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Tuesday, February 3

- Senior Menu: Baked turkey crunch, peas, fruit, whole wheat bread.
- School Breakfast: Scones.
- School Lunch: Pizza burgers, Fries.
- City Council meeting, 7 p.m.
- St. John's Lutheran: Ladies Aid LWML, 1 p.m.
- United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.
- Boys Basketball hosts Roncalli: Gym: 8th at 4 p.m., 7th at 5 p.m., 6th at 6 p.m.; Arena: C at 5 p.m., JV at 6 p.m., varsity to follow.

Wednesday, February 4

- Senior Menu: Ham, roasted potatoes, fruit, pineapple, whole wheat bread.
- School Breakfast: Breakfast pizza.
- School Lunch: Mac and cheese, peas.
- Groton Chamber meeting, noon, City Hall
- Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.; Sarah Circle, 5 p.m.; League, 6:30 p.m.
- St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.
- United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.
- Groton C&MA: Kid's Club, Youth Group, Adult Bible Study, 7 p.m.
- Pickleball at Elementary Gym, 5:30 p.m.
- Sixth grade BBB practice, 6 p.m., gym
- 3rd/4th grade volleyball practice, 6 p.m., Arena

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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.

Rare Earths Reserve

President Donald Trump is launching a first-of-its-kind \$12B strategic stockpile of critical minerals to reduce US reliance on Chinese supplies and protect domestic manufacturers from supply chain disruptions.

The initiative—dubbed “Project Vault” and modeled after US oil reserves—would combine roughly \$10B in financing from the US Export-Import Bank with about \$1.7B in private capital to buy and store materials. The record-setting loan from the US Export-Import Bank is more than double the bank’s previous largest deal. The stockpile will include rare earths, gallium, and cobalt, which are used in products such as iPhones, batteries, jet engines, and electric vehicles. The US already operates a national stockpile for defense needs, but not for civilian industries.

China is the world’s largest producer of rare earth minerals, accounting for about 70% of global extraction and 90% of processing.

Norwegian Royals Scrutinized

The son of Norway’s crown princess heads to trial today in Oslo on 38 charges, including alleged rape of four women. Though Marius Borg Høyby does not hold royal titles, his case has put pressure on Norway’s royal family.

Høyby is the son of Crown Princess Mette-Marit from a previous relationship and the stepson of the heir to the throne, Crown Prince Haakon. The rape allegations span from 2018 to 2024. Høyby also stands accused of violence and threats against two women, violating a restraining order, and abuse. Additional charges include transporting 7.7 pounds of marijuana and assorted traffic violations. The trial is expected to last through March; Høyby faces up to 10 years in prison.

The proceeding comes after Høyby’s arrest Sunday on new charges, including alleged assault and knife threats, as well as revelations that Mette-Marit corresponded with the late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein between 2011 and 2014. Mette-Marit said she regrets the interactions.

Trevi Fountain Fee

Tourists visiting Rome’s Trevi Fountain must now pay a roughly \$2.35 fee, implemented yesterday, to manage crowds and offset maintenance costs. A handful of city-owned museums also introduced a nearly \$6 tourist ticket.

Officials estimate the fees could generate an extra \$7.6M annually. Some revenue would expand free museum access for Roman residents, many of whom have expressed frustration over rising living costs and declining quality of life amid surging tourism. Last year, the “Eternal City” attracted a record 22.9 million visitors—up from 19.5 million in 2019—and the fountain drew roughly 10 million people. Rome experimented with lines and designated pathways to limit access to the 18th-century fountain’s basin before imposing the new fee.

Over \$1M is fished from the Trevi Fountain annually as visitors toss coins over their left shoulder with their right hand—a ritual popularized by the Oscar-winning film “Three Coins in the Fountain” that supposedly guarantees a return to Rome.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Kid Rock to headline Turning Point's alternative to Bad Bunny's Super Bowl halftime show.
President Donald Trump threatens to sue Trevor Noah over Grammys joke about Jeffrey Epstein's island.
Police investigate the disappearance of "Today" coanchor Savannah Guthrie's mother after the 84-year-old went missing in Arizona over the weekend.
NFL Pro Bowl kicks off at 8 pm ET; Patriots quarterback Drake Maye, Seahawks quarterback Sam Darnold, and others opt out ahead of Super Bowl, Feb. 8.
New Orleans Saints to play NFL's first regular-season game in Paris.

Science & Technology

OpenAI launches AI-powered coding app exclusively for Apple computers.
Firefox users can block generative AI features in browser, starting Feb. 24.
Geologists discover rivers slice through mountain ranges because Earth's crust is so dense, it begins to sink—a process dubbed "lithospheric drip".
Astronomers learn Jupiter is smaller and flatter than long assumed, based on 26 new measurements; the gaseous planet is roughly 5 miles less wide at the equator and 15 miles flatter at the poles.

Business & Markets

Elon Musk's SpaceX acquires xAI to create world's most valuable private company, expected to be valued at \$1.2T, with a portfolio that includes xAI's Grok chatbot and social media platform X.
Devon Energy, Coterra Energy strike \$58B merger, becoming top player in the Permian Basin—the US' highest-producing oil field; deal is oil sector's largest since Diamondback Energy bought Endeavor Energy Resources for \$26B in 2024.
US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +0.5%, Dow +1.1%, Nasdaq +0.6%).
January jobs report, previously expected Friday, to be delayed due to partial government shutdown.

Politics & World Affairs

The House is expected to vote today on whether to end the partial government shutdown; will consider the Senate's measure, including a two-week stopgap for the Department of Homeland Security—a sticking point for Democrats.
Former President Bill Clinton and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton agree to testify in House Oversight Committee probe into Jeffrey Epstein; announcement comes ahead of previously scheduled contempt vote.
US and Iranian officials schedule rare in-person talks in Istanbul Friday amid tensions between the two countries over Iranian protests, US military buildup in the Middle East.
Syrian army enters Kurdish-controlled city of al-Hassakeh after ceasefire reached last month, ending weeks of fighting.

Dunker has a double-double night in Tigers win over Florence-Henry



Rylee Dunker made this three-pointer. She made two three-pointers and finished with 10 points and 10 rebounds.

(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

The Groton Area Tigers improved to 10-5 on the season Tuesday night with a 50-37 win over the Florence/Henry Falcons, pulling away in the second half behind strong defense and hot shooting from the perimeter.

Florence/Henry jumped out to a 6-1 lead early, but Groton responded to tie the game at 6 before briefly taking a 9-6 advantage. The Falcons answered with a 12-0 run to take an 18-9 lead, but the Tigers quickly settled in, scoring eight straight points to reclaim the lead at 20-19. Florence/Henry briefly regained the lead at 21-20, and the game was tied again at 21 and 23 before Groton closed the half on a run to take a 33-25 halftime advantage.

Groton's defense took control in the second half, holding Florence/Henry to just five points in the third quarter while extending the lead to 46-30. The Tigers maintained control the rest of the way to secure the 50-37 victory.

Rylee Dunker recorded a double-double with 10 points and 10 rebounds, adding one assist and one steal. Taryn Traphagen led all scorers with 21 points, knocking down 5-of-9 three-pointers and pulling down five rebounds. Jayden Penning finished with eight points, eight rebounds, and three assists. Jerrica Locke contributed three points, four rebounds, six assists, and three steals, while McKenna Tietz added three points, two rebounds, four assists, and

one steal. Kella Tracy scored three points with four rebounds and one steal, Talli Wright added two points and two rebounds, Mia Crank pulled down one rebound, and Sydney Locke recorded one steal.

Groton shot 32 percent from two-point range and 35 percent from beyond the arc, finishing 8-of-23 from three-point range. The Tigers totaled 36 rebounds, 14 assists, seven steals, and nine turnovers.

Florence/Henry was led by Ashlynn Vavruska with 17 points, nine coming in the first half. Addison Byer, Ana Byer, and Mylee Sumner each scored four points, while Aubrey Johnson added three points. Avari Gusso finished with two points, Lucy Bloom had two points, and Madison Stemwedel added one point.

Groton completed a clean sweep on the night with wins at all three levels.

In the junior varsity game, Groton Area earned a 39-19 victory, leading at the quarter breaks 9-5, 20-8, and 32-11. Sydney Locke led the Tigers with 11 points, Kella Tracy added seven points, Tevan Hanson and Ashlynn Warrington each scored six points, Makenna Krause fin-



Taryn Traphagen led the Tigers, making five three-pointers and finishing with 21 points.

(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



Jerrica Locke dribbles past Florence-Henry's Ana Byer.

(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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Sydney Locke dribbles the ball and looks for a teammate to pass off the ball. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

ished with four points, and Taylynn Traphagen added three points.

The Tigers capped the night with a 40-15 win in the C game. Taylynn Traphagen led Groton Area with 19 points, followed by Kinsley Rowen with seven points. Brynley Dunker and Andi Iverson each scored five points, and Avery Crank added four points.

Groton Area will be back in action Thursday as the Lady Tigers travel to Clear Lake for a doubleheader against the Cardinals.

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

GT on **Boys Varsity** **TR**
Roncalli at Groton
Tuesday, Feb. 3, 2026
7:15 p.m.

Groton Area Tigers Groton, SD

GDILIVE
YouTube
A production of the Groton Daily Independent
For more info: GDILIVE.COM



GT on **Boys JV** **TR**
Roncalli at Groton
Tuesday, Feb. 3, 2026
6:00 p.m.

Groton Area Tigers Groton, SD

GDILIVE
YouTube
A production of the Groton Daily Independent
For more info: GDILIVE.COM



GT on **Boys C Game** **TR**
Roncalli at Groton
Tuesday, Feb. 3, 2026
5:00 p.m.

Groton Area Tigers Groton, SD

GDILIVE
YouTube
A production of the Groton Daily Independent
For more info: GDILIVE.COM



Need a **Babysitter** or **House Cleaner?**



Babysitting Available!

House Cleaning Offered!

Text Jeslyn Kosel at (605)-290-7821

I'm in Groton but am willing to drive to nearby towns!



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The Groton Area Band made its first appearance under the direction of new band director Sharon Schwan. The group's performance of the national anthem, which has drawn rave reviews on social media, featured trumpet players positioned in the four corners of the arena before the rest of the band joined in, creating a dramatic and memorable presentation.

Schwan's teaching in Groton has also stirred fond memories for many community members who remember her time as a band instructor in Conde and Warner. One social media post noted that having a teacher who inspires students to work hard, take pride in their accomplishments, and have fun while doing it is truly a blessing. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel and the corner shots

taken from GDILIVE.COM video)

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Groton City Council Meeting Agenda

February 3, 2026 – 7:00pm
City Hall – 120 N Main Street

(IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CALL IN TO THIS MEETING, PLEASE MAKE PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS TO DO SO BY CALLING CITY HALL 605-397-8422)

1. Approval of Agenda
2. Public Comments - pursuant to SDCL 1-25-1
(Public Comments will offer the opportunity for anyone not listed on the agenda to speak to the council. Speaking time will be limited to 3 minutes. No action will be taken on questions or items not on the agenda.)
3. Wastewater Project Update – IMEG Corp.
4. Department Reports
5. Open Bids for Exterior Painting of City Hall/Wage Memorial Library
6. Change Jr. Teener VFW Baseball to 14U Legion Baseball
7. Second Reading of Ordinance No. 795 – 2026 Summer Salaries
8. First Reading of Ordinance No. 796 – Sewer Rates
9. Review Quotes for Radar Speed Signs and Accept
10. Minutes
11. Bills
12. Begin Accepting Applications for Remaining Summer Recreational Positions – Due by March 3 at 5:00pm:
 - Public Works Laborer/Park Caretaker
 - Cemetery Caretaker
 - Assistant Part-Time Swimming Pool Manager
 - Swimming Pool Lifeguards
 - Baseball Groundskeepers
 - Baseball Gatekeepers
13. Reminder: Applications for Summer Recreational Positions – Due by February 17 at 5:00pm:
 - Baseball Coordinator
 - Softball Coordinator
 - Jr. Legion Coach
 - Jr. Teener Coach
 - Girls' Softball Coaches (U8/U10/U12/U14/U18)
 - Day Baseball/Softball Coach
 - Concessions Manager
 - Swimming Pool Manager
14. Reminder: Nominating Petitions for Municipal Election are due by March 24 at 5:00pm
15. Executive session personnel & legal 1-25-2 (1) & (3)
16. Adjournment

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BROWN COUNTY COMMISSION AGENDA
GENERAL MEETING
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2026, 8:45 A.M.
COMMISSIONER'S CHAMBERS
COURTHOUSE ANNEX - 25 MARKET STREET, ABERDEEN SD

1. Call To Order - Pledge of Allegiance
2. Approval of the Agenda
3. Opportunity for Public Comment
 - ❖ *Public comment will be limited to 10 minutes or at Boards Discretion. Presentations will be limited to 3 minutes.*
4. Second Reading & Possible Adoption of the following Ordinances:
 - a. Ord. #318 – Rezone for Marilyn Thum
 - b. Ord. #319 – Rezone for Larson Land Limited Partnership
 - c. Ord. #320 – Rezone for Chad Pray
5. Approve Resolution #2026-12 Establishing a Policy for Consideration of Petitions Filed Pursuant to SDCL10-6A-4 To Recalculate and Abate Taxes
6. Consent Calendar
 - a. Approval of the General Meeting Minutes of January 27, 2026
 - b. Claims
 - c. Sheriff Reports for Dec.2025
7. Other Business
8. Executive Session (if requested per SDCL 1-25-2)
9. Adjourn

You can join the Brown County Commission Meeting via **your computer, tablet, or smartphone** at <https://meet.goto.com/BrCoCommission>
You can also dial in using your phone. United States: [+1 \(872\) 240-3311](tel:+18722403311) - Access Code: 601-168-909 #
Get the app now and be ready when your first meeting starts: <https://meet.goto.com/install>

Official Recordings of Commission Meetings along with the Minutes can be found at [Commission Meetings | Brown County](#)

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ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP

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

MONTH-TO-MONTH

Student: \$35.15 per month
Single: \$40.48 per month
2-Person: \$59.78 per month
Family: \$72.43 per month
Senior/PT: \$20 per month



Call or Text Paul at 605/397-7460
Call or Text Tina at 605/397-7285

Same rates for several years!

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Tina's Baskets

605-397-7285



Reese's cake with mini Reese's on top
\$35.00



Mix candy cake with mini mix on top with
lights on the bottom
\$20.00



White heart shape with red roses and Fer-
rero chocolate candy with a bear with it
\$25.00



Bear sucker cake with life savers and dum
dum suckers in it
\$15.00

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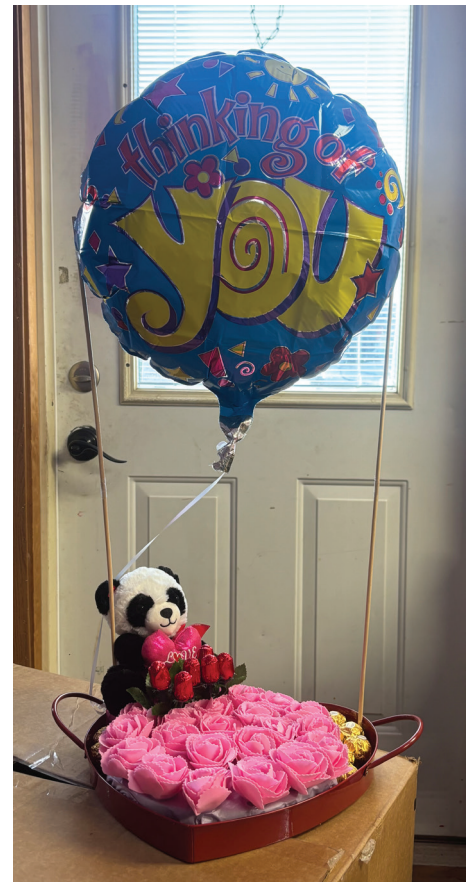
**Hersheys cake with strawberry drops and mini Hersheys on top
\$40.00**



**Laffy Taffy Octopus cake
\$ 15.00**



**Relax and Unwind basket with two wine bottles, blanket, adult coloring books and word finds with crayons and pens and some different chocolates as shown here
\$50.00**



**Thinking of you balloon with bear, red chocolate roses with pink roses and Ferrero Rocher chocolate candy
\$25.00**

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High School Boys' Basketball Aberdeen Roncalli @ Groton Area Tuesday, February 3rd, 2026

Game Times:

Main Court in Arena <ul style="list-style-type: none">- 5:00 PM CT → Boys C- 6:00 PM CT → Boys JV<ul style="list-style-type: none">o <i>Halftime Entertainment: FCCLA Shoot-for-a-Pop</i>- 7:15 PM CT → Boys Varsity<ul style="list-style-type: none">o <i>Halftime Entertainment: Groton High School's Dynamics Dance Team, choreographed by Aubray Miller</i>	Main Court in Old Gym <ul style="list-style-type: none">- 4:00 PM CT → 8th Grade- 5:00 PM CT → 7th Grade- 6:00 PM CT → 6th Grade	Ticket Takers - Report @ 4pm: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Caitlyn Fischbach- Landon Brown- Aaron Helvig Admin on Duty: Shelby Edwards
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Prior to the Varsity game, the National Anthem will be first, with Varsity Introductions/Lineups to follow.

****Aberdeen Area Federal Credit Union will be sponsoring the game and throwing shirts at halftime.**

****Split-Pot Fundraiser - Groton Spring Baseball**

LOCKER ROOMS: Aberdeen Roncalli will use the last locker room down the JH hallway.

