effort to shield Trump, who says he cut ties with Epstein years ago after an earlier friendship, from potential embarrassment.

Epstein's famous friends

The latest batch includes correspondence either with or about some of Epstein's friends.

The records have thousands of references to Trump, including emails in which Epstein and others shared news articles about him, commented on his policies or politics, or gossiped about him and his family. Also included was a spreadsheet created last August summarizing calls to the FBI's National Threat Operation Center or to a hotline established by prosecutors from people claiming without corroboration to have some knowledge of wrongdoing by Trump.

Mountbatten-Windsor's name appears at least several hundred times in the documents, sometimes in news clippings, sometimes in Epstein's private email correspondence and in guest lists for dinners organized by Epstein. Some records document an attempt by prosecutors in New York to get the former prince to agree to be interviewed as part of their Epstein sex trafficking probe.

The records also show Musk, the billionaire Tesla founder, reached out to Epstein on at least two occasions to plan visits to the Caribbean island where many of the allegations of sexual abuse purportedly occurred.

In a 2012 exchange, Epstein asked how many people Musk would like flown by helicopter to the island he owned.

"Probably just Talulah and me," Musk responded, referencing his then-partner, actress Talulah Riley. "What day/night will be the wildest party on our island?"

Musk messaged Epstein again ahead of a planned Caribbean trip in 2013. "Will be in the BVI/St Bart's area over the holidays," he wrote. "Is there a good time to visit?" Epstein extended an invite for after the New Year holiday.

It's not immediately clear if the island visits took place. Spokespeople for Musk's companies, Tesla and X, didn't respond to emails seeking comment.

Musk has said he repeatedly rebuffed Epstein's overtures.

"Epstein tried to get me to go to his island and I REFUSED," he posted on X in 2025 when House Democrats released an Epstein calendar with an entry mentioning a potential Musk visit.

Epstein also appears to have tried to connect New York Giants co-owner Steve Tisch with women, according to emails. In one exchange, Tisch told Epstein he had had lunch with one of Epstein's assistant's friends. He described her as a "very sweet girl," and asked if Epstein knew anything about her.

"no, but i will ask," said Epstein, before inquiring if Tisch had contacted another woman, crudely describing her physical features.

Tisch said in a statement that he had a "brief association" with Epstein where they emailed about adult women and other topics. He said he "never went to his island" and that he "deeply regrets" the association.

The documents show that Steve Bannon, a conservative activist who served as Trump's White House strategist earlier in the president's first term, bantered over politics with the financier, discussed get-togethers with him over breakfast, lunch or dinner and, on March 29, 2019, asked Epstein if he could supply his plane to pick him up in Rome.

Epstein told him his pilot and crew "are doing their best" to arrange that flight but if Bannon could find a charter flight instead, "I'm happy to pay." Apparently in France at the time, Epstein sent a text message saying: "My guys can pick you up. Come for dinner." The exchange did not show how that played out.

In December 2012, Epstein invited Howard Lutnick, now Trump's commerce secretary, to his private island for lunch, the records show. Lutnick's wife accepted the invitation and said they would arrive on a yacht with their children. On another occasion in 2011, the two men had drinks, according to a schedule shared with Epstein.

Lutnick has said he cut ties with Epstein long ago. A Commerce Department spokesman said Lutnick had "limited interactions with Mr. Epstein in the presence of his wife and has never been accused of wrongdoing."

Another Epstein contact surfacing in the records is former Obama White House general counsel Kathy Ruemmler. In one of several exchanges, Epstein emailed Ruemmler to advise that Democrats should stop demonizing Trump as a Mafia-type figure even as he derided the president as a "maniac."

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A spokesperson for Goldman Sachs, where Ruemmler is general counsel and chief legal officer, said in a statement that Ruemmler "had a professional association with Jeffrey Epstein when she was a lawyer in private practice" and "regrets ever knowing him."

Building on the earlier release

The tens of thousands of pages released last month included previously released flight logs showing Trump flew on Epstein's private jet in the 1990s, before their falling-out, and several photographs of Clinton. None of Epstein's victims who have gone public with their stories have publicly accused Trump, a Republican, nor Clinton, a Democrat, of wrongdoing. Both have said they had no knowledge he was abusing underage girls.

Epstein killed himself in a New York jail cell in August 2019, a month after being indicted on federal sex trafficking charges.

In 2008 and 2009, Epstein served jail time in Florida after pleading guilty to soliciting prostitution from someone under the age of 18. At the time, investigators had gathered evidence that Epstein had sexually abused underage girls at his Palm Beach home. The U.S. attorney's office agreed not to prosecute him in exchange for his guilty plea to lesser state charges.

A draft indictment from that period released Friday shows prosecutors contemplated federal charges against not just Epstein but three others who were his personal assistants and were suspected of participating in a conspiracy to recruit underage girls to perform lewd acts with Epstein.

In 2021, a federal jury in New York convicted Maxwell, a British socialite, of sex trafficking for helping recruit some of his underage victims. She is serving a 20-year prison sentence.

U.S. prosecutors never charged anyone else in connection with Epstein's abuse of girls. One victim, Virginia Roberts Giuffre, accused him in lawsuits of having arranged for her to have sexual encounters at age 17 and 18 with numerous politicians, business titans, academics and others. They all denied her allegations.

Among those accused was Britain's Prince Andrew, who was stripped of his royal titles amid the scandal. Andrew denied having sex with Giuffre but settled her lawsuit for an undisclosed sum.

Giuffre died by suicide last year at age 41.

Rescuers search frigid Atlantic for missing fishermen after boat sinks off Gloucester

By MICHAEL CASEY, RODRIQUE NGOWI and PATRICK WHITTLE Associated Press

GLOUCESTER, Mass. (AP) — There wasn't a mayday call from the commercial fishing vessel Lily Jean as it navigated the frigid Atlantic Ocean Friday morning on its way home to Gloucester, Massachusetts, America's oldest fishing port. The U.S. Coast Guard was notified by the boat's beacon that alerts when it hits the water.

When rescuers arrived they found one person dead, floating in the water, along with a debris field and an empty life boat. Six people remain missing.

The fate of the Lily Jean, a 72-foot fishing vessel owned by a beloved member of Gloucester's historic fishing community, is the latest maritime tragedy to befall America's oldest seaport. The city that inspired "The Perfect Storm" is tied to its fishing heritage in a way that has brought 400 years of history and, sometimes, tragedy. That book and movie were inspired by the FV Andrea Gail, which went missing at sea in 1991.

"We will continue to search throughout the night," said Coast Guard Commander Timothy Jones, who is coordinating the search and rescue. He noted that the sea spray was freezing on vessels and caused a serious danger to both the missing fishing boat and rescuers.

Captain is seasoned fisherman

The Lily Jean, its captain, Gus Sanfilippo, and his crew were featured in a 2012 episode of the History Channel show "Nor'Easter Men." Sanfilippo is described as a fifth-generation commercial fisherman, fishing out of Gloucester, Massachusetts, in the Georges Bank. The crew is shown working in dangerous weather conditions for hours on end, spending as many as 10 days at sea on one trip fishing for haddock, lobster

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and flounder.

Republican State Sen. Bruce Tarr, who confirmed seven people were on the vessel, grew emotional as he talked about Sanfilippo, who was a good friend.

"He's a person that has a big smile, and he gives you a warm embrace when he sees you," Tarr said. "He is very, very skilled at what he does."

Tarr said the "fact that vessel now rests at the bottom of the ocean is very hard to understand," given the owner's experience.

"This is a community that has felt this type of loss in the past," Tarr said. "I'm going to make a prediction. Tonight, tomorrow and the days that follow, no matter what happens, you're going to see the strength, strength that has made this the most historic fishing port in the United States."

Vito Giacalone, head of the Gloucester Fishing Community Preservation Fund, said he knows Sanfilippo from the captain's early days in commercial fishing and knew him as a hard worker from a fishing family. He said he and the fishing industry in Gloucester, a community where commercial fishing is a longstanding way of life, are distraught.

"He did well for himself. I was proud of him," Giacalone said. "And now the dock we own, he ties his boat at the dock so we see him every day. He's been to all my kids' weddings. That's how close we were. I feel a sense of loss. A lot of us do."

Search on for survivors

The Coast Guard's Sector Boston Commander Jamie Frederick acknowledged frigid temperatures, stormy conditions and the vast ocean makes finding survivors at night difficult, a task made more challenging with a nor'easter approaching the East Coast this weekend.