TEAM BENCHES: South Bench- Groton Area | North Bench- Aberdeen Roncalli

ATHLETIC TRAINER: There will be an athletic trainer on site.

AED – one is with the trainer, and one is also located near the ticket booth.

ADMISSION & SPECTATORS: Adults: \$5.00 Students: \$4.00.

CONCESSIONS: Will be available

JV/Varsity Officials: Spencer Aberle, Tanner Jondahl, Dustin Pitz

C Officials: Shaun Wanner, Chris Frost, Jordan Kjellsen

JH Officials: Kristi Zoellner, Quintin Biermann

JH Scoreboard: Kristen Swartz/Brett Schwan

C/JV/V Scoreboard: Kristen Swartz

C Scorebook: Krissi Zak

JV/V Official Book: Kristi Zoellner

C/JV/V Shot Clock Operator: Sean Schuring

Announcer: Mike Imrie

National Anthem: Groton Area High School Pep Band, under the direction of Mrs. Sharon Schwan

Livestream: www.GDlive.com or Groton High School | High School Sports | Home | Hudl
(fan.hudl.com/usa/sd/groton/organization/12097/groton-high-school)

Thank you,
Alexa Sperry, Athletic Director
Alexa.Sperry@k12.sd.us / 605-380-7887



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Statewide groundwater recharge requirement fails in House

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

South Dakota lawmakers on Monday defeated a bill that would have tightened limits on groundwater pumping by eliminating an exception for some deep aquifers.

The vote in the House of Representatives was 16-49.

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

Odenbach told fellow representatives he brought the bill after increased population growth in western South Dakota raised local concerns about whether the state is adequately tracking drawdowns from Black Hills area aquifers.

Opponents, however, said the bill risked creating practical and financial problems for public water providers that rely on those aquifers, where recharge is difficult to estimate with precision. They cited uncertainty with the science, warning that eliminating the exception could force additional study and expensive monitoring wells. That could cause delays for growing communities.

Rep. Kent Roe, R-Hayti, said "the Greenhorn exception does not allow over-appropriation. It simply recognizes the legitimate scientific uncertainties in estimating recharge rates for these deep, complex, bedrock aquifers."

"The exception uses the word 'may approve,' not 'shall,' meaning it's never automatic," he said.

The bill had advanced out of the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee on a 9-4 vote last week.

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.

Bills to loosen gun restrictions fail in SD committee after on-target questions from lawmaker

BY: SETH TUPPER

PIERRE — A pair of questions that struck the bullseye contributed to a South Dakota legislative committee's uncharacteristic rejection of two bills to roll back concealed gun laws Monday at the state Capitol.

The first bill would have relieved college students of the requirement to obtain a permit before carrying a concealed pistol on campus.

The questions came from House Education Committee member Jim Halverson, R-Winner, who opposed the bill. He directed the questions to Nathan Lukkes, who testified against the legislation.

Lukkes is the executive director and CEO of the Board of Regents, which oversees the state's public universities. He said during his testimony that he's taken the handgun training course required to obtain a permit, which includes shooting dozens of rounds.

Halverson wanted to know more about that.

"You've been through this course twice, you say, and you've been there when other people have been

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there doing the same thing," Halverson said. "As they have started out, did they all hit the target right away?"

"Representative, no," Lukkes said, causing laughter to erupt from the large audience in the committee room. "There's a wide disparity of contact with the target as you work through the live-fire training exercise, with the different experiences and levels of understanding and exposure to firearms of individuals taking the course."

Halverson wasn't finished.

"So," he continued, "if we take this enhanced permit away, will that automatically guarantee that these people that are carrying on campus that now have a permit — or don't — they're automatically going to be really good shooters?"

"Representative," Lukkes answered, "this is one person's opinion, but I would say no."

More laughter broke out from the audience after that response. The exchange illustrated Halverson's point about the dangers of people carrying and shooting guns on college campuses, and also carried the weight of the two men's experiences handling guns. Halverson is a former state Highway Patrol trooper, and Lukkes served 10 years in the Army National Guard, including a deployment to Afghanistan.

The legislation, from Rep. Dylan Jordan, R-Clear Lake, would have allowed college students to carry a concealed handgun without an enhanced or restricted-enhanced permit from the South Dakota Secretary of State's Office. The qualifications include being at least 18 years old for the restricted-enhanced permit, or 21 for the enhanced permit, and completing a handgun course and passing a criminal background check.

Concealed carrying was not allowed on college campuses in South Dakota until last year, when the Legislature and Gov. Larry Rhoden adopted a law allowing it for permit holders (over the objections of Halverson, who voted no). The Republican-dominated Legislature also repealed the ban on concealed carrying in bars last year, and this year has already sent to the governor for his consideration a bill that would deregulate silencers.

Concealed carrying is generally allowed without a permit in South Dakota except in places where a permit and notice are required, such as the state Capitol, or in places where only approved people are allowed to carry guns, such as courthouses and schools.

During Jordan's testimony, he said college students have a "God-given right to defend themselves" that should not be limited by a permit.

Opponents of the bill said the permit requirement is reasonable and ensures people who carry concealed weapons on a campus have training. That argument prevailed, and the committee voted 9-6 to defeat the bill.

The committee also rejected a bill from Rep. Kathy Rice, R-Black Hawk, that would have allowed any school employee 21 or older with an enhanced permit to carry or securely store a concealed pistol on school grounds after notifying local law enforcement, and would have relieved school districts of liability for any "damages or penalties resulting from the use of a firearm" by such an employee.

Opponents said the bill's lack of notification to school officials would make schools more dangerous, and attempting to relieve schools of their liability for gun-carrying employees would be ineffective and unwise. Schools can already create a sentinel program that allows trained people to carry guns, and state law also already allows people 21 and older with an enhanced permit to carry a gun on school grounds with written permission from a superintendent or other person in charge.

As it was becoming clear Rice's bill was headed for defeat, Jordan commented that "I didn't know I was in Minnesota's Education Committee" — a reference to the larger Democratic contingent in that state's Legislature.

Jordan's comment drew a point-of-order complaint from fellow committee member Amber Arlint, R-Sioux Falls, regarding the committee's decorum rules. Committee Chairwoman Lana Greenfield, R-Doland, agreed and ruled Jordan out of order. The committee then voted 12-3 to reject Rice's bill.

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

South Dakota lawmakers not ready to call emergency medical services 'essential'

State Senate panel creates task force to study ambulance funding

BY: JOHN HULT

South Dakota doesn't recognize emergency medical services as essential under state law, and that wouldn't change under an ambulance bill passed Monday by a state Senate panel.

A legal designation of "essential" in this case would have put the onus on state or local units of government to guarantee availability. A legislator-led summer study on emergency medical services concluded that the state ought to add the designation to state law, but the Senate Health and Human Services Committee struck a clause that would have added that designation from Senate Bill 89 in its first hearing at the state capitol.

"We're not ready to designate emergency medical services as essential — yet," said Sen. Tim Reed, R-Brookings, prime sponsor of the bill and chairman of the 2025 emergency medical services summer study.

As written, the bill would've required counties or municipalities to make sure "a minimum level of emergency medical service is available within its jurisdiction for prehospital emergency medical treatment and transport."

Need spurs legislation

Ambulance services function as essential at the moment, lawmakers learned during the 2025 summer study, but there's no guarantee it always will. Most emergency medical technicians in South Dakota are volunteers. Their average age is 52, and the level of training now required makes it difficult to find volunteers willing to commit to it without compensation, study group members heard.

Reimbursements for services often don't cover the cost, and rural ambulance services struggle to keep up with expenses as a result. A 2023 consultant's report to the state Department of Health recommended state funding for ambulance services.

That same report said the state faces consistent shortages in emergency medical staff in rural areas. It recommended allowing ambulance services to use drivers without advanced medical training, rather than two EMTs, and encouraged volunteer services to engage with business owners to encourage paid time off for training.

Current law requires drivers to either be EMTs or have advanced training and certifications from the state to respond to calls.

The Legislature has already advanced two bills meant to address workforce issues. House Bill 1024 lets police officers, firefighters or drivers trained in CPR and emergency vehicle operations to drive ambulances. House Bill 1023 allows registered nurses or people with advanced life saving training to respond to emergency medical calls.

Both bills have passed the full House of Representatives and await hearings in the Senate.

Supporters: Funding first

During Monday's hearing on SB 89, health committee members heard similar testimony.

Brian Hambek, who leads Spearfish Ambulance Services and is president of the South Dakota Ambulance Association, told the committee that the state's gone from 131 ambulance services to 121 in the past 10 years.

"We can't make it with the funding we have right now," said Brian Hambek, who leads Spearfish Emergency Ambulance Services and is president of the South Dakota Ambulance Association.

EMS is essential, Hambek said, but "listing us as an essential service without funding to back it is useless."

The state doesn't have a plan to pay yet, Reed said, as he asked for and received support to strike the "essential service" verbiage from his bill. Counties in particular are already overburdened by "unfunded mandates" in other areas and struggle to keep budgets in the black, Reed said.

"We probably got the cart in front of the horse," Reed said.

The amended bill takes an important step toward essential service recognition, according to Rosebud Democratic Rep. Eric Emery, who works in emergency medical services. Like Reed, he was a member of the 2025 legislative summer study group that heard testimony from emergency medical services leaders around the state and endorsed the original version of SB 89 and the bills on ambulance staffing.

The task force, the bill says, will "examine funding mechanisms to support counties and municipalities in the provision of emergency medical services as an essential service."

Emery brought a bill in 2025 to designate ambulance services as essential and to collect fees from convicted drunken drivers to pay for it. That bill, which failed, "started an important discussion" that needs to continue with the funding task force, he said.

"Ultimately, Senate Bill 89 acknowledges a simple truth," Emery said. "South Dakotans already rely on EMS as an essential service, and it's the responsibility of the legislature to make sure that infrastructure is sustainable."

The amended bill passed unanimously out of the Health and Human Services Committee and now moves to the full Senate.

John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux Falls Argus Leader.

Temporary legal status allowed for now for 350,000 Haitians as judge blasts Kristi Noem

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA

WASHINGTON — A federal judge late Monday blocked the termination of temporary protections for roughly 350,000 Haitians from taking effect, a move that prevents the Trump administration from acting to deport them as litigation continues.

In a searing 83-page order, District of Columbia federal Judge Ana C. Reyes found that Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem does not have "unbounded discretion" to terminate Temporary Protected Status for Haiti and rejected the Trump administration's arguments that ending the status is in the public interest.

"Secretary Noem complains of strains unlawful immigrants place on our immigration-enforcement system. Her answer? Turn 352,959 lawful immigrants into unlawful immigrants overnight," Reyes wrote. "She complains of strains to our economy. Her answer? Turn employed lawful immigrants who contribute billions in taxes into the legally unemployable. This approach is many things—in the public interest is not one of them."

The decision came the day before hundreds of thousands of Haitians were at risk of losing their work permits and deportation protections, opening them up to removal.

The Trump administration has moved to strip the legal status of immigrants, as many as 1.5 million, by ending the TPS designation and revoking humanitarian protections initially granted under the Biden administration. So far, Noem has ended TPS for 12 countries.

Other judges found Noem overreached

Reyes said the Trump administration would face no harm by allowing TPS recipients from Haiti to keep their legal status while they challenge Noem's move to end their status.

Last year, Noem initially tried to remove extended protections for TPS holders from Haiti granted under the Biden administration, which meant protections would end by August. But several judges found that move from Noem an overreach of her authority.

TPS is usually granted for 18 months to nationals who hail from a country deemed too dangerous to return to due to violence and instability.

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In her order, Reyes cited contradictions by the Trump administration in its attempts to end TPS for Haiti. She pointed to Noem's argument that conditions in Haiti have improved, but at the same time the State Department has a "do not travel" advisory for Haiti because of violence.

There has been escalating gang violence in Haiti since the assassination of the country's president in 2021. "There is an old adage among lawyers. If you have the facts on your side, pound the facts. If you have the law on your side, pound the law. If you have neither, pound the table," Reyes wrote. "Secretary Noem, the record to-date shows, does not have the facts on her side—or at least has ignored them. Does not have the law on her side—or at least has ignored it. Having neither and bringing the adage into the 21st century, she pounds X (f/k/a Twitter)."

Reyes was nominated by former President Joe Biden.

'Hostility to nonwhite immigrants'

Reyes added that one of the arguments from the plaintiffs – Haitian TPS recipients – that Noem "pre-ordained her termination decision and did so because of hostility to nonwhite immigrants," is likely substantial.

Reyes also pointed to the 2024 presidential campaign, where President Donald Trump and Vice President JD Vance spread false rumors claiming Haitians in Springfield, Ohio, ate residents' pets.

In her order, she said Trump referred to those Haitians with TPS as being in the country without legal authorization, despite their legal status, and recalled how the president vowed to revoke "Haiti's TPS designation and send them back to their country."

There are five Haitian TPS recipients who are plaintiffs in the case. They argued that Noem violated the Administrative Procedure Act, the process of how agencies issue regulations, by ending TPS for Haiti.

Those recipients include Fritz Emmanuel Lesly Miot, who is a neuroscientist researching Alzheimer's disease who has had TPS since 2011; Rudolph Civil, a software engineer at a national bank who was granted TPS in 2010; Marlene Gail Noble, a laboratory assistant in a toxicology department who's been a TPS recipient since 2024; Marica Merline Laguerre, an economics major at Hunter College and a TPS holder since 2010; and Vilbrun Dorsainvil, a full-time registered nurse and TPS holder since 2021.

A reprieve

This is not the first time the Trump administration has tried to end the TPS designation for Haiti, but the courts blocked those attempts in 2018.

Monday's decision came as a brief relief for immigrants and advocates in Springfield, Ohio.

"This 11th hour reprieve is, of course, welcome," Ohio Immigrant Alliance Executive Director Lynn Tramonte said in a statement. "But people can't live their lives like this, pegging their families' futures to a court case. The least this country can do is honor their strength and contributions by giving them a permanent home."

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

Noem: Body cameras to be deployed to immigration agents, starting in Minneapolis

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA

WASHINGTON — Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem announced Monday that body cameras would be given to federal immigration agents across the country, starting in Minneapolis, where two U.S. citizens were shot and killed by agents in the Trump administration's immigration crackdown.

"As funding is available, the body camera program will be expanded nationwide," she wrote on social

media. "We will rapidly acquire and deploy body cameras to DHS law enforcement across the country."

Noem did not specifically say agents would be required to wear the cameras.

President Donald Trump said he was supportive of the move, according to White House pool reports.

"It wasn't my decision," he said. "I leave it to her. It tends to be good for law enforcement, because people can't lie about what happened."

The announcement comes amid a partial government shutdown by congressional Democrats who are pushing to change immigration enforcement operations across the country. One of those proposed policy changes is a requirement for federal immigration officers to wear body cameras.

Democrats have also called for Noem to resign or be impeached after a second Minneapolis resident was shot and killed on Jan. 24 by federal immigration agents, 37-year-old intensive care unit nurse Alex Pretti. On Jan. 7, Renee Good, a poet and mother of three, was killed by federal immigration agent Jonathan Ross.

Even without approved funding in the Homeland Security appropriations bill, the agency still has roughly \$175 billion in funding for immigration enforcement from the massive tax cuts and spending package passed last year.

In the fiscal year 2026 appropriations bill for Homeland Security, \$20 million was set aside for body cameras for immigration agents. That measure would be the subject of two weeks of negotiations under the spending package under consideration in the House.

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

US Education Department paid up to \$38M to civil rights workers on leave, watchdog says

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Education exhausted millions in taxpayer dollars trying to eliminate a chunk of its Office for Civil Rights, a government watchdog found in a report released Monday.

The department spent between roughly \$28.5 million and \$38 million on the salaries and benefits of the hundreds of Office for Civil Rights, or OCR, employees who were not working between March and December 2025, according to a Government Accountability Office report.

OCR employees — tasked with investigating civil rights complaints from students and families — were targeted in March as part of a larger Reduction in Force, or RIF, effort at the department and placed on paid administrative leave while legal challenges against President Donald Trump's administration unfolded.

Amid a mounting backlog of discrimination complaints, the department said in December it would be bringing back the affected employees. The agency moved to rescind the RIFs against the OCR employees in early January while legal challenges proceeded.

Complaints resolved

The department resolved more than 7,000 of the over 9,000 discrimination complaints it received between March and September, GAO, an independent, nonpartisan body that reports to Congress, said.

However, roughly 90% of the resolved complaints were due to the department dismissing the complaint, the watchdog found. The dismissal rate ranged from 49% to 81% during academic years in the 2010s, GAO found in a 2021 report.

The department "has not made complete information publicly available about potential costs and has not made any information available about potential savings associated with its OCR RIF actions," GAO said, calling on the agency to provide those estimates and document its analysis.

Trump has taken significant steps to try to dismantle the 46-year-old department as part of his quest to move education "back to the states."

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In response to a draft of the report, Kimberly Richey, the assistant secretary for OCR, said the matter is rendered "moot" because the agency brought OCR employees back to work in December and rescinded the RIFs.

"We do not concur with the recommendation," Richey wrote.

'Unacceptable'

U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders, who requested the GAO report, blasted the millions of dollars the department spent as "unacceptable" in a Monday statement.

"Every child in America should be able to get a good education no matter where they live, what their religious beliefs are or whether or not they have a disability," said the Vermont independent, who serves as ranking member of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions.

"Instead, the Trump administration fired half of the Education Department employees working to protect the civil rights of students and wasted as much as \$38 million in taxpayer dollars by preventing investigators from doing their jobs," he added.

Rachel Gittleman, president of American Federation of Government Employees Local 252, which represents Education Department workers, said that "instead of following court orders and federal law, the Trump Administration chose to keep these civil rights professionals on paid administrative leave rather than letting them do their jobs, while students, families, and schools paid the price."

Gittleman added that Education Secretary Linda McMahon "has made clear that she would rather play politics than uphold her responsibility to protect students' rights," and "her actions have undermined the Department's mission, harmed families, and subjected dedicated federal employees to needless uncertainty, abuse, and harassment."

The department did not immediately respond to a request for comment Monday.

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

Trump urges US House to avert 'another long, pointless and destructive' shutdown

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT AND ARIANA FIGUEROA

WASHINGTON — The U.S. House is expected to vote as soon as Tuesday on the government funding package that will end the ongoing partial government shutdown once it becomes law.

The Senate voted Friday evening to approve the legislation after President Donald Trump and Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., brokered a deal to remove the full-year appropriations bill for the Department of Homeland Security and replace it with a two-week stopgap. But the partial shutdown began early Saturday morning because the House had not yet acted on the same measure.

The additional time is supposed to give Republicans and Democrats more leeway to broker a deal on constraints to immigration enforcement after federal officers shot and killed two U.S. citizens in Minnesota within the last month.

Trump wrote in a social media post that lawmakers in the House need to accept the package cannot change further.

"I am working hard with Speaker Johnson to get the current funding deal, which passed in the Senate last week, through the House and to my desk, where I will sign it into Law, IMMEDIATELY!" Trump wrote. "We need to get the Government open, and I hope all Republicans and Democrats will join me in supporting this Bill, and send it to my desk WITHOUT DELAY. There can be NO CHANGES at this time. We will work together in good faith to address the issues that have been raised, but we cannot have another long, pointless, and destructive Shutdown that will hurt our Country so badly — One that will not benefit Republicans or Democrats. I hope everyone will vote, YES!"

House Speaker Mike Johnson said during a Sunday interview on the Fox News show "Fox and Friends" that he was confident lawmakers would approve the funding package Tuesday.

"I don't understand why anybody would have a problem with this, though. Remember, these are the bills that have already been passed, we're going to do it again," the Louisiana Republican said.

The House voted in January to approve two separate bundles of appropriations bills and to pass the full-year Homeland Security bill before sending all six government funding bills to the Senate as one package.

The other six annual government spending bills have already become law.

Johnson added during the interview that negotiations between the president and Senate Democrats were an important step.

"I think there's some healthy conversations in good faith that'll be had over the next couple of days, and I look forward to that," he said.

Some of those policy negotiations that Senate Democrats are unified on include the banning of unidentified and masked federal immigration agents, requiring the use of body cameras and the end of roving patrols, among other things.

But House Democrats on the Homeland Security Committee on Sunday issued a letter, urging their caucus to reject funding for DHS.

"Democrats must act now to demand real changes that protect our communities before Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) receive another dollar in funding," they wrote. "This is what our constituents elected us to do – to hold ICE and this administration accountable when they fail to adhere to the Constitution or follow the law."

In the letter, House Democrats are pushing for the Trump administration to end the months-long immigration operation in Minneapolis and requiring immigration agents to get judicial warrants, among other things.

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

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

Judge blocks DHS policy to keep House Dems from visiting detention facilities unannounced

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA

WASHINGTON — A federal judge on Monday temporarily blocked a Trump administration policy that prevented members of Congress from making unannounced oversight visits at facilities that hold immigrants.

The temporary restraining order from U.S. District Judge Jia Cobb of District of Columbia federal court blocked a seven-day notice requirement that Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem established earlier this month. The order allows congressional Democrats to access facilities that are central to the national debate over President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown.

"The Court's decision today to grant a temporary restraining order against ICE's unlawful effort to obstruct congressional oversight is a victory for the American people," Colorado Democratic Rep. Joe Neguse, who is the lead plaintiff in the case, said in a statement. "We will keep fighting to ensure the rule of law prevails."

Noem issued the policy Jan. 8, one day after federal immigration officer Jonathan Ross shot and killed 37-year-old Renee Good in Minneapolis, the site of an aggressive immigration operation for nearly two months.

A second Minneapolis resident, 37-year-old Alex Pretti, was shot and killed by a Customs and Border Protection officer and Border Patrol agent on Jan. 24.

Following the Jan. 7 shooting, U.S. House Democrats from Minnesota tried to conduct unannounced oversight visits at a Department of Homeland Security facility that held immigrants, as allowed under a

2019 appropriations law. Democrats have argued the notice policies issued by Noem violate that appropriations law.

Noem argued the notice policy was acceptable, despite the spending law, because the facilities were funded through the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act," not an appropriations law, and were therefore exempt from the unannounced oversight visit policy.

Cobb rejected that argument, for now, while the case continues, saying the administration had not shown how the department could effectively separate the funds from each law. Cobb said the argument raised "practical challenges."

"Perhaps reflecting that difficulty, Defendants have not seriously attempted to argue that DHS and ICE ensured that only OBBBA-funded resources were used before promulgating and first implementing the January 8 policy," she wrote.

A dozen Democratic lawmakers brought the suit in July, after DHS created a seven-day notice policy to visit a facility where immigrants are detained. In the filing, lawmakers argued that DHS overreached its authority in creating the policy and that it violated a 2019 appropriations law.

Cobb in December also issued a temporary block on that policy.

The House Democrats who sued include Neguse, Adriano Espaillat of New York, Jamie Raskin of Maryland, Robert Garcia of California, J. Luis Correa of California, Jason Crow of Colorado, Veronica Escobar of Texas, Dan Goldman of New York, Jimmy Gomez of California, Raul Ruiz of California, Bennie Thompson of Mississippi and Norma Torres of California.

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

Planned Parenthood ends suit against Trump administration over serving Medicaid patients

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — A federal judge on Monday closed the lawsuit Planned Parenthood filed last summer after Republicans' "big, beautiful" law blocked Medicaid patients from visiting its clinics for any health care appointments for one year.

Planned Parenthood filed notice with the court Friday that it had dismissed "without prejudice all claims against" the Trump administration in the case. Massachusetts District Court Judge Indira Talwani issued an electronic order Monday closing the case "Pursuant to Plaintiffs' Notice of Voluntary Dismissal without Prejudice."

The law prevents people on Medicaid from being seen at Planned Parenthood facilities through early July, when the one-year period would expire.

Planned Parenthood Federation of America President and CEO Alexis McGill Johnson wrote in a statement released last week that President Donald Trump "and his allies in Congress have weaponized the federal government to target Planned Parenthood at the expense of patients — stripping people of the care they rely on.

"Through every attack, Planned Parenthood has never lost sight of its focus: ensuring patients can get the care they need from the provider they trust. That will never change. Care continues, as does our commitment to fighting for everyone's freedom to make their own decisions about their bodies, lives, and futures."

The Department of Justice did not immediately respond to a request for comment from States Newsroom.

Talwani originally ruled for Planned Parenthood in the case, temporarily blocking the defunding provision from taking effect. But an appeals court later overturned that decision, allowing the Trump administration to legally withhold Medicaid funding from going to Planned Parenthood.

Talwani was nominated by former President Barack Obama.

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The provision in Republicans' "big, beautiful" law that blocks all Medicaid funding from going to Planned Parenthood was originally slated to last for a decade, but the final version covered one year.

Federal law for decades has barred spending from covering abortions with limited exceptions for rape, incest, or the woman's life.

So the new language prevented Medicaid patients from scheduling appointments at Planned Parenthood for other types of health care, like annual physicals, cancer screenings, or birth control appointments.

Shireen Ghorbani, president and CEO of Planned Parenthood Association of Utah, which filed the lawsuit along with Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts and Planned Parenthood Federation of America, wrote in a statement that its health care providers would "continue to see patients and deliver on our mission to provide high-quality care and education to everyone who needs it, no matter where they live or how much money they make."

A Planned Parenthood spokesperson, who did not want to comment on the record, said that certain clinics may choose to cover the cost of treating Medicaid patients, even though the clinic will not receive reimbursement from the federal government under the law.

Angela Vasquez-Giroux, vice president of communications at Planned Parenthood Federation of America, wrote in a statement that the organization's "health centers initially shielded the overwhelming majority of patients who rely on Medicaid from the harm of this cruel law. Unfortunately, the consequences for patients will worsen considerably over time as health centers close, costs rise, and access to their trusted provider is pushed further out of reach."

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

Committee advances bill that would tighten candidate deadlines for upcoming election

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER

South Dakotans hoping to run in the June primary election this year could have less time to circulate their nominating petitions, based on a bill making its way through the legislative process.

Rep. Rebecca Reimer, R-Chamberlain, introduced a bill that would change the nominating petition deadline to the third Tuesday in March, rather than various dates currently in statute, including March 31 for some candidates.

A nominating petition signed by registered voters is required for local and statewide South Dakota candidates to get on the ballot, with signature thresholds varying by position. Prospective candidates can begin circulating petitions in January.

"South Dakota gives petitioners more time to collect signatures than it allows the election workers to prepare for the election and create a ballot," Reimer said.

County auditors, under the current law, would have 17 days this year to prepare a ballot between the end of the petition deadline and the start of early voting for the June election. March ends on a Tuesday this year, and Easter further complicates the timing, election officials said.

The bill was originally heard by the House State Affairs Committee on Wednesday before being deferred to Monday.

Christine Lehrkamp, director of elections for the South Dakota Secretary of State's Office, told lawmakers at the bill's original committee hearing that it is an attempt to remedy "unintended consequences" from a law adopted last year that required local governments hold elections on the same day as the primary or general election.

Kathy Glines, Harding County auditor, told lawmakers at the original hearing that the tight turnaround between petition filing and ballot printing impacts candidates and the "constitutional right of our voters."

"There's a 99.99% chance we won't meet the deadlines this year for the June election. That's disturbing," Glines said.

The bill would use an emergency clause to become law immediately, rather than becoming law on July

1, which is the usual effective date of legislation. The Secretary of State's Office will inform candidates of the change via press release if the bill passes the Legislature, Lehrkamp said.

House Speaker Jon Hansen, R-Dell Rapids, voted against the bill. He said the calendar "crunch" this year won't be as dramatic in the next few elections.

"I think that can open up a real unfairness and injustice to people if they tried submitting in that final week," Hansen said on Monday.

Hansen said earlier in the session that the "real solution" would be to cut absentee voting from 45 to 30 days.

Lawmakers on the House State Affairs Committee approved the bill in a 7-5 vote. It'll head to the House floor next.

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.

Bills cracking down on abortion pills advance in states that already ban most abortions

BY: ELISHA BROWN

Even though many legislative sessions only just convened across the country this month, efforts to restrict access to abortion pills are in full swing, particularly in states that already ban abortion.

Nearly 200 anti-abortion bills have been introduced in 29 states, according to an estimate by the Guttmacher Institute, a reproductive health research organization.

"In 2026, medication abortion remains one of the central battlegrounds in the fight over reproductive autonomy, with policymakers in several states pushing bills that would criminalize patients, restrict telehealth and mailing, and even misclassify abortion pills as controlled substances or environmental hazards," Kimya Forouzan, Guttmacher's principal policy adviser for state issues, said in a statement.

Some measures targeting abortion medication, including proposals in Arizona and Missouri, have not moved past introduction or beyond referral to initial committees. But lawmakers in Republican strongholds like Indiana and South Carolina have advanced bills that would allow residents to sue providers and manufacturers of mifepristone and misoprostol, key abortion drugs, for sending abortion pills into the state.

Those efforts echo laws passed in Texas and Louisiana that come with \$100,000 payouts if plaintiffs are successful in court. Leaders in states that ban abortions have been clear that the intent behind these measures is to thwart the availability of abortion drugs, States Newsroom reported.

Our reproductive rights reporting team will be tracking abortion-related bills through biweekly roundups as sessions continue this winter and into the spring. Depending on the partisan makeup of a state's legislature and other state government officials, some bills have a higher chance of passing and becoming law than others.

Efforts to restrict abortion pills in GOP-led states

Indiana

Senate Bill 236: The proposal would allow Indiana residents to sue anyone — providers, manufacturers and distributors — involved in sending abortion medication into the state and let plaintiffs collect at least \$100,000 if a claim proves successful in court. If a claimant cannot identify the manufacturer of the abortion drug, that person can sue all abortion drugmakers by pursuing wrongful death or injury claims for fetuses and pregnant people, Indiana Capital Chronicle reported.

The law would carry a 20-year statute of limitations. Women who took abortion pills and mail carriers could not be sued, and the use of the medication in other scenarios, such as miscarriage, would be permitted under the law. The bill also empowers the state's attorney general to pursue litigation for violating

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the legislation.

Other abortion-related provisions in the bill include legally redefining abortion — treatment for miscarriages and ectopic pregnancies would no longer be considered abortion procedures. The measure would require providers to submit to the state health department information about the age, race, sex and location of patients who sought care after abortions. The main sponsor of the bill tweaked language that would have originally made that information publicly available, Capital Chronicle reported.

Status: Approved by the Senate on Tuesday and referred to the House on Thursday

Sponsor: Republican Sen. Tyler Johnson

South Carolina

House Bill 4760: This bill would classify mifepristone and misoprostol as controlled dangerous substances, making them legal only by prescription. People who violate the law could face up to five years in prison, a \$5,000 fine or both, SC Daily Gazette reported. Pregnant women would be exempted from prosecution.

The legislation would also allow prospective parents and other relatives to sue manufacturers, providers and distributors of abortion pills if use of the drug causes harm to the mother or fetus. Relatives have three years to bring that claim, but a specific payout isn't mentioned.

Sponsor: Republican Rep. Weston Newton

Status: In House Judiciary Committee

Fetal personhood proposal clears Florida House

House Bill 289/Senate Bill 164: The legislation would allow prospective parents to sue providers for the wrongful death of fetuses, embryos and fertilized eggs, Florida Phoenix reported. Would-be parents could seek monetary damages for emotional distress and the fetuses' potential salary if they had been born.

Sponsors: Rep. Sam Greco and Sen. Erin Grall, Republicans

Status: House approved on Jan. 15, in the Senate Rules committee

Bills requiring students to watch fetal development videos advance

Florida

House Bill 1071: An education bill that bans schools from spending money on diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives would also require students to learn about "human embryological and fetal development," Florida Phoenix reported. Children in grades six through 12 would view a video about the development of fetal organs and another video about conception and human development.

Sponsor: Republican Rep. Dana Trabulsi

Status: Advanced in the House PreK-12 Budget Subcommittee on Thursday, in the chamber's Education and Employment Committee

Wisconsin

Senate Bill 371: The measure would require school districts to screen videos about human growth and development, particularly the fertilization process, Wisconsin Examiner reported. The bill is backed by the state's major anti-abortion groups, including Wisconsin Catholic Conference, Pro-Life Wisconsin and Wisconsin Right to Life.

Sponsor: Republican Sen. Mary Felzkowski

Status: The Senate approved the bill on Jan. 21, and the Assembly concurred on Jan. 22; on Democratic Gov. Tony Evers' desk

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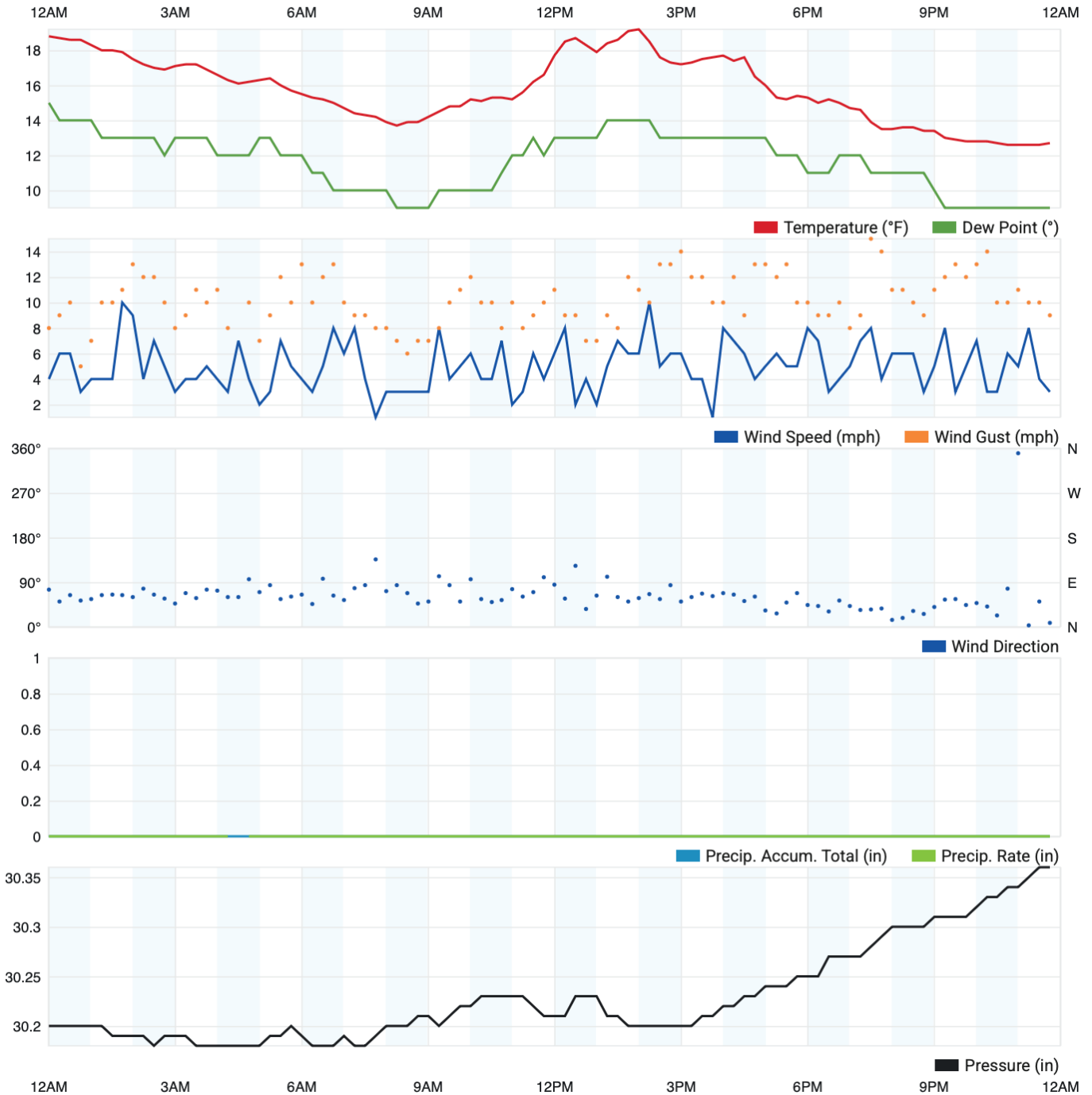
Elisha Brown is the Reproductive Rights Today newsletter author at States Newsroom. She is based in Durham, North Carolina, where she previously worked as a reporter covering reproductive rights, policy, and inequality for Facing South. Her work has appeared in The New York Times, The Daily Beast, The Atlantic, and Vox. She attended American University in Washington, D.C. and was raised in South Carolina.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