"That is the equivalent of searching for a coconut in the ocean," Frederick said.

At the time of the emergency alert, the National Weather Service said wind speeds out at sea were around 27 mph (24 knots) with waves around four feet high. It was 12 degrees (-11 Celsius) with water temperatures about 39 degrees (4 degrees Celsius.)

Commercial fishing is dangerous

Deep-sea fishing in New England can always be hazardous, but it can be especially dangerous in the winter because of high waves, frigid temperatures and unpredictable weather. Commercial fishing is often cited as one of the most dangerous jobs in the world.

"Commercial fishing is a really tough living to begin with, and it's as safe as the elements and all of the things allow it to be," Giacalone said. "Gus was a very seasoned experienced fisherman."

Everett Sawyer, 55, a childhood friend of Sanfilippo, said that he is still processing the news of his disappearance. "He was hardworking. He loved fishing," he said.

After more than five decades living and working near the Atlantic Ocean, Sawyer said he has known 25 people who were lost at sea. Cold winter conditions can complicate operations even for experienced sailors, Sawyer said.

"Things happen very quickly when you're out on the ocean," he said.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said Friday it was aware that there was a fishery observer on board the vessel. Fishery observers are workers who collect data on board fishing boats for the government to use to inform regulations.

Gloucester Council President Tony Gross, a retired fisherman who had joined other elected officials at the harbor in the city after learning of the missing boat, called it a "huge tragedy for this community."

"The families are just devastated at this point," Gross said. "They are half full of hope and half full of dread, I would imagine."

Massachusetts Gov. Maura Healey said she was "heartbroken" to hear about the boat's sinking.

"I am praying for the crew, and my heart goes out to their loved ones and all Gloucester fishing families during this awful time," she said in a statement. "Fishermen and fishing vessels are core to the history, economy and culture of Gloucester and Cape Ann, and this tragedy is felt all across the state."

Catherine O'Hara, Emmy-winning comic actor of 'Schitt's Creek' and 'Home Alone' fame, dies at 71

By ANDREW DALTON and JOCELYN NOVECK AP Entertainment Writers

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Catherine O'Hara, a gifted Canadian-born comic actor and "SCTV" alum who starred as Macaulay Culkin's harried mother in two "Home Alone" movies and won an Emmy as the dramatically ditzzy wealthy matriarch Moira Rose in "Schitt's Creek," died Friday. She was 71.

O'Hara died at her home in Los Angeles "following a brief illness," according to a statement from her representatives at Creative Artists Agency. Further details were not immediately available.

O'Hara's career was launched with the Second City comedy group in Toronto in the 1970s. It was there that she first worked with Eugene Levy, who would become a lifelong collaborator — and her "Schitt's Creek" costar. The two would be among the original cast of the sketch show "SCTV," short for "Second City Television." The series, which began on Canadian TV in the 1970s and aired on NBC in the U.S., spawned a legendary group of esoteric comedians that O'Hara would work with often, including Martin Short, John Candy, Andrea Martin, Rick Moranis and Joe Flaherty.

O'Hara would win her first Emmy for her writing on the show.

Her second, for best actress in a comedy series, came four decades later, for "Schitt's Creek," a career-capping triumph and the perfect personification of her comic talents. The small CBC series created by Levy and his son, Dan, about a wealthy family forced to live in a tiny town would dominate the Emmys in its sixth and final season. It brought O'Hara, always a beloved figure, a new generation of fans and put her at the center of cultural attention.

She told The Associated Press that she pictured Moira, a former soap opera star, as someone who had married rich and wanted to "remind everyone that (she was) special, too." With an exaggerated Mid-Atlantic accent and obscure vocabulary, Moira spoke unlike anyone else, using words like "frippet," "pettifogging" and "unasinous," to show her desire to be different, O'Hara said. To perfect Moira's voice, O'Hara would pore through old vocabulary books, "Moira-izing" the dialogue even further than what was already written.

O'Hara also won a Golden Globe and two SAG Awards for the role.

At first, Hollywood didn't entirely know what to do with O'Hara and her scattershot style. She played oddball supporting characters in Martin Scorsese's 1985 "After Hours" and Tim Burton's 1988 "Beetlejuice" — a role she would reprise in the 2024 sequel.

She played it mostly straight as a horrified mother who accidentally abandoned her child in the two "Home Alone" movies. The films were among the biggest box office earners of the early 1990s and their Christmas setting made them TV perennials. They allowed her moments of unironic warmth that she didn't get often.

Her co-star Culkin was among those paying her tribute Friday.

"Mama, I thought we had time," Culkin said on Instagram alongside an image from "Home Alone" and a recent recreation of the same pose. "I wanted more. I wanted to sit in a chair next to you. I heard you. But I had so much more to say. I love you."

Meryl Streep, who worked with O'Hara in "Heartburn," said in a statement that she "brought love and light to our world, through whipsmart compassion for the collection of eccentrics she portrayed."

Roles in big Hollywood films didn't follow "Home Alone," but O'Hara would find her groove with the crew of improv pros brought together by Christopher Guest for a series of mockumentaries that began with 1996's "Waiting for Guffman" and continued with 2000's "Best in Show," 2003's "A Mighty Wind" and 2006's "For Your Consideration."

"Best in Show" was the biggest hit and best-remembered film of the series. She and Levy play married couple Gerry and Cookie Fleck, who take their Norwich terrier to a dog show and constantly run into Cookie's former lovers along the way.

"I am devastated," Guest said in a statement to the AP. "We have lost one of the comic giants of our age."

Born and raised in Toronto, O'Hara was the sixth of seven children in a Catholic family of Irish descent. She graduated from Burnhamthorpe Collegiate Institute, an alternative high school. She joined Second City in her early 20s, as an understudy to Gilda Radner before Radner left for "Saturday Night Live." (O'Hara

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would briefly be hired for "SNL" but quit before appearing on air.)

Nearly 50 years later, her final roles would be as Seth Rogen's reluctant executive mentor and freelance fixer on "The Studio" and a dramatic turn as therapist to Pedro Pascal and other dystopia survivors on HBO's "The Last of Us." Both earned her Emmy nominations. She would get 10 in her career.

"Oh, genius to be near you," Pascal said on Instagram. "Eternally grateful. There is less light in my world."

Earlier this month, Rogen shared a photo on Instagram of him and O'Hara shooting the second season of "The Studio."

O'Hara is survived by her husband, Bo Welch, sons Matthew and Luke, and siblings Michael O'Hara, Mary Margaret O'Hara, Maureen Jolley, Marcus O'Hara, Tom O'Hara and Patricia Wallace.

Senate passes Trump-backed government funding deal, sending to House

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate voted Friday to fund most of the government through the end of September while carving out a temporary extension for Homeland Security funding, giving Congress two weeks to debate new restrictions on federal immigration raids across the country.

With a weekend shutdown looming, President Donald Trump struck the spending deal with Senate Democrats on Thursday in the wake of the deaths of two protesters at the hands of federal agents in Minneapolis. Democrats said they would not vote for the larger spending bill unless Congress considers legislation to unmask agents, require more warrants and allow local authorities to help investigate any incidents.

"The nation is reaching a breaking point," Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer said after the vote. "The American people are demanding that Congress step up and force change."

As lawmakers in both parties called for investigations into the fatal shootings, Trump said he didn't want a shutdown and negotiated the rare deal with Schumer, his frequent adversary. Trump then encouraged members of both parties to cast a "much needed Bipartisan 'YES' vote."

The bill passed 71-29 and will now head to the House, which is not due back until Monday. That means the government could be in a partial shutdown temporarily over the weekend until they pass it.

Speaker Mike Johnson, who held a conference call Friday with GOP lawmakers, said he expects the House to vote Monday evening. But what is uncertain is how much support there will be for the package.

Johnson's right flank has signaled opposition to limits on Homeland Security funds, leaving him reliant on Democrats who have their own objections to funding U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement without immediate restraints.

Two-week debate over ICE

It was unclear how involved Trump will be in the negotiations over new restrictions on immigration arrests — or if Republicans and Democrats could find any points of compromise.

Senate Democrats will not support an extension of Homeland Security funding in two weeks "unless it reins in ICE and ends violence," Schumer said. "If our colleagues are not willing to enact real change, they should not expect Democratic votes."

Similarly, House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries told reporters that any change in the homeland bill needs to be "meaningful and it needs to be transformative."