February 2, 2026



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Tuesday

Tuesday Night

Wednesday

Wednesday
Night

Thursday



20%

High: 25 °F

Slight Chance
Snow then
Mostly Cloudy



30%

Low: 18 °F

Chance Snow



High: 32 °F

Partly Sunny



Low: 24 °F

Mostly Cloudy



High: 46 °F

Mostly Sunny



Off and On Light Snow Today/Tonight

February 3, 2026
2:42 AM CST

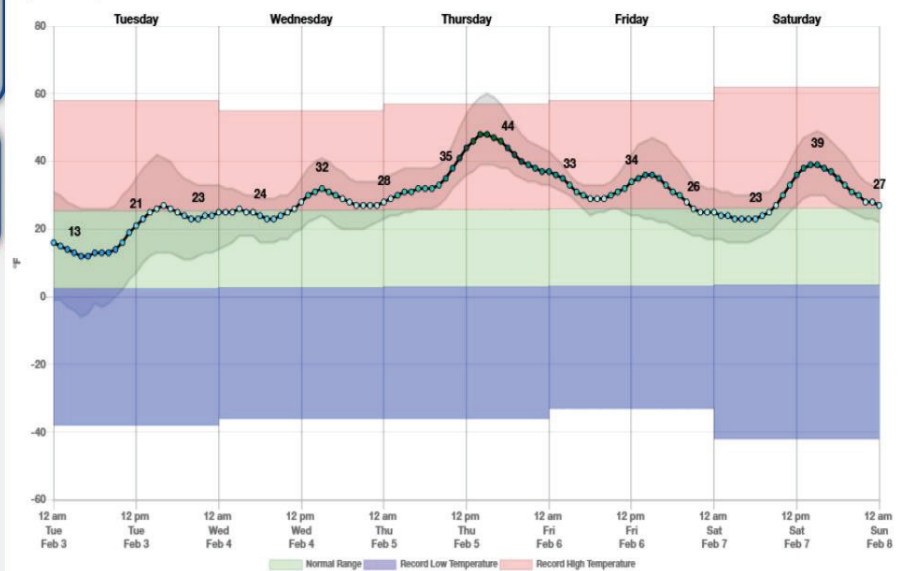
Clouds sticking around till at least Wednesday

- Light Snow Showers Across The Area Today/Tonight
 - Dusting to ½" Accumulation

- Milder Temperatures Incoming
Warmer = Central South Dakota
Cooler = Far Northeast SD



Regional Temperature Forecast



Low clouds and off and on light snow will stick around today, but milder and dry weather is on the way!

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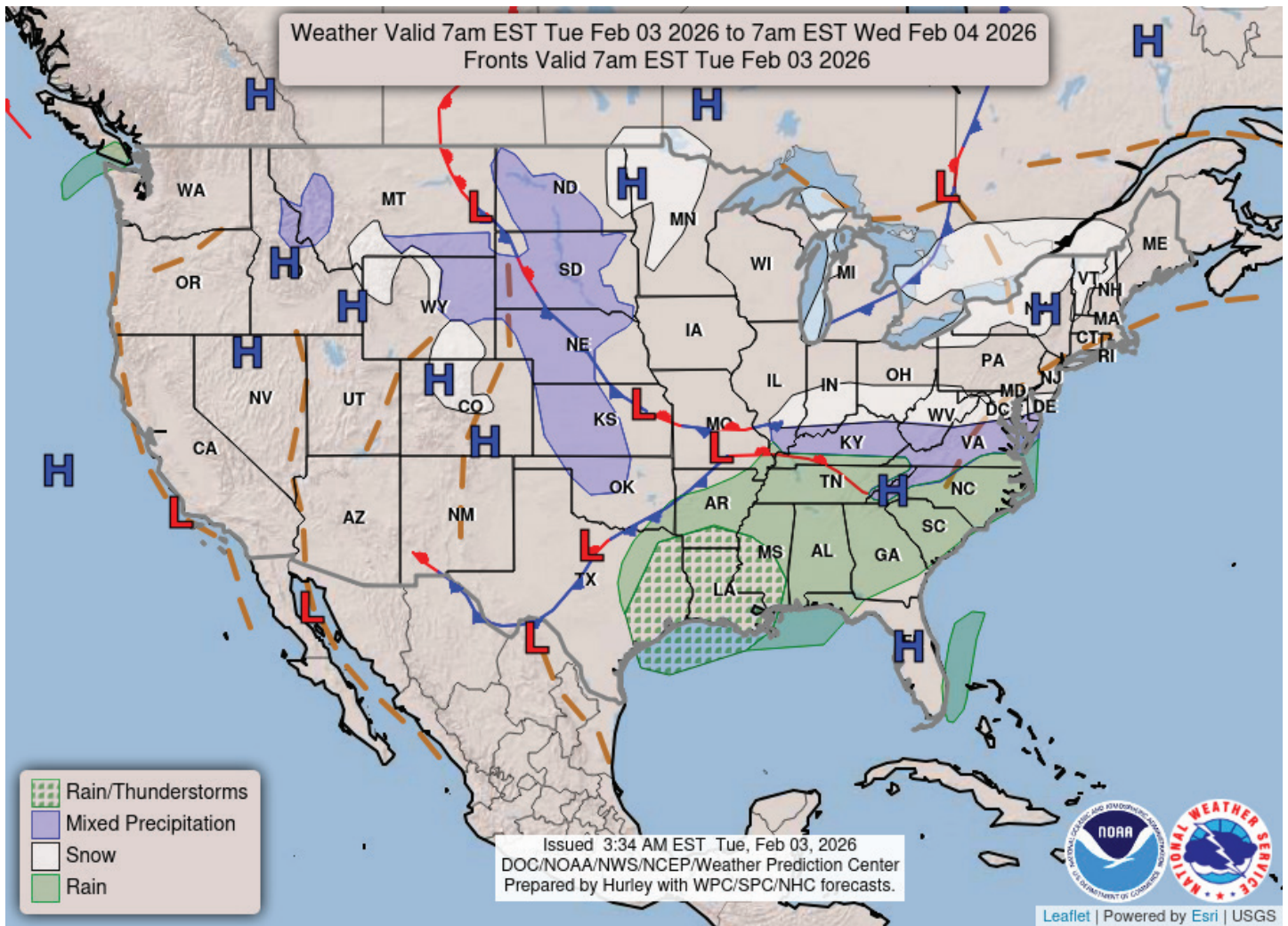
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 20 °F at 1:54 PM
Low Temp: 12 °F at 10:53 PM
Wind: 16 mph at 7:34 PM
Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 58 in 1991
Record Low: -38 in 1893
Average High: 25
Average Low: 3
Average Precip in Feb.: 0.08
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 0.61
Precip Year to Date: 0.00
Sunset Tonight: 5:41 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:49 am



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Today in Weather History

February 3, 1997: A winter storm dropped from 6 to 15 inches of snow across central and northeast South Dakota and west-central Minnesota, deepening the already expansive snowpack. The wind came up from the north at 20 to 30 mph during the morning of the 4th, causing blowing and drifting snow blocking some roads, and making travel hazardous if not impossible. Several vehicles got stuck or went off the road. Due to the massive snowfall, a roof collapsed in Aberdeen, damaging a car. Many schools started late or were canceled, adding to the number of days missed for the season. Some snowfall amounts included 5 inches at Wheaton, 6 inches at Britton, Summit, Webster, Browns Valley, Artichoke Lake, and Ortonville, 7 inches at Aberdeen, 6 SE McIntosh, Pollock, Timber Lake, 8 inches at Leola, Ipswich, Eagle Butte, and Gettysburg, 9 inches at Miller and Mellette, 10 inches at Mobridge, Watertown, Clear Lake, Pierre, Kennebec, and Onida, and 11 inches at Clark and Blunt. Snowfall amounts of a foot or more included 12 inches at Highmore, Bryant, and Gann Valley, 13 inches at Faulkton, 14 inches at 23 N Highmore and Murdo, and 15 inches at 1 SE Stephan.

1844: Boston Harbor was so thick with ice on this date that a channel had to be cut through the ice for the "Britannia" ship to leave with 30,000 letters for England.

1917 — Downtown Miami, FL, reported an all-time record low of 27 degrees. (David Ludlum)

1947: The record-low temperature for continental North America was recorded in Snag in the Yukon Territory, Canada. The temperature was 81.4 degrees below zero.

1959: At 12:55 am Central Time, a plane took off from runway 17 at the Mason City, Iowa airport, carrying the lives of Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, and J. P. "The Big Bopper" Richardson. At the time of departure, the weather was reported as light snow, a ceiling of 3,000 feet with sky obscured, visibility 6 miles, and winds from 20 to 30 mph. At around 9:35 am, Hubert Jerry Dwyer spotted the wreckage less than 6 miles northwest of the airport. The three musicians and the pilot died from this crash.

1987 — Wintry weather was confined to freezing drizzle and light snow in the northeastern U.S., and light rain and snow in the western U.S. (The National Weather Summary)

1988: Arctic air continued to invade the central U.S. The temperature at Midland, Texas, plunged from a record high of 80 degrees to 37 degrees in just three hours. Morning lows in the higher elevations of Wyoming were as cold as 38 degrees below zero. Heavy snow blanketed southwestern Colorado, with 16 inches reported at Steamboat Springs.

1989 — A winter storm brought heavy snow and high winds to the western U.S. Up to three feet of snow blanketed the Sierra Nevada of California, and buried parts of northeastern Washington State under three feet of snow in five days. High winds across Washington State reached 75 mph, with gusts to 105 mph. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 — Severe cold gripped the north central U.S. The morning low of 29 degrees below zero at Casper WY was a record for the month of February. Wisdom MT hit 53 degrees below zero. Missoula MT reported a wind chill reading of 85 degrees below zero. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 — Thunderstorms developing ahead of a cold front produced severe weather over the central Gulf coast states during the afternoon and evening hours. Thunderstorms spawned seven tornadoes in Alabama, including one which touched down north of Birmingham injuring fifteen people and causing nearly three million dollars damage. A tornado at Margaret injured eleven persons and caused a million dollars damage. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)



Service Is an Acknowledgment

Each follower of Christ is called to serve.

Psalms 100:1-2: 1 Shout joyfully to the LORD, all the earth.

2 Serve the LORD with gladness; Come before Him with joyful singing.

Who is a servant of God? We are! Some people think that believers are separated into two groups: servants (individuals in full-time ministry) and laypeople. The Bible makes no such distinction. Instead, Paul—a tentmaker by trade—reminds the Ephesians that believers are saved so that they might serve (Ephesians 2:10).

If there were no other reason to serve God besides gratitude for salvation, that would be cause enough. We are rescued and given eternal life along with the Holy Spirit's indwelling presence. Our service is an acknowledgment of all the Father did for us by sending His Son.

Many people, believers included, serve the big "I." In other words, they're continually thinking, What do I find satisfying and pleasing? What do I need to be happy and prosperous? Here's a harsh reality and a simple way to remember it: If "I" is our master, we are committing I-dolatry. Anything given first place over God—including selfish desires—is an idol.

Service isn't just a good idea. God calls us to be servants so we can each invest our life in an eternally valuable purpose: the salvation of others and their subsequent discipleship for His glory. Our job may seem small or our limitations great, but the truth is that we're all servants of Christ with a role in the kingdom.

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: 17 Hrs 28 Mins 59 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.02.26

10 30 40 47 50 1

All Star Bonus: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$14,680,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 43 Mins 59 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.02.26

27 34 36 39 47 17

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 58 Mins 59 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

01.31.26

16 19 20 34 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$242,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 58 Mins 59 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.02.26

4 8 22 40 61 16

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 27 Mins 59 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.02.26

3 8 31 60 65 4

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$80,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 27 Mins 59 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

Bennett County 86, Pine Ridge 43
Chester 59, Estelline-Hendricks 32
Dell Rapids 56, Baltic 16
Dell Rapids St Mary's 49, Viborg-Hurley 35
Ethan 46, Corsica/Stickney 35
Freeman 64, Avon 50
Groton 50, Florence-Henry 37
Howard 55, Oldham-Ramona-Rutland 39
McCook Central-Montrose 57, Flandreau 42
Philip 55, Kadoka 49
Waubay/Summit 64, Langford 24
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=
Corsica/Stickney vs. Bon Homme, ccd.

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

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Arlington 66, Waverly-South Shore 54
Bon Homme 46, Corsica/Stickney 40
Chester 64, Colman-Egan 60
Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 64, Little Wound 60
Edgemont 56, Morrill, Neb. 52
Gayville-Volin High School 66, Mitchell Christian 35
Harrisburg 62, Marshall, Minn. 52
McCook Central-Montrose 41, Flandreau 37
Waubay/Summit 67, Langford 38
Winner 66, Gregory 31

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

The son of Norway's crown princess pleads not guilty to rape charges as his trial opens in Oslo

By KOSTYA MANENKOV and MARK LEWIS Associated Press

OSLO, Norway (AP) — The son of Norway's crown princess pleaded not guilty to rape charges as he went on trial Tuesday for multiple alleged offenses, opening weeks of proceedings in a case that has cast a shadow on the royal family's image.

Marius Borg Høyby, 29, is the eldest son of Crown Princess Mette-Marit from a previous relationship and the stepson of the heir to the throne, Crown Prince Haakon. Høyby has no royal title or official duties.

Høyby stood for 24 minutes while prosecutor Sturla Henriksbø read out the 38 counts against him at the Oslo district court, asking him if he pleaded guilty. He replied "no" to each of the most serious charges, including the four counts of rape.

The charges also include abuse in a close relationship against one former partner, acts of violence against another and transporting 3.5 kilograms (7.7 pounds) of marijuana. Others include making death threats and traffic violations.

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Høyby pleaded guilty to several driving offenses, to an aggravated drugs offense and breaking a restraining order, and "partly" to threats and aggravated assault. Wearing glasses, a brown sweater and beige trousers, he spoke quietly and conferred regularly with his lawyer. A court official moved the microphone to better pick up his answers.

Prosecutors have said that Høyby could face up to 10 years in prison, if convicted in the trial, which is scheduled to last until March 19. Seven alleged victims are expected to testify.

"There is equality before the law," Henriksbø told the court. "The defendant is the son of the crown princess. He is part of the royal family. He shall nevertheless be treated in the same way as any other person who is charged with the same offenses."

International interest

Reflecting international interest in the trial, Judge Jon Sverdrup Efstad addressed the court in English, warning that it was prohibited to record or take photographs in the courtroom and advising that some witness testimony would be heard behind closed doors.

The investigation began in 2024. Police were first called to an apartment in Oslo's upscale Frogner neighborhood in early August that year following reports of a violent incident. Høyby was arrested and later released, but the case expanded as additional women came forward with allegations against him.

The indictment that prosecutors filed last year centers on four alleged rapes between 2018 and November 2024; alleged violence and threats against a former partner between the summer of 2022 and the fall of 2023; and two alleged acts of violence against a subsequent partner, along with violations of a restraining order.

It was expanded in January, when Høyby was charged with six new offenses, including possession and delivery of large quantities of marijuana and further restraining order violations.

He was free pending trial until Sunday, when police said that he was arrested over new allegations of assault, threats with a knife and violation of a restraining order.

The Oslo court on Monday granted their request to keep him in detention for up to four weeks on the grounds of a risk of reoffending. Defense lawyer Petar Sekulic said that the arrest followed an alleged "incident" involving another person on Sunday.

He declined to give details, but said that Høyby contests his detention and his legal team was considering an appeal as soon as he and the other person can provide statements to police.

Haakon said last week that he and Mette-Marit don't plan to attend the trial and that the royal house doesn't intend to comment during the proceedings.

Royal problems

King Harald, 88, and the royals are generally popular in Norway, but the Høyby case has been a problem for the family's image.

The trial opened at a particularly sensitive moment for the royal family. Mette-Marit faces renewed scrutiny over her past contacts with Jeffrey Epstein, who killed himself in 2019 in a New York jail cell as he faced sex trafficking charges, following the release on Friday of a new batch of documents from the Epstein files.

They contained several hundred mentions of the crown princess, who already said in 2019 that she regretted having had contact with Epstein, Norwegian media reported. The documents, which include email exchanges, showed that Mette-Marit borrowed an Epstein-owned property in Palm Beach, Florida, for several days in 2013. Norwegian broadcaster NRK reported that the stay was arranged through a mutual friend, which was later confirmed by the royal household.

Mette-Marit said in a statement that she "must take responsibility for not having investigated Epstein's background more thoroughly, and for not realizing sooner what kind of person he was." She added: "I showed poor judgment and regret having had any contact with Epstein at all. It is simply embarrassing."

Russia fires 450 drones and 70 missiles at Ukraine, a day before US-brokered talks

By KAMILA HRABCHUK Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia fired around 450 long-range drones and 70 missiles of various types at Ukraine in a major attack overnight, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Tuesday.

The barrage came a day before the two countries were due to attend U.S.-brokered talks in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, on ending the all-out war, which Russia launched nearly four years ago.

The bombardment of at least five regions of Ukraine specifically took aim at the power grid, Zelenskyy said, as part of Moscow's ongoing campaign to deny civilians light, heating and running water amid the coldest winter in years. At least 10 people were wounded, officials said.

"Taking advantage of the coldest days of winter to terrorize people is more important to Russia than diplomacy," Zelenskyy said. Temperatures in Kyiv fell to minus 20 degrees Celsius (minus 4 Fahrenheit) during the night and stood at minus 16 C (minus 3 F) on Tuesday.

He urged allies to send more air defense supplies and bring "maximum pressure" to bear on Russia to end its full-scale invasion, which began on Feb. 24, 2022. NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte was on an official visit to Kyiv on Tuesday to back Ukraine's war effort.

Officials have described recent talks between Moscow and Kyiv delegations as constructive. But after a year of efforts, the Trump administration is still searching for a breakthrough on key issues such as who keeps the Ukrainian land that Russia's army has occupied, and a comprehensive settlement appears distant. The Abu Dhabi talks were scheduled for Wednesday and Thursday.

A Kremlin official said last week that Russia had agreed to halt strikes on Kyiv for a week until Feb. 1 because of the frigid temperatures, following a personal request from U.S. President Donald Trump to Russian President Vladimir Putin. However, the bitter cold is continuing and so are Russia's aerial attacks.

Russia has tried to wear down Ukrainians' appetite for the fight by creating hardship for the civilian population living in dark, freezing homes.

It has tried to wreck Ukraine's electricity network, targeting substations, transformers, turbines and generators at power plants. Ukraine's largest private power company, DTEK, said that the overnight attack hit its thermal power plants in the ninth major assault since October.

In Kyiv, officials said that five people were wounded in the strikes that damaged and set fire to residential buildings, a kindergarten and a gas station in various parts of the capital, according to the State Emergency Service.

By early morning, 1,170 apartment buildings in the capital were without heating, Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said. That set back desperate repair operations that had restored power to all but 80 apartment buildings, he said.

Russia also struck Ukraine's northeastern Kharkiv region, where injuries were reported, and the southern Odesa region.

The attack also damaged the Hall of Fame at the National Museum of the History of Ukraine in the Second World War, at the foot of the Motherland Monument in Kyiv, Ukrainian Culture Minister Tetiana Berezna said.

"It is symbolic and cynical at the same time: the aggressor state strikes a place of memory about the fight against aggression in the 20th century, repeating crimes in the 21st," Berezna said.

Iran's president seeks 'fair and equitable negotiations' with the United States

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran's president said Tuesday he instructed the country's foreign minister to "pursue fair and equitable negotiations" with the United States, the first clear sign from Tehran it wants to try to negotiate as tensions remain high with Washington after the Mideast country's bloody

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crackdown on nationwide protests last month.

The announcement marked a major turn for reformist President Masoud Pezeshkian, who broadly had warned Iranians for weeks that the turmoil in his country had gone beyond his control. It also signals that the president received support from Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei for talks that the 86-year-old cleric previously had dismissed.

Turkey had been working behind the scenes to make the talks happen there later this week as U.S. Mideast envoy Steve Witkoff is traveling in the region.

But whether Iran and the U.S. can reach an agreement remains to be seen, particularly as President Donald Trump now has included Iran's nuclear program in a list of demands from Tehran in any talks. Trump ordered the bombing of three Iranian nuclear sites during the 12-day war Israel launched against Iran in June.

Iran's president signals talks are possible

Writing on X, Pezeshkian said in English and Farsi that the decision came after "requests from friendly governments in the region to respond to the proposal by the President of the United States for negotiations."

"I have instructed my Minister of Foreign Affairs, provided that a suitable environment exists — one free from threats and unreasonable expectations — to pursue fair and equitable negotiations, guided by the principles of dignity, prudence, and expediency," he said.

The U.S. has yet to acknowledge the talks will take place. A semiofficial news agency in Iran on Monday reported — then later deleted without explanation — that Pezeshkian had issued such an order to Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who held multiple rounds of talks with Witkoff before the 12-day war.

Khamenei adviser speaks on the nuclear issue

Late Monday, the pan-Arab satellite channel Al Mayadeen, which is politically allied with the Iranian-backed Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, aired an interview with Ali Shamkhani, a top Khamenei adviser on security.

Shamkhani, who now sits on the country's Supreme National Security Council and who in the 1980s led Iran's navy, wore a naval uniform as he spoke.

He suggested if the talks happened, they would be indirect at the beginning, then moving to direct talks if a deal appeared to be attainable. Direct talks with the U.S. long have been a highly charged political issue within Iran's theocracy, with reformists like Pezeshkian pushing for them and hard-liners dismissing them.

The talks would solely focus on nuclear issues, he added.

Asked about whether Russia could take Iran's enriched uranium like it did in Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, Shamkhani dismissed the idea, saying there was "no reason" to do so. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov on Monday said Russia had "long offered these services as a possible option that would alleviate certain irritants for a number of countries."

"Iran does not seek nuclear weapons, will not seek a nuclear weapon and will never stockpile nuclear weapons, but the other side must pay a price in return for this," he said.

Iran had been enriching uranium up to 60% purity, a short, technical step away from weapons-grade levels. The International Atomic Energy Agency had said Iran was the only country in the world to enrich to that level that wasn't armed with the bomb.

Iran has been refusing requests by the IAEA to inspect the sites bombed in the June war.

"The quantity of enriched uranium remains unknown, because part of the stockpile is under rubble, and there is no initiative yet to extract it, as it is extremely dangerous," Shamkhani said.

Witkoff traveling to Israel

Witkoff is expected to meet Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other Israeli security officials on Tuesday, according to a White House official who was not authorized to comment publicly about the talks and spoke on condition of anonymity.

While in Israel, Witkoff will meet with the head of the Mossad intelligence service and the Israeli military's chief of staff, according to another official who was not authorized to speak to the media and spoke on condition of anonymity.

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Israel is expected to ask that any agreement with Iran include removing enriched uranium from the country, stopping the enrichment of uranium, limiting the creation of ballistic missiles and ending support for Tehran's proxies.

However, Shakhani in his interview rejected giving up uranium enrichment — a major obstacle in earlier talks with the U.S. In November, Araghchi said Iran was doing no enrichment in the country because of the U.S. bombing of the nuclear sites.

Witkoff later will travel to Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, later in the week for Russia-Ukraine talks, the official said.

"We have talks going on with Iran, we'll see how it all works out," Trump told reporters in the Oval Office on Monday. Asked what his threshold was for military action against Iran, he declined to elaborate.

"I'd like to see a deal negotiated," Trump said. "Right now, we're talking to them, we're talking to Iran, and if we could work something out, that'd be great. And if we can't, probably bad things would happen."

Mike Pompeo, a hard-liner on Iran who served as CIA director and secretary of state in Trump's first term, said it was "unimaginable that there can be a deal."

"I think they may come away with some set of understandings," Pompeo said at Dubai's World Governments Summit. "But to think that there's a long-term solution that actually provides stability and peace to this region while the ayatollah is still in power is something I pray for but find unimaginable."

Global shares surge, led by records in Japan and South Korea, as markets regain momentum

By YURI KAGEYAMA AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Global shares surged on Tuesday, led by a nearly 7% jump in South Korea's benchmark and a 3.9% rally in Tokyo that took the Nikkei 225 to a record as investors bought tech-related shares.

France's CAC 40 gained 0.6% in early trading to 8,232.71, while the German DAX surged 1.0% to 25,053.90. Britain's FTSE 100 rose 0.2% to 10,361.21.

The future for the S&P 500 was up 0.3% while that for the Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 0.1%.

Markets are awaiting earnings reports from major companies to gauge the impact of various trends including U.S. President Donald Trump's tariffs and possible curbs on rare earths exports from China.

Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 climbed 3.9% to finish at 54,720.66, its highest close ever. Shares in equipment maker Disco Corp. jumped 7.4% while those in testing equipment maker Advantest gained 7.1%.

Share prices have been boosted by expectations that Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's Liberal Democratic Party will regain a significant majority in the parliament in a Feb. 8 election, ushering in more market-friendly policies. Some analysts warn the Japanese yen may weaken further if Takaichi boosts government spending, presenting hardships for consumers and some companies.

In South Korea, the Kospi gained 6.8% to 5,288.08, also a record. Investors appeared to regain confidence after the latest scare over a possible bubble in artificial intelligence as shares in Samsung Electronics Co. soared 11.4% while those in chip maker SK Hynix rocketed up 9.3%.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng gained 0.2% to 26,834.77, while the Shanghai Composite added 1.3% to 4,067.74.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 edged up 0.9% to 8,857.10. Australia's central bank raised its benchmark policy rate for the first time in two years, citing higher inflation than anticipated before it last cut rates.

On Monday, the S&P 500 added 0.5%, snapping a three-day losing streak. The Dow industrials rose 1.1% and the Nasdaq composite gained 0.6%.

Gold gained 6.7% on Tuesday, while silver's price rebounded nearly 14%.

Gold and silver prices have surged as investors search for safer things to own at a time of uncertainty over the status of the Federal Reserve, which may be set to become less independent, a U.S. stock market that critics say is expensive, threats of tariffs and heavy debt loads for governments worldwide.

Their prices cratered on Friday, including a 31.4% plunge for silver. Some on Wall Street saw it as a result of President Donald Trump's nomination of Kevin Warsh as the next chair of the Fed.

The Fed's chair has a big influence on the economy and markets worldwide by helping to dictate where the U.S. central bank moves interest rates. That affects 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.

In other dealings early Tuesday, benchmark U.S. crude fell 4 cents to \$62.10 a barrel. Brent crude shed 13 cents to \$66.17 a barrel.

The U.S. dollar declined to 155.52 Japanese yen from 155.61 yen. The euro cost \$1.1819, up from \$1.1791.

Argentina fires ravage pristine Patagonia forests, fueling criticism of Milei's austerity

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

LOS ALERCES NATIONAL PARK, Argentina (AP) — These days, the majestic, forested slopes of Argentina's Patagonia look like a war zone.

Mushroom clouds of smoke rise as if from missile strikes. Large flames illuminate the night sky, tainting the moon mango-orange and turning the glorious views that generations of writers and adventurers imprinted on the global psyche into something haunted.

Vast swaths of the Los Alerces National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site home to 2,600-year-old trees, are now ablaze.

The wildfires, among the worst to hit the drought-stricken Patagonia region in decades, have devastated more than 45,000 hectares (174 square miles) of Argentina's forests in the last month and a half, forcing the evacuation of thousands of residents and tourists. As of Monday, the inferno was still spreading.

The crisis, with most of Argentina's fire season still ahead, has reignited anger toward the country's radical libertarian president, Javier Milei, whose harsh austerity drive in the last two years has slashed spending on programs and agencies that not only work to combat fires but also protect parks and prevent blazes from igniting and spreading in the first place.

"There has been a political decision to dismantle firefighting institutions," said Luis Schinelli, one of 16 park rangers covering the 259,000 hectares (1,000 square miles) of Los Alerces National Park. "Teams are stretched beyond their limits."

After coming to office on a campaign to rescue Argentina's economy from decades of staggering debt, Milei slashed spending on the National Fire Management Service by 80% in 2024 compared to the previous year, gutting the agency responsible for deploying brigades, maintaining air tankers, purchasing extra gear and tracking hazards.

The service faces another 71% reduction in funds this year, according to an analysis of the 2026 budget by the Environment and Natural Resources Foundation, or FARN, an Argentine environmental research and advocacy group.

The retrenchment arrives at a time when climate change is making extreme weather more frequent and severe, increasing the risk of wildfires.

"Climate change is something that's undeniable. This is us living it," said firefighter Hernán Mondino, his face smeared with sweat and soot after a backbreaking day battling blazes in Los Alerces National Park. "But we see no sign that the government is concerned about our situation."

The Ministry of Security, which assumed oversight of firefighting efforts after Milei downgraded the Ministry of Environment, did not respond to requests for comment.

Milei and Trump take chainsaws to the state

Milei's deep spending cuts have stabilized Argentina's crisis-stricken economy and driven annual inflation down from 117% in 2024 to 31% last year — the lowest rate in eight years.

His battles against government bloat and "woke" culture have helped him cozy up to U.S. President Donald Trump, whose own war on federal bureaucracy has similarly rippled through scientific research and disaster response programs.

After Trump announced last year that the U.S. would leave the Paris climate agreement, Milei threatened to do the same. He boycotted U.N. climate summits and referred to human-caused climate change as a

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"socialist lie," infuriating Argentines who understand that record-breaking heat and dryness, symptomatic of a warming planet, are fueling the fires in Patagonia.

"There's a lot of anger building up. People here are very uncomfortable with our country's politics," said Lucas Panak, 41, who piled into a pickup truck with his friends last Thursday to fight the blazes enveloping the small town of Cholila after municipal firefighters were sent elsewhere.

Disaster management amid austerity

When lightning started a small fire along a lake in the northern fringes of Los Alerces in early December, firefighters struggled to respond, limited by the remote location and a lack of available aircraft to transport crews and douse the hills.

The initial delay forced the resignation of the park's management and led residents to accuse them of negligence in a criminal complaint when the winds picked up and blasted the blaze through the native forest.

But some experts argue the problem wasn't inaction after the fire erupted, but long before.

"Fires are not something you only fight once they exist. They must be addressed beforehand through planning, infrastructure and forecasting," said Andrés Nápoli, director of FARN. "All the prevention work that's so important to do year-round has essentially been abandoned."

On top of cutting the National Fire Management Service budget, Milei's government ripped tens of millions of dollars from the National Park Administration last year, leading to the dismissal or resignation of hundreds of rangers, firefighters and administrative workers.

As more tourists descend each year on Argentina's parks, forest rangers say that cutbacks and deregulation measures make it harder to monitor fire dangers, clear trails and educate visitors on caring for the park. Last March the government scrapped a requirement for tourist activities such as glacier treks and rock climbs to be overseen by licensed guides.

"If you increase the number of visitors while cutting staff, you risk losing control," said Alejo Fardjoume, a union representative for national park workers. "The consequences of these decisions is not always immediate, they will be noticed cumulatively, progressively."

Firefighters strain to keep up

A 2023 National Park Administration report recommends a minimum deployment of 700 firefighters to cover the land under its purview. The agency employs 391 now, having lost 10% of staff as a result of layoffs and resignations in the last two years under Milei.

Budget cuts to the National Fire Management Service have scaled back training capacity and reduced available equipment, firefighters say, leaving many to rely on secondhand protective suits and donated gear.

Authorities at Los Alerces said that they've always been strapped for funds no matter the government and insisted that there were no shortages of resources to battle the blaze.

"Criticizing is always easy," said Luciano Machado, head of the fire, communications and emergency division at the National Park Administration. "Sometimes adding aircraft doesn't make things better. And in order to add firefighters, you need more food, shelter and rotation."

But national park firefighters pushed beyond the brink of exhaustion said their ranks are constantly thinning, if not due to layoffs then to resignations over poverty-level wages that have failed to keep pace with inflation.

The average firefighter in Patagonia's parks earns less than \$600 a month. In provinces with cheaper living costs, the monthly wage drops below \$450. A growing number of firefighters say they've had to pick up extra work as gardeners and farmhands.

"From the outside it looks like everything still functions, but our bodies bear the cost," said Mondino. "When someone leaves, the rest of us carry more weight, sleep less and work longer hours."

An untimely dance

For a month as the forests burned, Milei said almost nothing about the fires and carried on as usual. Last week, as provincial governors pleaded with him to declare a state of emergency in order to release federal funds, he danced onstage with his ex-girlfriend to Argentine rock ballads.

The split-screen image supplied his critics with powerful political ammunition. "While Patagonia burns,

the president is having fun singing," said centrist lawmaker Maximiliano Ferraro. Left-leaning opposition parties staged protests across provinces.

On Thursday Milei relented, decreeing a state of emergency that unlocked \$70 million for volunteer firefighters and announcing "a historic fight against fire" on social media.

At a base camp this weekend, volunteer medics scurried around bleary-eyed firefighters, tending to scratchy throats, sore legs and irritated sinuses. Some expressed hope that more relief was on the way. Others dismissed the decree as symbolic. All, looking over the smoldering trees that take human generations to regenerate, couldn't help but dwell on what had already been lost.

"It hurts because it's not just a beautiful landscape, it's where we live," said Mariana Rivas, one of the volunteers. "There's anger about what could have been avoided, and anger because every year it gets worse."