Absent "dramatic change," Jeffries said, "Republicans will get another shutdown."

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., said the two sides will "sit down in good faith," but it will be "really, really hard to get anything done," especially in such a short amount of time.

"We'll stay hopeful, but there are some pretty significant differences of opinion," Thune said.

Democrats demand change

Irate Democrats have asked 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.

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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.

Alex Pretti, a 37 year-old ICU nurse, was killed by a border patrol agent on Jan. 24, two weeks after protester Renee Good was killed by an ICE officer. Administration officials, including Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem, originally said Pretti had aggressively approached officers, but multiple videos contradicted that claim.

Republican pushback

The president's concessions to Democrats prompted pushback from some Senate Republicans, delaying the final votes and providing a preview of the coming debate over the next two weeks. In a fiery floor speech, Trump ally Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina warned that Republicans should not give away too much.

"To the Republican party, where have you been?" Graham said, adding that ICE agents and Border Patrol agents have been "slandered and smeared."

Several Republicans have said that if Democrats are going to push for restrictions on ICE, they will push for restrictions on so-called "sanctuary cities" that they say do not do enough to enforce illegal immigration.

"There no way in hell we're going to let Democrats knee cap law enforcement and stop deportations in exchange for funding DHS," said Missouri Sen. Eric Schmitt, R-Mo., ahead of the vote.

Still, some Republicans said they believe that changes to ICE's operations were necessary, even as they were unlikely to agree to all of the Democrats' requests.

"I think the last couple of days have been an improvement," said Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul. "I think the rhetoric has been dialed down a little bit, in Minnesota."

Last-minute promises

After Trump announced the deal with Democrats, Graham held the spending bills up for almost a day until Thune agreed to give him a vote on his sanctuary cities bill at a later date.

Separately, Graham was also protesting a repeal of a new law giving senators the ability to sue the government for millions of dollars if their personal or office data is accessed without their knowledge — as happened to him and other senators as part of the so-called Arctic Frost investigation into the Jan. 6, 2021, attack by Trump supporters at the Capitol.

The spending bill, which was passed by the House last week, would repeal that law. But Graham said Thune had agreed to consider a separate bill that would allow "groups and private citizens" who were caught up in Jack Smith's probe to sue.

Thousands face another arctic blast without power as East Coast preps for a storm

By KRISTIN M. HALL and SOPHIE BATES Associated Press

NASHVILLE (AP) — Frustrations were bubbling up Friday for the tens of thousands who have been without power for nearly a week in the U.S. South as a new storm looms, including Tennessee's residents in Nashville, where the utility was criticized for storm preparations and recovery.

Terry Miles, a 59-year-old construction worker whose home has been without power since Sunday, said he's using a fish fryer for heat and is worried about carbon monoxide.

"I'm taking a chance of killing myself and killing my wife, because why?" Miles said after attending a Nashville Electric Service news conference intended to showcase the utility's repairs on poles and lines. He then pointed to officials.

"I came up here to speak my mind because I've been so cold," he said. "This is the coldest and worst I've ever been in my damn life."

Crews have been working by ground and air to restore the lingering outages as another storm is predicted to hit the East Coast, threatening near-hurricane force winds, heavy snow and flooding, while arctic air moves into the Southeast.

More than 186,000 homes and businesses were without electricity Friday, with the vast majority of those

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outages in Mississippi and Tennessee, according to the outage tracking website poweroutage.us.

Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee said he has shared "strong concerns" with Nashville Electric Service leadership, saying communication and power restoration must improve.

Residents "need a clear timeline for power restoration, transparency on the number of linemen deployed, and a better understanding of when work will be completed in their neighborhood," Lee said.

In Nashville, where more than 60,000 homes and businesses remain powerless, the city's electrical service has defended its approach, saying it was an unprecedented storm.

A video on the Tennessee Valley Authority's Facebook page shows a worker sitting on the skids of a hovering helicopter so they can repair a giant power structure.

Arctic air moving into the Southeast will cause already frigid temperatures to plummet into the teens (minus 10 Celsius) on Friday night in cities like Nashville.

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.

On Saturday night and early Sunday, forecasters expect wind and snow that could lead to blizzard conditions before the storm starts to move to sea.

Snow should pile up in the Carolinas

Several inches of snow, possibly 1 foot (30.5 centimeters) in some locations, were forecast statewide, particularly in eastern counties.

Hundreds of state National Guard soldiers were ready to help. State workers have also been preparing roads.

In Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, a town more accustomed to hurricanes, traffic jams and tourists, the National Weather Service predicted 6 inches (15 centimeters) of snow.

The city has no snow removal equipment. Mayor Mark Kruea said they will "use what we can find" — maybe a motor grader or bulldozer to scrape streets.

"With a hurricane you can storm proof many things," Kruea said Friday. "But at a place like this, there is only a few things you can do to get ready for snow."

In North Carolina, several inches of snow, possibly 1 foot (30.5 centimeters) in some locations, were forecast statewide, particularly in eastern counties.

In Dare County, home to much of North Carolina's Outer Banks, longtime resident Bob Woodard said he's worried about that more unoccupied houses in communities like Rodanthe and Buxton could collapse into the Atlantic Ocean.

Hypothermia risks grow

With the wave of dangerous cold heading for the South, 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.

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

"Once you get into days six, seven, upward 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.

Frostbite is also a concern in southern states, where people might not own clothes for northern winters, said Dr. David Nestler, an emergency medicine specialist at the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota.

Mississippi and Tennessee still seeking full power

Mississippi officials say it's the state's worst winter storm since 1994. About 80 warming centers were opened in one of the nation's poorest states. National Guard troops were delivering supplies by truck and helicopter.

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Yazoo Valley Electric Power Association workers, some of whom don't have power at their own homes, are working 16-hour days to restore electricity in Mississippi.

Nearly 90 people have died in 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. Officials have not released specific details about how some of the people died.

The arctic cold was expected to plunge as far south as Florida.

Judge blocks additional citizenship provisions in latest setback to Trump's election executive order

By TOM VERDIN Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — A federal judge on Friday blocked certain federal agencies from requesting citizenship status when distributing voter registration forms, the latest blow to a wide-ranging executive order on elections President Donald Trump signed last year.

U.S. District Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly in Washington ruled that the Constitution's separation of powers, giving states and to an extent Congress authority over setting election rules, are at the heart of the case.

"Put simply, our Constitution does not allow the President to impose unilateral changes to federal election procedures," wrote the judge, an appointee of former President Bill Clinton.

Specifically, Kollar-Kotelly permanently blocked two provisions of the executive order that sought to impose proof-of-citizenship rules.

Her decision said agencies will not be allowed to "assess citizenship" before providing a federal voter registration form to people enrolling in public assistance programs. It also said the Secretary of Defense cannot require documentary proof of citizenship when military personnel register to vote or request ballots.

"Our democracy works best when all Americans can participate, including members of our military and their families living overseas. Today's ruling removes a very real threat to the freedom to vote for overseas military families and upholds the separation of powers," said Danielle Lang, a voting rights expert with the Campaign Legal Center, which is representing plaintiffs in the case.

The White House said Trump's executive order was intended to ensure "election security" and said Friday's ruling would not be the last word.

"Ensuring only citizens vote in our elections is a commonsense measure that everyone should be able to support," said Abigail Jackson, a White House spokeswoman. "This is not the final say on the matter and the administration looks forward to ultimate victory on the issue."

The specter of noncitizens voting and tainting elections was a central strategy for Trump and Republicans during the 2024 campaign, and congressional Republicans are continuing to push proposals that would require proof of citizenship to register to vote. Research, even among Republican state officials, has shown voting by noncitizens is a rare problem.

Friday's ruling is among several setbacks for the president's executive order, which has faced multiple lawsuits. In October, Kollar-Kotelly blocked the administration from adding a documentary proof of citizenship requirement to the federal voter registration form. Separate lawsuits by Democratic state attorneys general and by Oregon and Washington, which rely heavily on mailed ballots, have blocked various portions of Trump's order.

Florida braces for frost and possible snow flurries as winter storms hit other parts of the US

By DAVID FISCHER Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — Florida is a winter escape, but for the next few days much of it will have below-freezing nights and the Tampa Bay area might even see snowflakes for the first time in over a decade.

The Midwest and South have been getting major winter storms for several days, and a giant cyclone

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forecast in the Atlantic Ocean is expected to pull that cold weather east as a powerful blizzard this weekend. The worst seems to be heading toward the Carolinas, but the Sunshine State is preparing for winter weather.