Even small EU nations go big on arms production, sending drones to the Ukrainian front and beyond

By MENELAOS HADJICOSTIS Associated Press

NICOSIA, Cyprus (AP) — There's a chance the dreaded buzz of propellers heard on Ukrainian battlefields is coming from drones built in a country with a population of just over a million on Europe's southeastern fringe: Cyprus.

Manufacturer Swarmly says there are more than 200 of its H-10 Poseidon drones helping Ukrainian artillery batteries pinpoint enemy targets on the ground in all kinds of weather, racking up more than 100,000 hours in the air over the last three years.

Its 5,000-square-meter (54,000-square-foot) factory, where the whir of grinders shaping composite plastics reverberates off the walls, has become a major source of uncrewed vehicles shipped to countries such as Indonesia, Benin, Nigeria, India and Saudi Arabia, according to company officials. Most of the factory floor is reserved for uncrewed aerial vehicle manufacture. But tucked in a secure storage area is a selection of Swarmly's super-fast marine drones replete with high-definition cameras and .50-caliber machine guns.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has driven even the smallest European Union member countries to develop their home-grown, high-tech defense industries, just as necessity has made Kyiv a world leader in cutting-edge UAV technology. Many EU countries have partnered with Kyiv to develop that technology, and Ukraine's front lines are usually their testing grounds.

Like Cyprus, the Baltic countries and Denmark have revved up their domestic drone and counter-drone technology. In Greece, drones are part of a 25-billion euro (\$29-billion) overhaul of its armed forces.

"The example of Swarmly, as well as other important companies based in small EU countries, is a testament to the serious effort made by the private sector in Europe to innovate and build mass production capacity of defense items, including uncrewed systems," said Federico Borsari, an expert with the Washington-based Center for European Policy Analysis.

Force Multipliers

UAVs are reshaping warfare by offering less militarily capable countries some leverage over superior adversaries. Drones aren't going to completely replace big-ticket weaponry like tanks, artillery and warplanes, said Borsari. But they offer flexibility and bang for the buck, making them a formidable force multiplier.

Take Swarmly's explosives-packed, satellite-guided Hydra marine drone. Each one costs 80,000 euros (\$94,500), which means deploying a group of them to neutralize a billion-euro warship can be a bargain, said company director Gary Rafalovsky.

This sort of naval weapon taking out a much larger warship is already evidenced by Houthi attacks from Yemen, according to Fabian Hinz, a research fellow for missile technologies and UAVs at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Europe.

Barriers to entry for undercapitalized companies are low, he added, because UAVs are often designed and assembled from components cheaply and readily available on the global market.

"And that, of course, means that basically you don't have to have a great industrial investment at first

that you need with other military capabilities. You don't need decades of experience in certain material sciences or these kinds of things," Hinz said.

Getting in the game

In Denmark, a pair of companies focusing on anti-drone devices have reported a surge in new clients, and some of the devices were to be shipped to Ukraine to assist in jamming Russian technology on the battlefield. Ukraine in September said it was partnering with Danish companies to build missile and drone components at a factory in Denmark.

In the Baltic country of Lithuania, scientists and business partners have joined forces under the name VILNIUS TECH to develop UAVs, automated mine detection and other military technologies. The state-run ammunition factory Giraitė says it has increased production capacity by 50% since 2022.

Greece for the first time showcased its homemade drones and counter-drone technology during a full tactical exercise in November as NATO urged Europe's defense sector to pick up the pace.

"We need capabilities, equipment, real firepower and the most advanced technology," NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte warned during a visit to Romania earlier that month. "Bring your ideas, test your ingenuity and use NATO as your test bed."

Even as drone development accelerates, Borsari cautioned that the advantages of UAVs are often tempered by numerous variables like the harsh conditions in which they sometimes fly, operators' training and skill levels, as well as the depth of logistical support to keep them functional.

Europe goes into defense mode

Russia's war in Ukraine and the Trump administration's mixed messages that have strained relations with NATO allies have forced European leaders to reckon with the need to become more self-reliant on defense. So the EU has made billions of euros available to encourage investment and bolster its collective deterrent capability.

That's been a boost to nations like Cyprus, which assumed the six-month EU presidency on Jan. 1. Last week, the EU's executive arm approved financial assistance for eight members including Spain, Croatia, Portugal, Bulgaria, Belgium, Romania and Cyprus.

Cyprus is set to receive final approval from EU leaders for some 1.2 billion euros (\$1.4 billion) in low-cost, long-term loans under the EU's 150-billion-euro joint (\$177-billion) procurement program called Security Action for Europe (SAFE).

Its nascent defense industry is already made up of around 30 companies and research centers that produce technology for both civilian and military sectors, including robotics, communications networks, anti-drone systems and even satellite communications and surveillance, said Panayiotis Hadjipavlis, chief of the armaments and defense capabilities development directorate within Cyprus' Defense Ministry.

"We have niche capabilities on very high-tech products and this has to be taken seriously into account," Hadjipavlis told The Associated Press in his office, where the helmet from his fighter pilot days hung on a nearby coat rack.

Major defense industry players, he added, are among those who should take note.

GOP leaders labor for support ahead of key test vote on ending partial government shutdown

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Speaker Mike Johnson's ability to carry out President Donald Trump's "play call" for funding the government will be put to the test Tuesday as the House holds a procedural vote on a bill to end the partial shutdown.

Johnson will need near-unanimous support from his Republican conference to proceed. He can afford to lose only one Republican on party-line votes with perfect attendance, but some lawmakers are threatening to tank the effort if their priorities are not included. Trump weighed in with a social media post, telling them "There can be NO CHANGES at this time."

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"We will work together in good faith to address the issues that have been raised, but we cannot have another long, pointless, and destructive Shutdown that will hurt our Country so badly — One that will not benefit Republicans or Democrats. I hope everyone will vote, YES!," Trump wrote on his social media site.

The measure would end the partial government shutdown that began Saturday, funding most of the federal government through Sept. 30 and the Department of Homeland Security for two weeks as lawmakers negotiate potential changes for the agency that enforces the nation's immigration laws — United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE.

Running Trump's 'play call'

Johnson said on "Fox News Sunday" it was Trump's "play call to do it this way. He had already conceded he wants to turn down the volume, so to speak." But GOP leaders sounded like they still had work to do in convincing the rank-and-file to join them as House lawmakers returned to the Capitol Monday after a week back in their congressional districts.

"We always work till the midnight hour to get the votes," said House Majority Leader Steve Scalise, R-La. "You never start the process with everybody on board. You work through it, and you could say that about every major bill we've passed."

The funding package passed the Senate on Friday. Trump says he'll sign it immediately if it passes the House. Some Democrats are expected to vote for the final bill, but not for the initial procedural measure setting the terms for the House debate, making it the tougher test for Johnson and the White House.

Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries has made clear that Democrats wouldn't help Republicans out of their procedural jam, even though Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer helped negotiate the funding bill.

Jeffries noted that the procedural vote covers a variety of issues that most Democrats oppose, including resolutions to hold former President Bill Clinton and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in contempt of Congress over the Jeffrey Epstein investigation.

"If they have some massive mandate," Jeffries said of Republicans, "then go pass your rule, which includes toxic bills that we don't support."

Key differences from the last shutdown

The path to the current partial shutdown differs from the fall impasse, which affected more agencies and lasted a record 43 days.

Then, the debate was over extending temporary, COVID-era subsidies for those who get health coverage through the Affordable Care Act. Democrats were unsuccessful in getting those subsidies included as part of a package to end the shutdown.

Congress has made important progress since then, passing six of the 12 annual appropriations bills that fund federal agencies and programs. That includes important programs such as nutrition assistance and fully operating national parks and historic sites. They are funded through Sept. 30.

But the remaining unpassed bills represent roughly three-quarters of federal spending, including the Department of Defense. Service members and federal workers could miss paychecks depending upon the length of the current funding lapse.

Voting bill becomes last-minute obstacle

Some House Republicans have demanded that the funding package include legislation requiring voters to show proof of citizenship before they are eligible to participate in elections. Rep. Anna Paulina Luna, R-Fla., had said the legislation, known as the SAVE Act, must be included in the appropriations package.

But Luna appeared to drop her objections late Monday, writing on social media that she had spoken with Trump about a "pathway forward" for the voting bill in the Senate that would keep the government open.

The Brennan Center for Justice, a think tank focused on democracy and voting rights issues, said the voting bill's passage would mean that Americans would need to produce a passport or birth certificate to register to vote, and that at least 21 million voters lack ready access to those papers.

"If House Republicans add the SAVE Act to the bipartisan appropriations package it will lead to another prolonged Trump government shutdown," Schumer said. "Let's be clear, the SAVE Act is not about securing our elections. It is about suppressing voters."

Johnson has operated with a thin majority throughout his tenure as speaker. But with Saturday's special

election in Texas, the Republican majority stands at a threadbare 218-214, shrinking the GOP's ability to withstand defections.

Football, politics and protest: This year's Super Bowl comes at a tinderbox moment in the US

By STEVEN SLOAN and STEVE PEOPLES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Don't tune into the Super Bowl hoping for a break from the tumultuous politics gripping the U.S.

The NFL is facing pressure ahead of Sunday's game between the Seattle Seahawks and the New England Patriots to take a more explicit stance against the Trump administration's aggressive immigration enforcement. More than 184,000 people have signed a petition calling on the league to denounce the potential presence of Immigration and Customs Enforcement at the Super Bowl, which is being held at Levi's Stadium in the San Francisco Bay Area. The liberal group MoveOn plans to deliver the petition to the NFL's New York City headquarters on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, anticipation is building around how Bad Bunny, the halftime show's Spanish-speaking headliner, will address the moment. He has criticized President Donald Trump on everything from his hurricane response in his native Puerto Rico to his treatment of immigrants. On Sunday night, he blasted ICE while accepting an award at the Grammys. His latest tour skipped the continental U.S. because of fears that his fans could be targeted by immigration agents.

Trump has said he doesn't plan to attend this year's game, unlike last year, and he has derided Bad Bunny as a "terrible choice." A Republican senator is calling it "the woke bowl." And a prominent conservative group plans to hold an alternative show that it hopes will steal attention from the main event.

The Super Bowl is one of the few remaining cultural touchstones viewed by millions of people in real time and the halftime show is no stranger to controversy, perhaps most notably Janet Jackson's 2004 performance in which her breast was briefly exposed. But there are few parallels to this year's game, which has the potential to become an unusual mix of sports, entertainment, politics and protest. And it will unfold at a tinderbox moment for the U.S., just two weeks after Alex Pretti's killing by federal agents in Minneapolis reignited a national debate over the Trump administration's hard-line law enforcement tactics.

"The Super Bowl is supposed to be an escape, right? We're supposed to go there to not have to talk about the serious things of this country," said Tiki Barber, a former player for the New York Giants who played in the Super Bowl in 2001 and has since attended several as a commentator. "I hope it doesn't devolve, because if it does, then I think we're really losing touch with what's important in our society."

Bad Bunny has leaned into the controversy

The 31-year-old Bad Bunny, born in Puerto Rico as Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio, has elevated Latino music into the mainstream and gained global fame with songs almost entirely in Spanish — something that irks many of his conservative detractors. He has leaned into the controversy, referring to the halftime show when he hosted "Saturday Night Live" in October by joking "everybody is happy about it — even Fox News."

He segued into a few sentences in Spanish, expressing Latino pride in the achievement, and finished by saying in English, "If you didn't understand what I just said, you have four months to learn!"

Those who follow him closely doubt that he'll back down now.

"He has made it very clear what he stands for," said Vanessa Díaz, a professor at Loyola Marymount University and co-author of "P FKN R: How Bad Bunny Became the Global Voice of Puerto Rican Resistance." "So I can't imagine that this would all go away with the Super Bowl."

The halftime show is a collaboration between the NFL, Roc Nation and Apple Music. Roc Nation curates the performers and Apple Music distributes the performance while the NFL ultimately controls the stage, broadcast and branding.

The NFL, which is working to expand its appeal across the world, including into Latin America, said it

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never considered removing Bad Bunny from the halftime show even after criticism from Trump and some of his supporters.

NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell on Monday described the singer as "one of the great artists in the world," as well as someone who understands the power of the Super Bowl performance "to unite people and to be able to bring people together."

"I think artists in the past have done that. I think Bad Bunny understands that. And I think you'll have a great performance," Goodell told reporters during his annual Super Bowl press conference.

About half of Americans approved of Bad Bunny as the halftime performer, according to an October poll from Quinnipiac University. But there were substantial gaps with about three-quarters of Democrats backing the pick compared to just 16% of Republicans. About 60% of Black and Hispanic adults approved of the selection compared to 41% of whites.

Republicans are eager to maintain Latino support in their bid to keep control of Congress. But as the Super Bowl draws near, many in the GOP have kept up their Bad Bunny critiques.

Sen. Tommy Tuberville of Alabama, the former head football coach at Auburn University who is now running for governor, derided the "Woke Bowl" on Newsmax last week and said he'll watch an alternative event hosted by Turning Point USA.

The group founded by the late conservative activist Charlie Kirk said Monday that Kid Rock, a vocal Trump supporter, would be among the performers at its event.

DHS won't say whether immigration agents will be at Super Bowl

In recent days, Department of Homeland Security official Jeff Brannigan hosted a series of private calls with local officials and the NFL in which he indicated that ICE does not plan to conduct any law enforcement actions the week of the Super Bowl or at the game, according to two NFL officials with direct knowledge of the conversations.

ICE is not expected to be among more than a dozen DHS-related agencies providing security at the game, the officials said, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss private conversations.

While that is the plan, some worry that Trump and his MAGA allies who lead DHS can change their minds ahead of Sunday's game given their recent statements.

DHS official Corey Lewandowski, a key adviser to DHS Secretary Kristi Noem, said in October that ICE agents would be conducting immigration enforcement at the game.

"There is nowhere that you can provide safe haven to people who are in the country illegally, not the Super Bowl, not anywhere else," he said at the time.

Asked to clarify ICE's role this week, DHS spokeswoman Tricia McLaughlin refused to say whether federal immigration agents will be present for the Super Bowl.

"Those who are here legally and not breaking other laws have nothing to fear," she said. "We will not disclose future operations or discuss personnel. Super Bowl security will entail a whole-of-government response conducted in line with the U.S. Constitution."

The progressive group MoveOn will host a Tuesday rally outside the NFL headquarters in New York to present a petition telling the league, "No ICE at the Super Bowl."

"This year's Super Bowl should be remembered for big plays and Bad Bunny, not masked and armed ICE agents running around the stadium inflicting chaos, violence, and trauma on fans and stadium workers," MoveOn spokesperson Britt Jacovich said. "The NFL can't stay on the sidelines, the league has a responsibility to act like adults, protect Super Bowl fans and stadium workers, and keep ICE out of the game."

In an interview, San Francisco mayor Daniel Lurie was optimistic that the event would be a success even in a politically tense climate.

"We are going to keep everybody safe — our residents, our visitors," he said. "Obviously with everything going on, we're staying on top of it, monitoring everything. But I expect everything to be safe and fun."

Trump's \$45 billion expansion of immigrant detention sites faces pushback from communities

By DAVID A. LIEB, HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH and MORGAN LEE Associated Press

With tensions high over federal immigration enforcement, some state and local officials are pushing back against attempts by President Donald Trump's administration to house thousands of detained immigrants in their communities in converted warehouses, privately run facilities and county jails.

Federal officials have been scouting cities and counties across the U.S. for places to hold immigrants as they roll out a massive \$45 billion expansion of detention facilities financed by Trump's recent tax-cutting law.

The fatal shootings of Renee Good and Alex Pretti during immigration enforcement actions in Minnesota have amplified an already intense spotlight on U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, increasing scrutiny of its plans for new detention sites.

A proposed ICE facility just north of Richmond, Virginia, drew hundreds of people last week to a tense public hearing of the Hanover County Board of Supervisors.

"You want what's happening in Minnesota to go down in our own backyard? Build that detention center here, and that's exactly what will happen," resident Kimberly Matthews told county officials.

As a prospective ICE detention site became public, elected officials in Kansas City, Missouri, scrambled to pass an ordinance aimed at blocking it. And mayors in Oklahoma City and Salt Lake City — after raising concerns about building permits — announced last week that property owners won't be selling or leasing their facilities for immigration detention.

Meanwhile, legislatures in several Democratic-led states pressed forward with bills aimed at blocking or discouraging ICE facilities. A New Mexico measure targets local government agreements to detain immigrants for ICE. A novel California proposal seeks to nudge companies running ICE facilities out of the state by imposing a 50% tax on their proceeds.

The number of ICE detention sites has doubled

More than 70,000 immigrants were being detained by ICE as of late December, up from 40,000 when Trump took office, according to federal data.

In a little over a year, the number of detention facilities used by ICE nearly doubled to 212 sites spread across 47 states and territories. Most of that growth came through existing contracts with the U.S. Marshals Service or deals to use empty beds at county jails.

Trump's administration now is taking steps to open more large-scale facilities. In January, ICE paid \$102 million for a warehouse in Washington County, Maryland, \$84 million for one in Berks County, Pennsylvania, and more than \$70 million for one in Surprise, Arizona. It also solicited public comment on a proposed warehouse purchase in a flood plain in Chester, New York.

Federal immigration officials have toured large warehouses elsewhere, without releasing many details about the efforts.

"They will be very well structured detention facilities meeting our regular detention standards," ICE said in a statement, adding: "It should not come as news that ICE will be making arrests in states across the U.S. and is actively working to expand detention space."

Detention site foes face legal limitations

State and local governments can decline to lease detention space to ICE, but they generally cannot prohibit businesses and private landowners from using their property for federal immigrant detention centers, said Danielle Jefferis, an associate law professor at the University of Nebraska who focuses on immigration and civil litigation.