Florida could experience record cold

Ana Torres-Vazquez, a forecaster with the National Weather Service in Miami, said that a cold front earlier this week has already caused temperatures to dip, but the region could experience record-setting, freezing temperatures this weekend.

South Florida residents are less likely to have heavy coats and other winter clothes, so Torres-Vazquez said it's important to layer up and limit time outside. Dr. David Nestler, with the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota, said frostbite and hypothermia, two health dangers not always top-of-mind among Floridians, are real concerns when temperatures drop this far.

Meanwhile, visitors from cooler climates are finding it easier to acclimate to Florida's version of cold weather. Doug Brubaker said it was minus 20 F (minus 29 C) with windchill when he left Cleveland, Ohio, on Wednesday.

"Whatever's coming this weekend to me is not cold, but I know it's cold for Florida," Brubaker said.

Moving north, Tony Hurt, a National Weather Service forecaster for the Tampa Bay area, said there's a small chance of snowfall and flurries in that region this weekend, but no accumulations.

The last two times the area got snow was flurries in January 2010 and December 1989. A record 2 inches (5 centimeters) of snow fell in January 1977 about 20 miles (32 kilometers) east of Tampa.

Despite the forecast, Tampa will host the annual Gasparilla Pirate Fest on Saturday. And Sunday, the Tampa Bay Lightning are set to host the Boston Bruins for an outdoor NHL game at the Tampa Bay Buccaneers NFL stadium.

Few tourists will be swimming or lounging on beaches this weekend, but many attractions will remain open. Most of Walt Disney World and Universal Orlando will operate normally, though their water parks will be closed. Most of the state's zoos and animal parks will also remain open while keepers take steps to protect the inhabitants.

Keeping animals safe and warm

Zoo Miami spokesman Ron Magill said keepers have been setting up heaters and moving reptiles and smaller mammals indoors, while primates like chimpanzees and orangutans are given blankets.

Florida's native wildlife has learned to survive cold snaps, though casualties still occur, Magill said. Manatees, for example, have spent decades congregating at the warm-water outflows of about a dozen power plants.

But invasive, nonnative animals like iguanas and other exotic reptiles will suffer the most. Iguanas in South Florida go dormant in the cold, and though they usually wake when temperatures warm, many die after more than a day of extreme cold.

"I think in South Florida you're going to see iguanas falling from trees, I mean a lot, once it gets under 40 degrees," Gov. Ron DeSantis said Friday at a news conference in Vero Beach. "In some of these places, it's going to be in the 20s and 30s."

Protecting crops

Farmers are working to safeguard their crops during winter harvest and the start of spring planting, Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association spokeswoman Christina Morton said.

The biggest concern for Florida's citrus growers is temperatures below 28 F (minus 2.2 C) for more than four hours — that's when damage occurs. Trevor Murphy, who has groves in the interior of the state, said he planned to turn on his irrigation system when the thermometer hits just above freezing to create a protective layer of ice on the trees and also fog, which helps warm the groves.

"We are about as ready as we are going to be," Murphy said Friday. "We will see Sunday or Monday what Mother Nature throws at us."

Robert Moehling Jr., whose family has been growing tropical fruit for generations in south Miami-Dade County, said the excessive water from running the irrigation can actually do more damage to their crops.

"In our experience over 66 years farming the avocados and mangoes and jackfruit, you leave the water

off, run the risk of killing some versus destroying all," Moehling said.

An arctic blast from Canada is also spreading south, where thousands of people remain without power to heat their homes. A new storm is expected to churn along the East Coast, prompting people in mid-Atlantic states to prepare for possible blizzard conditions and the Carolinas and nearby states to brace for near-blizzard conditions.

Temperatures in hard-hit northern Mississippi will feel as cold as minus 5 F (minus 21 C) when winds are factored in, National Weather Service forecasters say. People in a large part of the southeastern U.S. were under a variety of alerts warning of extremely cold weather.

Judge bars federal prosecutors from seeking the death penalty against Luigi Mangione

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Federal prosecutors can't seek the death penalty against Luigi Mangione in the killing of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson, a federal judge ruled Friday, foiling the Trump administration's bid to see him executed for what it called a "premeditated, cold-blooded assassination that shocked America."

Judge Margaret Garnett dismissed a federal murder charge that had enabled prosecutors to seek capital punishment, finding it technically flawed. She wrote that she did so to "foreclose the death penalty as an available punishment to be considered by the jury" as it weighs whether to convict Mangione.

Garnett also dismissed a gun charge but left in place stalking charges that carry a maximum punishment of life in prison. To seek the death penalty, prosecutors needed to show that Mangione killed Thompson while committing another "crime of violence." Stalking doesn't fit that definition, Garnett wrote in her opinion, citing case law and legal precedents.

In a win for prosecutors, Garnett ruled they can use evidence collected from his backpack during his arrest, including a 9mm handgun and a notebook in which authorities say Mangione described his intent to "wack" an insurance executive. Mangione's lawyers had sought to exclude those items, arguing the search was illegal because police hadn't yet obtained a warrant.

During a hearing Friday, Garnett gave prosecutors 30 days to update her on whether they'll appeal her death penalty decision. A spokesperson for the U.S. attorney's office in Manhattan, which is prosecuting the federal case, declined to comment.

Garnett acknowledged that the decision "may strike the average person — and indeed many lawyers and judges — as tortured and strange, and the result may seem contrary to our intuitions about the criminal law." But, she said, it reflected her "committed effort to faithfully apply the dictates of the Supreme Court to the charges in this case. The law must be the Court's only concern."

Mangione, 27, appeared relaxed as he sat with his lawyers during the scheduled hearing, which took place about an hour after Garnett issued her written ruling. Prosecutors retained their right to appeal but said they were ready to proceed to trial.

Outside court afterward, Mangione attorney Karen Friedman Agnifilo said her client and his defense team were relieved by the "incredible decision."

Jury selection in the federal case is set for Sept. 8, followed by opening statements and testimony on Oct. 13. The state trial's date hasn't been set. On Wednesday, the Manhattan district attorney's office urged the judge in that case to schedule a July 1 trial date.

"That case is none of my concern," Garnett said, adding that she would proceed as if the federal case is the only case unless she hears formally from parties involved in the state case. She also said the federal case will be paused if the government appeals her death penalty ruling.

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 by critics to describe how insurers avoid paying claims.

Mangione, an 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.

Following through on Trump's campaign promise to vigorously pursue capital punishment, Attorney General Pam Bondi ordered Manhattan federal prosecutors last April to seek the death penalty against Mangione.

It was the first time the Justice Department sought the death penalty in President Donald Trump's second term. He returned to office a year ago with a vow to resume federal executions after they were halted under his predecessor, President Joe Biden.

Garnett, a Biden appointee and former Manhattan federal prosecutor, ruled after hearing oral arguments earlier this month.

Besides seeking to have the death penalty rejected on the grounds Garnett cited, Mangione's lawyers argued that Bondi's announcement flouted long-established Justice Department protocols and was "based on politics, not merit."

They said her remarks, followed by posts to her Instagram account and a TV appearance, "indelibly prejudiced" the grand jury process resulting in his indictment weeks later.

Prosecutors urged Garnett to keep the death penalty on the table, arguing that the charges were legally sound and Bondi's remarks weren't prejudicial, as "pretrial publicity, even when intense, is not itself a constitutional defect."

Prosecutors argued that careful questioning of prospective jurors would alleviate the defense's concerns about their knowledge of the case and ensure Mangione's rights are respected at trial.

"What the defendant recasts as a constitutional crisis is merely a repackaging of arguments" rejected in previous cases, prosecutors said. "None warrants dismissal of the indictment or categorical preclusion of a congressionally authorized punishment."

Israel reopening Gaza's border crossing with Egypt on Sunday after long closure

By SAM METZ Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel said Friday that it will reopen the pedestrian border crossing between the Gaza Strip and Egypt over the weekend, marking an important step forward for U.S. President Donald Trump's Gaza ceasefire plan.

COGAT, the Israeli military body in charge of coordinating aid to Gaza, said in a statement that starting on Sunday a "limited movement of people only" would be allowed through the Rafah crossing, Gaza's main gateway to the outside world.

The announcement followed statements from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Ali Shaath, newly appointed to head the Palestinian administrative committee governing Gaza's daily affairs, that it would likely open soon.