In 2023, a federal court invalidated a California law barring private immigrant detention facilities for infringing on federal powers. A federal appeals court panel cited similar grounds in July while striking down a New Jersey law that forbade agreements to operate immigrant detention facilities.

After ICE officials recently toured a warehouse in Orlando, Florida, as a prospective site, local officials looked into ways to regulate or prevent it. But City Attorney Mayanne Downs advised them in a letter that "ICE is immune from any local regulation that interferes in any way with its federal mandate."

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Officials in Hanover County also asked their attorney to evaluate legal options after the Department of Homeland Security sent a letter confirming its intent to purchase a private property for use as an ICE processing facility. The building sits near retail businesses, hotels, restaurants and several neighborhoods.

Although some residents voiced concerns that an ICE facility could strain the county's resources, there's little the county can do to oppose it, said Board of Supervisors Chair Sean Davis.

"The federal government is generally exempt from our zoning regulations," Davis said.

Kansas City tries to block new ICE detention site

Despite court rulings elsewhere, the City Council in Kansas City voted in January to impose a five-year moratorium on non-city-run detention facilities. The vote came on the same day ICE officials toured a nearly 1-million-square-foot (92,903-square-meter) warehouse as a prospective site.

Manny Abarca, a county lawmaker, said he initially was threatened with trespassing when he showed up but was eventually allowed inside the facility, where a deputy ICE field office director told him they were scouting for a 7,500-bed site.

Abarca is trying to fortify Kansas City's resistance by proposing a countywide moratorium on permits, zoning changes and development plans for detention facilities not run by the county or a city.

"When federal power is putting communities on edge, local government has a responsibility to act where we have authority," he said.

Kansas City is looking to follow a similar path as Leavenworth, Kansas, which has argued that private prison firm CoreCivic must have an operating permit to reopen a shuttered prison as an ICE detention facility.

As other ICE proposals have surfaced, officials in Social Circle, Georgia, El Paso, Texas, and Roxbury Township, New Jersey, all have raised concerns about a lack of water and sewer capacity to transform warehouses into detention sites.

Nationally, it remains to be seen whether local governments can effectively deter ICE facilities through building permits and regulations.

"We're currently in a moment where it is being tested," Jefferis said. "So there is no clear answer as to how the courts are going to come down."

New Mexico targets existing ICE facilities

The Democratic-led New Mexico House on Friday passed legislation banning state and local government contracts for ICE detention facilities, sending it to the Senate. Similar bills are pending in Hawaii, Massachusetts, New York and Rhode Island.

The Otero County Processing Center, 25 miles (40 kilometers) from downtown El Paso, Texas, is one of three privately run ICE facilities that could be affected by the New Mexico legislation. The facility includes four immigration courtrooms and space for more than 1,000 detainees. The county financed its construction in 2007 with the intent to use it as a revenue source, and plans to pay off the remaining \$16.5 million debt by 2028.

Otero County Attorney Roy Nichols said the county is prepared to sue the Legislature under a state law that prevents impairment of outstanding revenue bonds.

Republicans warned of job losses and economic fallout if the legislation forces immigrant detention centers to close.

But Democratic state Rep. Sarah Silva, who voted for the ban, and said her constituents in a heavily Hispanic area view the ICE facility as a burden.

"Our state can't be complicit in the violations that ICE has been doing in places like Minneapolis," Silva said. "To me that was beyond the tipping point."

Judge blocks Trump administration from ending protections for Haitians

By LUIS ANDRES HENAO and HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press

SPRINGFIELD, Ohio (AP) — A federal judge on Monday blocked the end of protections that have allowed roughly 350,000 Haitians to live in the U.S., dealing President Donald Trump's immigration agenda another legal, though perhaps temporary, setback.

U.S. District Judge Ana Reyes in Washington granted a request to pause the termination of Temporary Protected Status for Haitians while a lawsuit challenging it proceeds. The termination, which was set for Tuesday, "shall be null, void, and of no legal effect," she wrote.

"We can breathe for a little bit," said Rose-Thamar Joseph, the operations director of the Haitian Support Center in Springfield, Ohio.

Reyes said in an 83-page opinion that plaintiffs were likely to prevail on the merits of the case, and that she found it "substantially likely" that Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem preordained her termination decision because of "hostility to nonwhite immigrants."

The judge, an appointee of President Joe Biden, said Noem did not have "unbounded discretion" and was required to consult with other agencies on conditions in Haiti. The ruling cited Noem's own words three days after announcing an end to Haitian protections, calling for a travel ban from Haiti and "every damn country that has been flooding our nation with killers, leeches, and entitlement junkies."

While the ruling grants temporary relief to Haitians, the next legal steps were unclear.

Department of Homeland Security spokesperson Tricia McLaughlin denounced the ruling as "lawless activism."

"Haiti's TPS was granted following an earthquake that took place over 15 years ago," she said. "It was never intended to be a de facto amnesty program, yet that's how previous administrations have used it for decades."

DHS says Haiti has improved, but community leaders say it's still unsafe

Temporary Protected Status can be granted by the Homeland Security secretary if conditions in home countries are deemed unsafe for return due to a natural disaster, political instability or other dangers. While it grants TPS holders the right to live and work in the U.S., it does not provide a legal pathway to citizenship.

Haiti's TPS status was initially activated in 2010 after a catastrophic earthquake and has been extended multiple times. The country is racked by gang violence that has displaced hundreds of thousands of people.

The Trump administration has aggressively sought to remove the protection, making more people eligible for deportation. The moves are part of the administration's wider, mass deportation effort.

In addition to the migrants from Haiti, Noem has terminated protections for about 600,000 Venezuelans, 60,000 people from Honduras, Nicaragua and Nepal, more than 160,000 Ukrainians and thousands of people from Afghanistan and Cameroon. Some have pending lawsuits in federal courts.

"If the termination stands, people will almost certainly die," attorneys for Haitian TPS holders wrote in a court filing in December. "Some will likely be killed, others will likely die from disease, and yet others will likely starve to death."

They say the decision to end Haiti's status was motivated by racial animus, and Noem failed to consider whether there was an ongoing armed conflict that would pose a "serious threat" to personal safety, as required by law.

DHS said conditions in Haiti had improved. In a court filing in December, attorneys for the administration said the plaintiffs' claims of racial animus were based on statements "taken out of context, often from other speakers and from years ago, and without direct links to the Secretary's determinations."

"Rather, Secretary Noem provided reasoned, factually sufficient explanations for her determinations," they said.

A government notice in November announcing the termination said there had been some positive developments for Haiti, including authorization of a new, multinational force to combat gangs. Noem determined

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allowing Haitians to remain in the U.S. was against the national interest, the notice said.

Jerome Bazard, a member of the First Haitian Evangelical Church of Springfield, said it's still too dangerous for many in his community to return to Haiti.

"They can't go to Haiti because it's not safe. Without the TPS, they can't work. And if they can't work, they can't eat, they can't pay bills. You're killing the people," he said.

Haitians in Springfield are fraught with uncertainty

Earlier Monday, two dozen faith leaders and hundreds of congregants in Springfield sang and prayed together in support of Haitian migrants who feared their protected status could end this week. They were hopeful that the federal judge might intervene.

Uncertainty over TPS has deepened worries for the city's already embattled Haitian community.

Trump denigrated the community of about 15,000 Haitians while campaigning in 2024 for a second term, falsely accusing its members of eating their neighbor's cats and dogs as he pitched voters on his plans for an immigration crackdown. The false claims exacerbated fears about division and anti-immigrant sentiment in the mostly white, working class city of about 59,000 people.

In the weeks after his comments, schools, government buildings and the homes of elected officials received bomb threats.

Since then, Haitians in Springfield have lived in constant fear that has only been exacerbated by the federal immigration crackdowns happening in Minneapolis and other cities, said Viles Dorsainvil, a leader of Springfield's Haitian Community Help and Support Center.

Many of the Haitian children in Springfield are U.S. citizens who have parents in the country illegally. Some families are too afraid to send their kids to school, Dorsainvil said. If they are detained, he said, some parents have signed caregiver affidavits that designate a legal guardian in hopes of keeping their kids out of foster care.

Volunteers from nearby towns have offered to deliver food to those afraid to leave home, Dorsainvil said. Others have been stockpiling groceries in case immigration officers flood the area.

Some, he said, have been receiving desperate calls from family members abroad urging them to leave. "They keep telling them that Springfield is not a safe place now for them to stay."

Lynn Tramonte, executive director of the Ohio Immigrant Alliance, said the court's "11th-hour reprieve is, of course, welcome. But people can't live their lives like this, pegging their families' futures to a court case."

Couples at the Westminster show bond over dogs, and each other

By JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Must love dogs. Really, really love dogs.

The Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show spotlights the bond between people and dogs. But reaching the United States' premier canine event also can be about another kind of love.

"For me, it would be very hard to do this without somebody who was as vested in it as I am," said two-time Westminster-winning handler Bill McFadden, who's half of a dogdom power couple. His wife, Taffe McFadden, handled the second-place winner in 2019, and she and Bono the Havanese were among past finalists who appeared Monday evening in a special tribute to Westminster's 150th annual show.

Yes, the McFaddens — who met at a dog show in the late 1970s and married in 1985 — have faced and sometimes beaten each other at various shows. And no, there are no hard feelings.

"I think some of my best memories are watching Taffe win best in show," Bill said Saturday while the couple readied for Westminster. "If one of us takes the big ribbon home, it's awesome. Doesn't matter which one."

Breed competition gets underway

After starting with agility and other sports on Saturday, the storied show got down to its traditional business Monday. Dogs ranging from teeny Chihuahuas to towering Irish wolfhounds started competing in the multi-round, breed-by-breed competition that leads to the best in show award Tuesday night.

Some finalists were chosen Monday, starting with Zaida, an Afghan hound who has twice won the World

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Dog Show, a major international showcase. She'd never gotten this far at Westminster before, and handler Willy Santiago told the crowd he'd been waiting for "this day for all my life."

"She's the dog that makes me feel everything can happen," he said, choking up.

Zaida's rivals will include a Lhasa apso named JJ, who won the massive AKC National Championship show in December.

"He's a show dog all the time," breeder, handler and co-owner Susan Giles of Manakin Sabot, Virginia, said in an interview earlier Monday. A Lhasa owner for 53 years, she said JJ is everything the breed is supposed to be, though he departs from one norm for a breed that's generally reserved with strangers: "He'll talk to everybody."

Also advancing were Graham, an old English sheepdog whose grandfather, Swagger, was runner-up at Westminster in 2013, and Cookie, a Maltese who pulled off an upset in the toy dog semifinals. Cookie bested two-time prior Westminster finalist and former AKC National Championship winner Comet the shih tzu.

Graham loves showing. "He comes from a long line of dogs that love it, and we're just happy to be on the end of his lead," handler and longtime breeder Colton Johnson told the audience.

Three more finalists will be chosen Tuesday night.

Juggling dog shows with full-time jobs

A number of veteran Westminster handlers are married couples, and no wonder.

The McFaddens, for instance, travel the country to 150 to 200 dog shows a year and share their home with a varying cast of canines that need feeding, exercise, grooming and training.

"I can't even imagine trying to date and explain to somebody, 'Now, I'm going to be gone five days a week, and I'm going to have like 20 dogs with me,'" said Bill McFadden, who largely credits his wife "for any semblance of order that we have" at their home on five acres (two hectares) in Acampo, California.

The key is "being with someone you can actually coexist with — constantly," said Bill McFadden (who's aware of the 2005 romcom "Must Love Dogs" but doesn't recall seeing it). Like many top handlers, they also have assistants, he notes.

Then there are couples such as Randy and Andrea Hulsemann of Prairie Du Sac, Wisconsin, who juggle breeding and showing their own French bulldogs with their full-time jobs. He's a 911 dispatcher, and she's a dental hygienist.

"We do it for just the love of it, for something to do together," Randy said while waiting to bring their dog Ollie into a first-round ring Monday.

"It's a great hobby for the two of us," Andrea added.

Show dogs with show-business ties

Not handling but no less enthusiastic were Lydia Hearst and Chris Hardwick, who cheered and whooped for their otterhound, Zoltar. He didn't win his breed, but he probably got the most decibels.

"I die a lot in horror movies, so I can scream for a long time," Hearst said with a laugh. She and her husband, who hosted AMC's "Talking Dead," are both actors and grew up with dogs — pets in his case, and show dogs in hers. Her mother, newspaper heir and longtime Frenchie owner Patricia Hearst Shaw, also had a dog in Monday's competition.

Wilbur the beagle had his own Hollywood connections: He appears in the new Netflix police drama "The Rip," starring Matt Damon and Ben Affleck. On Monday, Wilbur was performing for Charlotte Jones, 13, in a competition for junior handlers.

Wilbur's owner, Mary Cummings, has long trained dogs for both the show ring and show business.

Which does Wilbur prefer?

"Everything," said Cummings, of Binghamton, New York. "He likes anything that involves food and getting attention."

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The Latest: Seahawks get their turn at Super Bowl Opening Night

SAN JOSE, Calif. (AP) — Super Bowl Opening Night is ongoing, with Drake Maye, Sam Darnold and other Super Bowl participants meeting with thousands of reporters from across the globe in a zany spectacle that kicks off the week's festivities on Monday night.

Maye and the New England Patriots will take on Darnold and the Seattle Seahawks on Sunday at Levi's Stadium, home of the San Francisco 49ers.

First, the athletes will meet more than 6,000 credentialed reporters who will pepper them with questions ranging from the standard football topics to the silly and offbeat stuff.

The event began as a daytime introduction of the teams and evolved into a live, ticketed, prime-time showcase on national television.

The Latest:

Cooper Kupp says 18th regular-season game would need to make sense financially for players

Even though NFL commissioner Roger Goodell said expanding the regular season to 18 games is "not a given," several players said they expect it to be discussed long before the current labor deal expires in 2030.

Seahawks receiver Cooper Kupp hinted that owners would have to give up a bigger piece of the financial pie to get it done.

"For the 18th game to happen, there's obviously going to be some negotiation," Kupp said. "There's some things, give and take. Unfortunately, it's one of those things. If the 18th game is on the table, there's going to have to be some talks about what makes that worth it to the players. And we'll get to that point. We'll cross that bridge."

Seahawks' Mike Macdonald calls Klint Kubiak's likely departure 'bittersweet'

Seahawks coach Mike Macdonald has mixed feelings as he prepares for the Super Bowl.

It won't be long after Sunday's game that teams start raiding Seattle's coaching staff. Offensive coordinator Klint Kubiak is likely to become the head coach in Las Vegas and could take a handful of assistants with him.

"Our coaches, as they get these opportunities to take it to the next level, you're happy for them," Macdonald said. "It's a little bittersweet because (Kubiak is) such a great person and great coach.

"We have a lot of great coaches and those people are going to have opportunities as well."

Seahawks' Cooper Kupp would like to see halftime show led by Noah Kahan

Singer-songwriter Noah Kahan has a fan in Seahawks receiver Cooper Kupp.

Asked to pick one person to perform during the Super Bowl halftime show, Kupp thought about it for a minute before going with Kahan.

"I have a few people I really love listening to," Kupp said. "I'm a big Noah Kahan fan. Noah could get some people around him, too, that can make a pretty cool thing collaboratively come to life. So I'll go with that one."

Bad Bunny is the halftime act for Sunday's game.

Sam Darnold gets an odd gift: A hat that looks like a giant ham

Of all the zaniness of the Super Bowl's Opening Night, this one was hammier than most.

A reporter presented Seahawks quarterback Sam Darnold with an oversized hat designed to look like a giant ham, complete with pineapple slices.

"I'll wear it later," Darnold said politely.

But the reporter asked him to wear it for a photo, and Darnold obliged. He also held up a poncho made from a Mexican blanket that had "Ham for Sam" printed on the front.

"You made this just for me?" Darnold asked. "You did not."

On a more serious note, Darnold thanked his family for helping through his journey that started with the New York Jets and included stops in Carolina, San Francisco and Minnesota before Seattle.

"It's important to have those people in your life," he said. "The only thing that matters is if you believe in yourself. That's really it. I always believed in myself. I knew that I could do this at a high level, and that was really it.

"That's what kept me going. And I knew at some point an opportunity would arise. But even if I didn't,

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I knew that I did everything that I could to become a better player, year in and year out.”

Patriots roll with their road white jerseys even though they’re the home team

The Patriots are the home team for the Super Bowl but will be wearing their road jerseys.

New England’s team captains were allowed to choose which uniform combination to wear as the home team. Coach Mike Vrabel joked that they chose white jerseys because “they are more slimming.”

The reality is the Pats are 9-0 on the road this season — undefeated in white tops.

“Let’s roll with the whites,” the team captains told Vrabel.

The Seahawks, meanwhile, will wear their home blue jerseys despite being designated the visiting team.

Patriots coordinator Terrell Williams happy to be back with team after cancer battle

New England Patriots defensive coordinator Terrell Williams is back with the team for the Super Bowl after spending nearly five months getting treated for prostate cancer.

Williams attended meetings at the Patriots’ facility during his cancer battle, but he hasn’t traveled with the team all season and hasn’t been on the sideline since Week 1. Inside linebackers coach Zak Kuhr filled in as New England’s defensive play-caller.

Williams was declared cancer-free during the playoffs and cleared to join the team at the Super Bowl.

The 51-year-old Williams has given up soda and alcohol, saying Monday he needed to improve his nutrition anyway and the diagnosis put him on a path to better health.

“Honestly, my thoughts are about the game and not really about me or the Super Bowl or anything,” he said. “This could be a preseason game and I’d be happy to be here with these guys after kind of what I’ve been through, what we’ve been through.”