While COGAT said the passage will open in both directions on Sunday, Shaath said the first day will be a trial for operations and that travel both ways will start Monday.

Israel as of Friday agreed to allow up to 150 people to leave each day — 50 medical patients with two family members, an official familiar with the situation told The Associated Press, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were discussing diplomatic talks. Up to 50 people who fled during the war can return daily, the source said.

Roughly 20,000 sick and wounded Palestinians need treatment outside Gaza, according to the territory's health ministry. Gaza's health system was decimated in the war, rendering advanced surgical procedures out of reach.

COGAT said both Israel and Egypt will vet individuals for exit and entry through the crossing, which will be supervised by European Union border patrol agents. In addition to screenings at the crossing, Palestinians leaving and returning will be screened by Israel in the adjacent corridor, which remains under Israeli military control.

The crossing has been under a near complete closure since Israel seized it in May 2024, saying the

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step was part of a strategy to halt cross-border arms smuggling by Hamas. It was briefly opened for the evacuation of medical patients during a short-lived ceasefire in early 2025.

Israel had resisted reopening the crossing, but the recovery of the remains of the last hostage in Gaza on Monday cleared the way to move forward. A day later, Netanyahu said the crossing would soon open in a limited and controlled fashion.

Thousands of Palestinians inside Gaza are trying to leave the war-battered territory, while tens of thousands who fled the territory during the heaviest fighting say they want to return home.

The reopening is one of the first steps in the second phase of last year's U.S.-brokered ceasefire agreement, which includes challenging issues ranging from demilitarizing Gaza to putting in place an alternative government to oversee rebuilding the mostly destroyed enclave.

Netanyahu said this week that Israel's focus is on disarming Hamas and destroying its remaining tunnels. Without these steps, he said that there would be no reconstruction in Gaza, a stance that could make Israel's control over Rafah a key point of leverage.

More deadly strikes in Gaza

Palestinians in Gaza on Friday mourned friends and relatives who died earlier this week in Israeli strikes, which have slowed but not stopped since the return of the remains of the final hostage held in the territory.

Three Palestinians were laid to rest in traditional Islamic funeral rites. Men gathered to pay their final respects, carrying the shrouded bodies through the streets before praying over them.

Israel's military said four people were killed in airstrikes Friday in central Gaza, saying they were armed and approaching troops near the ceasefire line dividing Israeli-held areas and most of Gaza's Palestinian population.

The most recent deaths Friday are on top of the 492 Palestinians killed since the ceasefire began in October, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. The ministry doesn't distinguish between civilians and combatants in its figures. It maintains detailed casualty records that are seen as generally reliable by U.N. agencies and independent experts.

US stocks fall while a break in gold fever sends metals prices plunging

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Financial markets churned on Friday as investors tried to figure out what President Donald Trump's new nominee to lead the Federal Reserve will mean for interest rates.

U.S. stocks fell, with the S&P 500 down 0.4% after sinking as much as 1.1% earlier in the day. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 179 points, or 0.4%, and the Nasdaq composite lost 0.9%.

The value of the U.S. dollar rallied, but only after swiveling a couple times following Trump's nomination of Kevin Warsh. And some of the wildest action was again in precious metals markets, where gold and silver prices plunged following their stellar runs over the last year.

Whoever leads the Fed has a big influence on the economy and markets worldwide by helping to dictate where the U.S. central bank moves interest rates. Such decisions lift or weigh on prices for all kinds of investments, as the Fed tries to keep the U.S. job market humming without letting inflation get out of control. Trump has been pushing for lower interest rates, which usually help goose the economy but can also cause higher inflation.

A fear in financial markets has been that the Fed will lose some of its independence because of Trump. That fear in turn helped catapult the price of gold and weaken the U.S. dollar's value over the last year.

The longtime assumption has been that the Fed should operate separately from the rest of Washington so that it can make moves that are painful in the short term but necessary for the long term. To get inflation down to the Fed's goal of 2%, for example, may require the unpopular choice to keep interest rates high and grind down on the economy for a while.

The big question is what Warsh's nomination, which still requires approval from the Senate, means for the Fed's independence.

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Warsh used to be a governor on the Fed's board, so investors are familiar with him. That could also mean Warsh is familiar with and hopes to continue the institution of the Fed as an independent operator. And while with the Fed, Warsh criticized the central bank's buying of bonds to keep interest rates low.

Some on Wall Street took Warsh's nomination as an encouraging signal for a still-independent Fed that will keep rates high, if necessary. Besides slowing the economy, higher interest rates would push downward on stock prices.

But Warsh has also recently been critical of the Fed's current chair, Jerome Powell, and has voiced support for lower rates.

"Indeed, Warsh is not the Fed's guy, he is Trump's guy, and has shadowed Trump on monetary policy almost every step of the way since 2009," according to Thierry Wizman, a strategist at Macquarie Group. "This doesn't necessarily mean that Warsh will push the Fed into rate cuts soon," but it could indicate he may be quicker to do so when the time comes.

On Wall Street, stocks of metals miners tumbled as the price of gold dropped 11.4% to settle at \$4,745.10 per ounce. Gold's price suddenly ran out of momentum following a tremendous rally where it roughly doubled over 12 months. It topped \$5,000 for the first time on Monday and was around \$5,600 at one point on Thursday.

Silver, which had been on a similar, jaw-dropping tear, fell even more. It plunged 31.4%.

Prices for gold and other precious metals had been surging as investors looked for safer places for their money while weighing a wide range of risks, including a potentially less independent Fed, a U.S. stock market that critics say is expensive, threats of tariffs and heavy debt loads for governments worldwide.

The dramatic halt may have been inevitable given how far and how fast metal prices had surged over the last year. Nothing goes up in price forever.

Friday's drops for metals prices helped send the stock of miner Newmont down 11.5%. Freeport-McMoRan, another miner, dropped 7.5%.

Helping to limit the market's losses was Tesla, which rose 3.3%. It bounced back after dropping on Thursday despite delivering better profit reports for the latest quarter than analysts expected.

Apple added 0.5% after the iPhone maker reported a stronger profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected.

All told, the S&P 500 fell 29.98 points to 6,939.03. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dipped 179.09 to 48,892.47, and the Nasdaq composite sank 223.30 to 23,461.82.

In the bond market, the yield on the 10-year Treasury inched up to 4.25% from 4.24% late Thursday. It got near 4.28% in the overnight and early-morning hours before falling back. A rise in a bond's yield indicates that its price is weakening.

Yields may have felt some upward pressure from a report released Friday showing U.S. inflation at the wholesale level was hotter last month than economists expected. That could put pressure on the Fed to keep interest rates steady for a while instead of cutting them, as it did late last year.

In stock markets abroad, indexes rose in much of Europe following a mixed performance in Asia.

Stocks rose 1.2% in Jakarta after the CEO of Indonesia's stock market resigned Friday. Stocks had stumbled there in prior days after MSCI, an influential company in the investment industry that creates stock and other indexes, warned about market risks such as a lack of transparency.

Trump's choice of Warsh to lead Fed could reshape the world's most influential central bank

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's nomination of Kevin Warsh to chair the Federal Reserve could bring about sweeping changes at a central bank that dominates the global economy and markets like no other.

Warsh, if approved by the Senate, will be under close scrutiny from financial markets and Congress given his appointment by a president who has loudly demanded much lower rates than many economists think

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are justified by economic conditions. Whether he can maintain the Fed's long time independence from day-to-day politics while also placating Trump will be a tremendous challenge.

Still, former associates and friends of Warsh say that he has the intellectual heft and people skills to potentially pull it off. His family also has connections to Trump that could reduce the pressure from the White House.

Warsh has "a judicious temperament and both the intellectual understanding but also the hopefully diplomatic talents to navigate what is a challenging position at this point," said Raghuram Rajan, an economics professor at the University of Chicago and formerly head of India's central bank.

Warsh would replace current chair Jerome Powell when his term expires in May. Trump chose Powell to lead the Fed in 2017 but this year has relentlessly assailed him for not cutting interest rates quickly enough.

"I have known Kevin for a long period of time, and have no doubt that he will go down as one of the GREAT Fed Chairmen, maybe the best," Trump posted on social media Friday. "On top of everything else, he is 'central casting,' and he will never let you down."

Trump said later Friday in the Oval Office that he didn't ask Warsh to commit to cutting rates, calling such a question "inappropriate" and adding, "I want to keep it nice and pure."

But Trump added, "But he certainly wants to cut rates."

The appointment, which requires Senate confirmation, amounts to a return trip for Warsh, 55, who was a member of the Fed's board from 2006 to 2011. He was the youngest governor in history when he was appointed at age 35. He is currently a fellow at the right-leaning Hoover Institution and a lecturer at the Stanford Graduate School of Business.

In some ways, Warsh is an unlikely choice for the Republican president because he has long supported higher interest rates to control inflation. Trump, by contrast, has said the Fed's key rate should be as low as 1%, a level few economists endorse, and far below its current level of about 3.6%.

During his time as governor, Warsh objected to some of the low-interest rate policies that the Fed pursued during and after the Great Recession of 2008-09. He also often expressed concern at that time that inflation would soon accelerate, even though it remained at rock-bottom levels for many years after that recession ended.

More recently, however, in speeches and opinion columns, Warsh has voiced support for lower rates, seemingly coming in line with Trump's point of view.

Markets and members of Congress react

Financial markets reacted in ways that suggest investors expect Warsh could keep rates a bit higher over time. The dollar and yields on long-term U.S. Treasuries ticked higher. U.S. stocks fell about 0.5%. The biggest moves were in the volatile metals markets, where gold dropped more than 5% and silver sank more than 13%.

In Congress, Sen. Thom Tillis, a North Carolina Republican, reiterated in a social media post that he will oppose Warsh's nomination until a Justice Department investigation into Powell is resolved.

Tillis is on the Senate committee that will consider Warsh's nomination.

He added that Warsh is a "qualified nominee," but stressed that "protecting the independence of the Federal Reserve from political interference or legal intimidation is non-negotiable."

Tillis's opposition could complicate the confirmation process. Asked late Thursday whether Warsh could be confirmed without Tillis's support, Senate Majority Leader John Thune said, "probably not."

Separately, Democratic Sen. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, the highest-ranking Democrat on the committee, accused Warsh of reshaping his views to appease Trump ahead of his nomination.

"I don't know how to interpret that, except to say, that's exactly what a sock puppet does," she said. "If Donald Trump says it, then Kevin Warsh echoes it, even though it contradicts everything he had done for years."

Changes coming to Fed?

Warsh has frequently criticized the Fed for its ownership of trillions of dollars in government and mortgage-backed securities, which it accumulated after the Great Recession and during the pandemic.

Warsh has charged that the massive bond-buying, which was intended to lower longer-term interest rates

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and boost the economy, enabled Congress to ramp up spending without concern for higher borrowing costs.

Reducing the Fed's \$6.6 trillion balance sheet, however, will be a fraught exercise because banks have become accustomed to the large amounts of cash in the financial system that it provides.

Warsh has also said the Fed's economic models wrongly assume that rapid economic growth threatens to elevate inflation. Instead, "Inflation is caused when government spends too much and prints too much," he wrote in a November column in *The Wall Street Journal*.

Controlling the Fed

The announcement comes after an extended and unusually public search. The chair of the Federal Reserve is tasked with combating inflation in the United States while also supporting maximum employment. The Fed is also the nation's top banking regulator.

The Fed's rate decisions, over time, influence borrowing costs throughout the economy, including for mortgages, car loans and credit cards.

Trump has sought to exert more control over the Fed. In August he tried to fire Lisa Cook, one of seven governors on the Fed's board, in an effort to secure a majority of the board. Cook, however, sued to keep her job, and the Supreme Court, in a hearing last week, appeared inclined to let her stay in her position while her suit is resolved.

Powell revealed this month that the Fed had been subpoenaed by the Justice Department about his congressional testimony on a \$2.5 billion building renovation. Powell said the subpoenas were "pretexts" to force the Fed to cut rates.

Trump's economic policies

Warsh has expressed support for the president's economic policies, despite a history as a more conventional, pro-free trade Republican.

In a January 2025 column in *The Wall Street Journal*, Warsh praised Trump's deregulatory policies and potential spending cuts, which he said would help bring down inflation. He has also suggested that artificial intelligence will boost productivity, making the economy more efficient while reducing inflation. Lower inflation would allow the Fed to lower rates.

In December, Trump wrote on social media of the need for lower borrowing costs and said, "Anyone who disagrees with me will never be the Fed chairman!"

Potential challenges and pushback

If confirmed, Warsh would face challenges in pushing interest rates much lower. The chair is just one member of the Fed's 19-person rate-setting committee, with 12 of those officials voting on each rate decision. The committee is already split between those worried about persistent inflation, who'd like to keep rates unchanged, and those who think that recent upticks in unemployment point to a stumbling economy that needs lower interest rates to bolster hiring.

Financial markets could also push back. If the Fed cuts its short-term rate too aggressively and is seen as doing so for political reasons, then Wall Street investors could sell Treasury bonds out of fear that inflation would rise. Such sales would push up longer-term interest rates, including mortgage rates, and backfire on Warsh.

Trump considered appointing Warsh as Fed chair during his first term, though ultimately he went with Powell. Warsh's father-in-law is Ronald Lauder, heir to the Estee Lauder cosmetics fortune and a longtime donor and confidant of Trump's.

Satellite photos show activity at Iran nuclear sites as tensions rise over protest crackdown

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — As tensions soar over Iran's bloody crackdown on nationwide protests, satellite images show activity at two Iranian nuclear sites bombed last year by Israel and the United States that may be a sign of Tehran trying to obscure efforts to salvage any materials remaining there.

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The images from Planet Labs PBC show roofs have been built over two damaged buildings at the Isfahan and Natanz facilities, the first major activity noticeable by satellite at any of the country's stricken nuclear sites since Israel's 12-day war with Iran in June.

Those coverings block satellites from seeing what's happening on the ground — right now the only way for inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency to monitor the sites as Iran has prevented access.

Iran has not publicly discussed the activity at the two sites. The IAEA, a watchdog agency of the United Nations, did not respond to requests for comment.

U.S. President Donald Trump repeatedly has demanded Iran negotiate a deal over its nuclear program to avert threatened American military strikes over the country's crackdown on protesters. The U.S. has moved the USS Abraham Lincoln and several guided-missile destroyers into the Middle East, but it remains unclear whether Trump will decide to use force.

The new roofs do not appear to be a sign of reconstruction starting at the heavily damaged facilities, experts who examined the sites said. Instead, they are likely part of Iran's efforts "to assess whether key assets — such as limited stocks of highly enriched uranium — survived the strikes," said Andrea Stricker, who studies Iran for the Washington-based Foundation for Defense of Democracies, which has been sanctioned by Tehran.

"They want to be able to get at any recovered assets they can get to without Israel or the United States seeing what survived," she said.

Isfahan and Natanz are 2 key Iran sites

Prior to Israel launching a 12-day war with Iran in June, the Islamic Republic had three major nuclear sites associated with its program. Iran long has insisted its nuclear program is peaceful. However, Iranian officials in recent years have increasingly threatened to pursue the bomb. The West and the IAEA say Iran had an organized nuclear weapons program up until 2003.

The Natanz site, some 220 kilometers (135 miles) south of the capital, is a mix of above- and below-ground laboratories that did the majority of Iran's uranium enrichment.

Before the war, the IAEA said Iran used advanced centrifuges there to enrich uranium up to 60%, a short, technical step from weapons-grade levels of 90%. Some of the material is presumed to have been onsite for when the entire complex was attacked.

The facility outside the city of Isfahan was mainly known for producing the uranium gas that is fed into centrifuges to be spun and purified.

A third site, Fordo, some 95 kilometers (60 miles) southwest of the capital, housed a hardened enrichment site under a mountain.

During last year's war, Israel targeted the sites first, followed by U.S. strikes using bunker-busting bombs and Tomahawk cruise missiles. The U.S. strikes "significantly degraded Iran's nuclear program," the White House's National Security Strategy published in November said, though specifics on the damage have been hard to come by publicly.

Iran has not allowed IAEA inspectors to visit the sites since the attacks.

Roofs seen in Isfahan and Natanz

The main above-ground enrichment building at Natanz was known as the Pilot Fuel Enrichment Plant. Israel hit the building June 13, leaving it "functionally destroyed," and "seriously damaging" underground halls holding cascades of centrifuges, the IAEA's director-general, Rafael Mariano Grossi, said at the time. A U.S. follow-up attack on June 22 hit Natanz's underground facilities with bunker-busting bombs, likely decimating what remained.

Planet Labs PBC images show Iran began in December to build a roof over the damaged plant. It completed work on the roof by the end of the month. Iran has not provided any public acknowledgment of that work. Natanz's electrical system appears to still be destroyed.

Iran also appears to be continuing digging work that it began in 2023 at Kūh-e Kolang Gaz Lā, or "Pickaxe Mountain," a few hundred meters (yards) south of the Natanz complex's perimeter fence. Satellite images

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show piles of dirt from the excavation growing in size. It is believed to be building a new underground nuclear facility there.

At Isfahan, Iran began building a similar roof over a structure near the facility's northeast corner, finishing the work in early January. The exact function of that building isn't publicly known, although the Israeli military at the time said its strikes at Isfahan targeted sites there associated with centrifuge manufacturing. The Israeli military did not respond to requests for comment over the construction.

Meanwhile, imagery shows that two tunnels into a mountain near the Isfahan facility have been packed with dirt, a measure against missile strikes that Iran also did just before the June war. A third tunnel appears to have been cleared of dirt, with a new set of walls built near the entrance as an apparent security measure.

Sarah Burkhard, a senior research associate for the Washington-based Institute for Science and International Security, which long has watched Iran's nuclear sites, said the roofs appear to be part of an operation to "recover any sort of remaining assets or rubble without letting us know what they are getting out of there."

Sean O'Connor, an expert at the open-source intelligence firm Janes, concurred that the aim was likely "to obscure activity rather than to, say, repair or rebuild a structure for use."

Other work continues in Iran

Since the end of the war, Iran has worked to reconstitute its ballistic missile program, rebuilding sites associated with the program, earlier AP reporting showed. That's included work at a military complex known as Parchin, just to the southeast of Tehran.

In recent weeks, Iran has been working to rebuild a site at Parchin identified by the Institute for Science and International Security as "Taleghan 2." Israel destroyed the site in an airstrike in October 2024.

It has said an archive of Iranian nuclear data earlier seized by Israel identified the building as housing an explosive chamber and a special X-ray system to study explosive tests. Such tests could be used in research toward compressing a core of uranium with explosives — something that's needed for an implosion-style nuclear weapon.

Satellite photos show construction being done at "Taleghan 2" in recent months. The open-source intelligence firm Janes similarly noted the construction, as did the institute.

"This has been reconstituted very rapidly," said Lewis Smart, a Janes analyst who studies Iran's nuclear program. "It's being expanded to potentially make it more resistant to penetration attacks and bombings. ... A rather large containment vessel is being put into the facility, which could be used for high explosive testing."

Polygamous sect's sway has dwindled in twin towns on Arizona-Utah line. Residents enjoy new freedoms

By JACQUES BILLEAUD Associated Press

COLORADO CITY, Ariz. (AP) — The prairie dresses, walled compounds and distrust of outsiders that were once hallmarks of two towns on the Arizona-Utah border are mostly gone.

These days, Colorado City, Arizona, and neighboring Hildale, Utah, look much like any other town in this remote and picturesque area near Zion National Park, with weekend soccer games, a few bars, and even a winery.

Until courts wrested control of the towns from a polygamous sect whose leader and prophet, Warren Jeffs, was imprisoned for sexually assaulting two girls, youth sports, cocktail hours and many other common activities were forbidden. The towns have transformed so quickly that they were released from court-ordered supervision last summer, almost two years earlier than expected.

It wasn't easy.

"What you see is the outcome of a massive amount of internal turmoil and change within people to reset themselves," said Willie Jessop, a onetime spokesman for the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints who later broke with the sect. "We call it 'life after Jeffs' — and, frankly, it's a great life."

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A dark turn

Some former members have fond memories of growing up in the FLDS, describing mothers who looked out for each other's kids and playing sports with other kids in town.

But they say things got worse after Jeffs took charge following his father's death in 2002. Families were broken apart by church leaders who cast out men deemed unworthy and reassigned their wives and children to others. On Jeffs' orders, children were pulled from public school, basketball hoops were taken down, and followers were told how to spend their time and what to eat.

"It started to go into a very sinister, dark, cult direction," said Shem Fischer, who left the towns in 2000 after the church split up his father's family. He later returned to open a lodge in Hildale.

Church members settled in Colorado City and Hildale in the 1930s so they could continue practicing polygamy after the sect broke away from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the mainstream Mormon church that renounced plural marriage in 1890.

Stung by the public backlash from a disastrous 1953 raid on the FLDS, authorities turned a blind eye to polygamy in the towns until Jeffs took over.

After being charged in 2005 with arranging the marriage of a teenage girl to a 28-year-old follower who was already married, Jeffs went on the run, making the FBI's Ten Most Wanted Fugitives list before his arrest the next year. In 2011, he was convicted in Texas of sexually assaulting two girls ages 12 and 15 and sentenced to life in prison.

A court-ordered overhaul

Even years after Jeffs' arrest, federal prosecutors accused the towns of being run as an arm of the church and denying non-followers basic services such as building permits, water hookups and police protection. In 2017, the court placed the towns under supervision, excising the church from their governments and shared police department. Separately, supervision of a trust that controlled the church's real estate was turned over to a community board, which has been selling it.

The towns functioned for 90 years largely as a theocracy, so they had to learn how to operate "a first-generation representative government," Roger Carter, the court-appointed monitor, pointed out in his progress reports.

The FLDS had controlled most of the towns' land through a trust, allowing its leaders to dictate where followers could live, so private property ownership was new to many. People unaccustomed to openness and government policies needed clarification about whether decisions were based on religious affiliation.

Although the towns took direction from the sect in the past, their civic leaders now prioritize residents' needs, Carter wrote before the court lifted the oversight last July.

'Like a normal town'

With its leader in prison and stripped of its control over the towns, many FLDS members left the sect or moved away. Other places of worship have opened, and practicing FLDS members are now believed to account for only a small percentage of towns' populations.

Hildale Mayor Donia Jessop, who was once distantly related to Willie Jessop through marriage, said the community has made huge strides. Like others, she has reconnected with family members who were divided by the church and quit talking to each other.

When a 2015 flood in Hildale killed 13 people, she was one of many former residents who returned to help look for missing loved ones. She got a chance to visit with a sister she hadn't seen in years.

"We started to realize that the love was still there -- that my sister that I hadn't been able to speak to for in so many years was still my sister, and she missed me as bad as I missed her," the mayor said. "And it just started to open doors that weren't open before."

Longtime resident Isaac Wyler said after the FLDS expelled him in 2004, he was ostracized by the people he grew up with, a local store wouldn't sell him animal feed, he was refused service at a burger joint and police ignored his complaints that his farm was being vandalized.

Things are very different now, he said. For one thing, his religious affiliation no longer factors into his encounters with police, Wyler said. And that feed store, burger joint and the FLDS-run grocery store have

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been replaced by a big supermarket, bank, pharmacy, coffee shop and bar.

"Like a normal town," he said.

People with no FLDS connections have also been moving in.

Gabby Olsen, who grew up in Salt Lake City, first came to the towns in 2016 as an intern for a climbing and canyoneering guide service. She was drawn to the mountains and canyons, clean air and 300 days of sunshine each year.

She said people asked "all the time" whether she was really going to move to a place known for polygamy, but it didn't bother her.

"When you tell people, 'Hey, we're getting married in Hildale,' they kind of chuckle, because they just really don't know what it's about," said Olsen's husband, Dion Obermeyer, who runs the service with her. "But of course when they all came down here, they're all quite surprised. And you're like, 'Oh yeah, there's a winery.'"

A ways to go

Even with the FLDS' influence waning, it's not completely gone and the towns are dealing with some new problems.

Residents say the new openness has brought common societal woes such as drug use to Hildale and Colorado City.

And some people are still practicing polygamy: A Colorado City sect member with more than 20 spiritual "wives," including 10 underage girls, was sentenced in late 2024 to 50 years in prison for coercing girls into sexual acts and other crimes.

Briell Decker, who was 18 when she became Jeffs' 65th "wife" in an arranged marriage, turned her back on the church. These days, she works for a residential support center in Colorado City that serves people leaving polygamy.

Now 40 and remarried with a child, Decker said she thinks it will take several generations to recover from the FLDS' abuses under Jeffs.

"I do think they can, but it's going to take a while because so many people are in denial," Decker said. "Still, they want to blame somebody. They don't really want to take accountability." _____

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The Justice Department has opened a federal civil rights probe into the killing of Alex Pretti

By MICHAEL BIESECKER, REBECCA SANTANA and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department has opened a federal civil rights investigation into the shooting of Alex Pretti, the Minneapolis resident killed Saturday by Border Patrol officers, Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche said Friday.

"We're looking at everything that would shed light on what happened that day and in the days and weeks leading up to what happened," Blanche said during a news conference.

Blanche did not explain why DOJ decided to open an investigation into Pretti's killing, but has said a similar probe is not warranted in the Jan. 7 death of Renee Good, who was shot by an Immigration and Customs Enforcement officer in Minneapolis. He said only on Friday that the Civil Rights Division does not investigate every law enforcement shooting and that there have to be circumstances and facts that "warrant an investigation."

"President Trump has said repeatedly, 'Of course, this is something we're going to investigate,'" Blanche said of the Pretti shooting.

Steve Schleicher, a Minneapolis-based attorney representing Pretti's parents, said Friday that "the family's focus is on a fair and impartial investigation that examines the facts around his murder."

FBI to take over federal investigation

The Department of Homeland Security also said Friday that the FBI will lead the federal probe into

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Pretti's death.

Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem first disclosed the shift in which agency was leading the investigation during a Fox News interview Thursday evening. Her department previously said Homeland Security Investigations, a departmental unit, would head the investigation.

"We will continue to follow the investigation that the FBI is leading and giving them all the information that they need to bring that to conclusion, and make sure that the American people know the truth of the situation and how we can go forward and continue to protect the American people," Noem said, speaking to Fox host Sean Hannity.

Homeland Security spokesperson Tricia McLaughlin said Homeland Security Investigations will support the FBI in the investigation. Separately, Customs and Border Protection, which is part of DHS, is doing its own internal investigation into the shooting, during which two officers opened fire on Pretti.

DHS did not immediately respond to questions about when the change was made or why. The FBI did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

It was not immediately clear whether the FBI would share information and evidence with Minnesota state investigators, who have thus far been frozen out of the federal investigation.

In the same interview, Noem appeared to distance herself from statements she made shortly after the shooting, claiming Pretti had brandished a handgun and aggressively approached officers.

Multiple videos that emerged of the shooting contradicted that claim, showing the intensive care nurse had only his mobile phone in his hand as officers tackled him to the ground, with one removing a handgun from the back of Pretti's pants as another officer began firing shots into his back.

Pretti had a state permit to legally carry a concealed firearm. At no point did he appear to reach for it, the videos showed.

Videos emerge of previous altercation

The change in agency comes after two other videos emerged of an earlier altercation between Pretti and federal immigration officers 11 days before his death.

The Jan. 13 videos show Pretti yelling at federal vehicles and at one point appearing to spit before kicking out the taillight of one vehicle. A struggle ensues between Pretti and several officers, during which he is forced to the ground. Pretti's winter coat comes off, 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 not clear whether federal agents saw it.

Schleicher, the Pretti family attorney, said Wednesday the earlier altercation in no way justified the shooting more than a week later.

In a post on his Truth Social platform early Friday morning, President Donald Trump suggested that the videos of the earlier incident undercut the narrative that Pretti was a peaceful protester when he was shot.

"Agitator and, perhaps, insurrectionist, Alex Pretti's stock has gone way down with the just released video of him screaming and spitting in the face of a very calm and under control ICE Officer, and then crazily kicking in a new and very expensive government vehicle, so hard and violent, in fact, that the taillight broke off in pieces," Trump's post said. "It was quite a display of abuse and anger, for all to see, crazed and out of control. The ICE Officer was calm and cool, not an easy thing to be under those circumstances!"

Trump claims Putin agreed to temporary halt in energy attacks on Ukraine, but terms are unclear

By SUSIE BLANN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The terms of a Russian commitment to U.S. President Donald Trump to temporarily halt its bombardment of Ukraine during one of the country's bleakest winters in years remained unclear Friday, as Ukrainians braced for even worse conditions to come next week.

Trump said late Thursday that President Vladimir Putin had agreed to a temporary pause in targeting Kyiv and other places as the region experiences freezing temperatures that have brought widespread

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hardship to civilians.

"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. Putin has "agreed to that," he said, without elaborating on when the request to the Russian leader was made.

The White House didn't immediately respond to a query seeking clarity about the scope and timing of any limited pause.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov confirmed Friday that Trump "made a personal request" to Putin to stop targeting Kyiv until Feb. 1 "in order to create favorable conditions for negotiations."

The mention of Feb. 1 was confusing since that is only two days away. Also, the cold weather is forecast to get much worse from Sunday, with temperatures dropping even further and making the time frame for a pause in attacks hard to understand.

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."

Asked if Moscow agreed to Trump's proposal, Peskov said, "Yes, of course." But he refused to answer further questions about whether the agreement covered only energy infrastructure or all aerial strikes, and when the halt on strikes was supposed to start.

'Evidence to the contrary'

Russia struck Ukrainian energy assets in several regions of Ukraine on Thursday but there were no strikes on those facilities overnight, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Friday.

In a post on social media, Zelenskyy also noted that Russia has turned its attention to targeting Ukrainian logistics networks and that Russian drones and missiles hit residential areas of Ukraine overnight, as they have most nights during the war.

Trump framed Putin's acceptance as a concession. But Zelenskyy was skeptical as Russia's invasion approaches its fourth anniversary on Feb. 24 with no sign 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. 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, he said.

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 said that its air defenses overnight shot down 18 Ukrainian drones over several Russian regions, as well as the illegally annexed Crimea and the Black Sea.

Bitter cold forecast

Forecasters say Kyiv, which recently endured severe power shortages, will see 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.

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, adding 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, the United Arab Emirates, but that could change because of a spike in tensions between the United States and Iran.

'We are ready for compromises'

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 proposed a limited energy ceasefire at talks in Saudi Arabia last year, Zelenskyy

said, but it 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."

Ukraine demands control over such a zone, he said.

Cut off from most communication, Iranian protesters share rare stories of determination and dissent

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 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

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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.

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),"

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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.”

DHS ramps up surveillance in immigration raids, sweeping in citizens

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.

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,

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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

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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?"

Today in History: January 31, US declares public health emergency over coronavirus

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Saturday, Jan. 31, the 31st day of 2026. There are 334 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Jan. 31, 2020, the United States declared a public health emergency over the new coronavirus, and President Donald Trump signed an order to temporarily bar entry to foreign nationals, other than immediate family of U.S. citizens, who traveled in China in the preceding 14 days.

Also on this date:

In 1863, during the Civil War, the First South Carolina Volunteers, an all-Black Union regiment composed of many who escaped from slavery, was mustered into federal service at Beaufort, South Carolina.

In 1945, Pvt. Eddie Slovik, 24, became the first U.S. soldier since the Civil War to be executed for desertion as he was shot by an American firing squad in France.

In 1958, the United States entered the Space Age with its first successful launch of a satellite, Explorer 1, from Cape Canaveral.

In 1971, astronauts Alan Shepard, Edgar Mitchell and Stuart Roosa blasted off aboard Apollo 14 on a mission to the moon.

In 1988, Doug Williams, the first Black quarterback to play in the Super Bowl, led the Washington Redskins (now Washington Commanders) to a 42-10 victory over the Denver Broncos and was named Super Bowl MVP.

In 2000, an Alaska Airlines MD-83 jet crashed into the Pacific Ocean off Port Hueneme (wy-NEE'-mee), California, killing all 88 people aboard.

In 2001, a Scottish court sitting in the Netherlands convicted one Libyan and acquitted a second in the

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1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland. (Abdel Baset Ali al-Megrahi was given a life sentence but was released after eight years on compassionate grounds by Scotland's government. He died in 2012.)

In 2023, Boeing Co. delivered its last 747 wide-body jet to a customer, capping more than a half-century of production of the iconic jumbo jet.

Today's birthdays: Composer Philip Glass is 89. Blues singer-musician Charlie Musselwhite is 82. Actor Glynn Turman is 79. Baseball Hall of Famer Nolan Ryan is 79. Actor Jonathan Banks is 79. Rock singer John Lydon is 70. Actor Anthony LaPaglia is 67. Actor Minnie Driver is 56. Actor Portia de Rossi is 53. Actor-comedian Bobby Moynihan is 49. Actor Kerry Washington is 49. Singer Justin Timberlake is 45. Country singer Tyler Hubbard (Florida Georgia Line) is 39. Musician Marcus Mumford (Mumford and Sons) is 39.