Stefon Diggs isn’t intimidated by Super Bowl stage after 11 NFL seasons

It took Stefon Diggs 11 seasons and four teams to make the Super Bowl. But he’s not feeling any pressure because “it’s the game we’ve been playing.”

Diggs had 85 receptions for 1,013 yards and four touchdowns this season. He was a key playmaker for blossoming quarterback Drake Maye. And even though he’s never played in the NFL’s ultimate game, he won’t be overwhelmed by the stage.

“I’ve been in the league a long time,” Diggs said during the Super Bowl’s Opening Night. “As far as the corners, I’ve seen some of the best corners in the game, Hall of Fame corners, Patrick Peterson, Richard Sherman, all those guys.

“I took a lot of lumps earlier in my career, so understanding what I’ve seen, I come with a little bit of experience, I guess, to kind of show out in the game.”

Diggs previously played for Minnesota, Buffalo and Houston.

Drake Maye says Tom Brady told him there are ‘no shortcuts’ to success

Drake Maye is following Tom Brady’s path in leading the New England Patriots to the Super Bowl in his second season.

Maye said he has met Brady a few times and the best advice he has gotten from the seven-time Super Bowl champion is there are “no shortcuts” when it comes to succeeding in the league.

Brady led the Patriots to the Super Bowl title in the 2001 season, his second in the NFL, after he took over for injured starter Drew Bledsoe early in the year. He played in the Super Bowl 10 times, going 7-3 — including three wins in his first five seasons.

Patriots’ Christian Gonzalez looks forward to matchup with Seahawks’ Jaxon Smith-Njigba

Patriots cornerback Christian Gonzalez could have his hands full in the Super Bowl. Gonzalez will be tasked with trying to slow down Seahawks star receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba.

It should be one of the best matchups of the game.

“He can do everything from every spot on the field,” Gonzalez said at Super Bowl Opening Night. “He’s a smooth route-runner, can run every route, and he’s just an amazing player. I got the utmost respect for him, and I’m excited for Sunday.”

Smith-Njigba led the NFL this season with 1,793 yards on 119 catches and scored 10 touchdowns.

Gonzalez had 69 tackles and 10 pass defenses.

Drake Maye says his older brothers are his heroes

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Patriots quarterback Drake Maye has more than one hero in his life. He has three — his older brothers. Speaking at Super Bowl Opening Night, Maye said he looked up to brothers Luke, Cole and Beau more than anyone else.

"My older brothers, my heroes," he said. "Just growing up with them, having somebody that's that close to me, kind of live their own lives and me just learn from them and be the youngest brother and to have the opportunity to have something to chase."

Maye and his brothers grew up in Cornelius, North Carolina, where they attended William A. Hough High School. Maye transferred after his freshman year to Myers Park High School in Charlotte and ended up playing college football for the Tar Heels.

He will be the second youngest QB to start a Super Bowl, at 23 years and 162 days.

Roger Goodell doesn't expect anything divisive from Bad Bunny at Super Bowl

NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell says he doesn't expect Bad Bunny to say anything divisive during his Super Bowl halftime performance.

The Puerto Rican musician won album of the year at the Grammy Awards on Sunday night. While accepting an earlier award, Bad Bunny criticized President Donald Trump's administration for its dramatic expansion of immigration arrests.

"Before I say thanks to God, I'm going to say ICE out," Bad Bunny said. "We're not savage, we're not animals, we're not aliens. We are humans and we are Americans."

Goodell was asked if he expects political statements from Bad Bunny, Green Day or any other artists performing at the Super Bowl. He says Bad Bunny understands that the NFL is providing a platform "to unite people and be able to bring people together."

"Bad Bunny is, and I think that was demonstrated last night, one of the great artists in the world," Goodell added. "And that's one of the reasons we chose him."

Roger Goodell says he played no role in Bill Belichick's Hall of Fame snub

NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell wants to make it clear that the Pro Football Hall of Fame board he's on does not make the rules, so he played no role in Bill Belichick's reported snub.

"We have no involvement in what they're charged with," Goodell said, noting the Pro Football Hall of Fame is "completely and entirely run separately" from the NFL.

ESPN reported last week that Belichick fell short of making the Hall of Fame in his first year of eligibility.

"I'm not even sure whether it's true because I don't think the class has been announced at the end of the day," Goodell said. "As I said before, Bill Belichick, I think, is the second-winningest coach in NFL football, six Super Bowls as a head coach and two as a defensive coordinator. That's a Hall of Fame career."

"But there's a decision-making process here, and it's a timing issue. ... There are a lot of people who want to be in that Hall of Fame, and Bill Belichick deserves to be in that Hall of Fame, too."

Roger Goodell says it's too soon to say whether Giants' Tisch could be disciplined by league

NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell says it's too soon to say whether New York Giants co-owner Steve Tisch might be subject to the league's personal conduct policy.

Tisch's name showed up more than 400 times in files released by the Justice Department regarding Jeffrey Epstein.

"We are going to look at all the facts," Goodell said. "We're going to look at the context of those. We're going to try to understand that, and we'll look at how that falls under the (personal conduct) policy. But I think we're taking it one step at a time. Let's get the facts first."

Tisch acknowledged last week that he knew Epstein and they "exchanged emails about adult women" and "discussed movies, philanthropy and investments." But the 76-year-old Tisch denied going to Epstein's island and was never charged in the investigation.

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

Roger Goodell says no talks yet on expanding NFL season to 18 games

NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell says the league and the players union have not had "any formal dis-

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cussions" about an 18-game schedule.

He added they have had "very little informal conversations."

Goodell says expanding from 16 to 17 games "went quite smoothly."

"But the challenges will be different here a little bit, and it'll depend on a lot of factors, including safety of the game," he said.

Goodell suggested part of the discussion will include roster sizes and whether teams should have two bye weeks to potentially accommodate an extra regular-season game.

NFL will return to Mexico City for total of 9 international games next season

The NFL will play nine international games next season, with commissioner Roger Goodell announcing a return to Mexico City.

He says the league will play regular-season games at Estadio Banorte in each of the next three years.

Goodell added that he hopes the NFL will continue adding international games until it has 16 per season, meaning every team will play one game abroad.

Ten teams hold marketing rights in Mexico as part of the league's Global Markets Program.

The NFL also extended its longstanding broadcast partnership with TelevisaUnivision, an official media partner for the last 60 years, as part of the league's commitment to increasing fan access to live games and NFL programming in Mexico.

The NFL's international schedule in 2026 includes games played across four continents, seven countries and eight stadiums.

Saints will play in the first NFL game in France

The NFL will play its first regular-season game in France next season, with the New Orleans Saints set to travel to Paris.

The league announced Monday that the game will be played at the Stade de France. The NFL also has a multiyear deal to keep playing regular-season games at Real Madrid's Santiago Bernabeu Stadium.

The NFL already had its first game in Australia scheduled for next season, with the Los Angeles Rams set to host that one. It also will play in Rio de Janeiro, Munich and three games in London. The league also could return to Mexico City this fall.

The NFL has played 62 regular-season games outside the U.S. so far, with London, Berlin, Munich, Frankfurt, Madrid, Dublin, Sao Paulo, Mexico City and Toronto serving as hosts.

The Saints' opponent will be determined once the schedule is finalized in a few months.

NFL releases statement on Giants co-owner appearing in Epstein files

The NFL released a statement on New York Giants co-owner Steve Tisch, whose name showed up more than 400 times in files released by the Justice Department regarding Jeffrey Epstein.

"The league is aware of the reports and Steve's response," the statement read. "Our office will look into the matter to understand the facts."

Tisch said last week he knew Epstein and they "exchanged emails about adult women" and "discussed movies, philanthropy and investments." But the 76-year-old Tisch denied going to Epstein's island and was never charged in the investigation.

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

Patriots QB Drake Maye deals with illness on top of Super Bowl pressure

New England quarterback Drake Maye didn't practice on Friday because he was dealing with an illness, the latest wrinkle in the quarterback's preparation for his first Super Bowl.

Maye also has a shoulder injury, though he was at the team's facility and able to participate in team meetings. The 23-year-old is in his second season with the Patriots. He's an MVP candidate after a stellar year that included 4,394 yards passing and 31 touchdowns in the regular season.

Coach Mike Vrabel has said he doesn't expect the illness or the shoulder injury to affect Maye's performance on Sunday.

Sam Darnold is the first class of '18 QB in the Super Bowl

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Sam Darnold will be starting in the Super Bowl before Lamar Jackson, Josh Allen and the rest of the NFL's Class of 2018 quarterbacks. It took Darnold five teams and eight seasons to get there.

Darnold led the Seattle Seahawks to a 14-3 record, a division title, the No. 1 seed and was at his best in the NFC championship game.

Despite an oblique injury, Darnold threw for 346 yards and three touchdowns in Seattle's 31-27 victory over the Los Angeles Rams. He completed 25 of 36 passes and had no turnovers.

NFL turf guru has spent a year and a half preparing the Super Bowl field

The process of preparing the Super Bowl field got underway long before the Seattle Seahawks and New England Patriots started getting ready for the 2025 season.

Nick Pappas — the NFL's turf guru — chose the sod farm that began growing the grass for the game about 16 months ago. He has spent time since then monitoring the progress.

The job went into overdrive in January, when Pappas and his crew started a monthlong installation and preparation process to make sure that the story of the game is about the teams and not the grass.

The field at Levi's Stadium will be the stage for the country's most-watched sporting event on Feb. 8, along with the pregame and halftime festivities and concerts that make Super Bowl Sunday a cultural capstone.

Appeals court overturns former UCLA gynecologist's sex abuse conviction

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A California appeals court on Monday overturned a sex abuse conviction against a former University of California, Los Angeles, gynecologist and ordered the case to be retried.

A three-justice panel from California's 2nd District Court of Appeal ruled Dr. James Heaps was denied a fair trial because the judge did not share with his defense counsel a note by the court's foreman pointing out concerns that one juror lacked sufficient English to carry out their duties.

Heaps' attorney, Leonard Levine, said he and his team were not aware of the note or that there was any question about a juror's ability to serve until two years later when an attorney working on an appeal discovered it in a court file.

If the attorney had not seen it, "it still would have remained a secret, which is very unfortunate since it would have been a miscarriage of justice, but thankfully it's been corrected," Levine said.

Heaps was sentenced in 2023 to 11 years in prison after his conviction on charges he sexually abused female patients.

"Justice is slow but it's finally been done," he said, adding "I believe it's just a matter of time before he is totally exonerated."

Heaps was accused of sexually assaulting hundreds of patients during his 35-year career and UCLA made nearly \$700 million in payouts over lawsuits connected to the allegations — a record amount at the time for a public university.

He pleaded not guilty to 21 felony counts in the sexual assaults of seven women between 2009 and 2018. He was convicted in October 2022 of three counts of sexual battery by fraud and two counts of sexual penetration of two patients. The jury found him not guilty of seven of the 21 counts and was deadlocked on the remaining charges.

In the 31-page ruling, the appellate court panel pointed out that within about one hour of Juror No. 15 being seated as a substitute for a juror who had a medical issue, concerns were raised about whether the person was qualified to serve. The foreman's note indicated that Juror No. 15 did not speak English well enough to participate in the deliberations, the ruling stated.

Prosecutors have 30 days to appeal the ruling. The Los Angeles County District Attorney's office said in an email to The Associated Press that it plans to retry Heaps as soon as possible.

The panel stated that the problem was too grave to not order a retrial.

"We recognize the burden on the trial court and regrettably, on the witnesses, in requiring retrial of a case involving multiple victims and delving into the conduct of intimate medical examinations," the ruling stated. "The importance of the constitutional right to counsel at critical junctures in a criminal trial gives us no other choice."

Intelligence director says Trump requested her presence at FBI search of Georgia election center

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard told lawmakers in a letter Monday that she attended an FBI search of the elections hub in Fulton County, Georgia, last week because President Donald Trump asked for her to be there.

She also acknowledged that she “facilitated” what she described as a brief phone call between Trump and FBI agents who carried out the search but insisted that neither she nor the president had issued any directives.

The letter to top Democrats on the House and Senate intelligence committees marked Gabbard’s first detailed explanation for her unusual presence at an FBI search during which agents armed with a warrant seized hundreds of boxes containing ballots and other documents related to the 2020 election in Georgia’s most populous county.

Fulton County, which votes overwhelmingly Democratic, has been a frequent target of the president’s ire. He has long insisted without evidence that widespread voter fraud in the county cost him victory in Georgia in his 2020 loss to Democrat Joe Biden.

Gabbard’s arrival in Georgia raised immediate questions among Democratic officials because the FBI search of the election center was a law enforcement, not intelligence, activity and because the position of national intelligence director is typically focused on foreign threats rather than domestic concerns.

In her letter, Gabbard said her presence was specifically requested by Trump and she accompanied senior FBI officials “under my broad statutory authority to coordinate, integrate, and analyze intelligence related to election security.”

Gabbard has been central to Trump administration efforts to cast doubt on intelligence community conclusions of Russian interference on Trump’s behalf during his successful 2016 campaign, and her presence in Georgia has been feared by Democrats as laying the groundwork for the federal government to assert that the 2020 race he lost was somehow tainted by foreign meddling or to cast doubt on the integrity of future elections.

Gabbard in her letter suggested that election systems are at risk of foreign interference, citing what she said was intelligence showing that electronic voting systems “have been vulnerable to exploitation” that could result in the manipulation of votes.

She said that in order to “preserve the integrity of our elections, we must understand whether there has been foreign or other malign interference in our elections, and whether vulnerabilities exist in our election infrastructure that could be exploited in future elections.” She did not explain why Fulton County was singled out for scrutiny, saying she had not seen the warrant that investigators submitted to a judge for approval.

Audits, state officials, courts and Trump’s own former attorney general have rejected the idea that there was widespread fraud in the 2020 election that could have altered the outcome. The 2024 election that Trump won was also seen as relatively trouble-free at the polls.

Gabbard also appeared to confirm a report earlier Monday from The New York Times that she had helped arrange a call between Trump and FBI agents. It is rare for a president to communicate directly with rank-and-file FBI personnel about specific investigations.

“While visiting the FBI Field Office in Atlanta, I thanked the FBI agents for their professionalism and great work, and facilitated a brief phone call for the President to thank the agents personally for their work. He did not ask any questions, nor did he or I issue any directives,” she wrote.

Clintons agree to testify in House Epstein investigation ahead of contempt of Congress vote

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former President Bill Clinton and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton agreed late Monday to testify in a House investigation into convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, but the Republican leading the probe said an agreement had not yet been finalized.

Rep. James Comer, the chair of the House Oversight Committee, continued to press for criminal contempt of Congress charges against both Clintons Monday evening for defying a congressional subpoena when attorneys for the Clintons emailed staff for the Oversight panel, saying the pair would accept Comer's demands and "will appear for depositions on mutually agreeable dates."

The attorneys requested that Comer, a Kentucky Republican, agree not to move forward with the contempt proceedings. Comer, however, said he was not immediately dropping the charges, which would carry the threat of a substantial fine and even incarceration if passed by the House and successfully prosecuted by the Department of Justice.

"We don't have anything in writing," Comer told reporters, adding that he was open to accepting the Clintons' offer but "it depends on what they say."

The last-minute negotiating came as Republican leaders were advancing the contempt resolution through the House Rules Committee — a final hurdle before it headed to the House floor for a vote. It was potentially a grave moment for Congress, the first time it could hold a former president in contempt and advance the threat of prison time.

As Comer and the Clintons negotiated over the terms of the depositions, the House Rules Committee postponed advancing the contempt of Congress resolutions.

Comer earlier Monday rejected an offer from attorneys for the Clintons to have Bill Clinton conduct a transcribed interview and Hillary Clinton submit a sworn declaration. He insisted that both Clintons sit for sworn depositions before the committee in order to fulfill the panel's subpoenas.

A letter from the committee to attorneys for the Clintons indicated that they had offered for Bill Clinton to conduct a 4-hour transcribed interview on "matters related to the investigations and prosecutions of Jeffrey Epstein" and for Hillary Clinton to submit a sworn declaration.

"The Clintons do not get to dictate the terms of lawful subpoenas," Comer said.

The former president and secretary of state had resisted the subpoenas for months after the Oversight panel issued subpoenas for their testimony in August as it opened an investigation into Epstein and his associates. Their attorneys had tried to argue against the validity of the subpoena.

However, as Comer threatened to begin contempt of Congress proceedings, the Clintons started negotiating towards a compromise. The Republican-controlled Oversight committee advanced criminal contempt of Congress charges last month. Nine of the committee's 21 Democrats joined Republicans in support of the charges against Bill Clinton as they argued for full transparency in the Epstein investigation. Three Democrats also supported advancing the charges against Hillary Clinton.

Republicans push Bill Clinton's involvement

Bill Clinton's relationship with Epstein has reemerged as a focal point for Republicans amid the push for a reckoning over Epstein, who killed himself in 2019 in a New York jail cell as he faced sex trafficking charges.

Clinton, like a bevy of other high-powered men, had a well-documented relationship with Epstein in the late 1990s and early 2000s. He has not been accused of wrongdoing in his interactions with the late financier.

The Clintons have remained highly critical of Comer's decision, saying he was bringing politics into the investigation while failing to hold the Trump administration accountable for delays in producing the Department of Justice's case files on Epstein.

"They negotiated in good faith. You did not," a spokesperson for the Clintons, Angel Ureña, said in response to Comer's threats on Monday. "They told you under oath what they know, but you don't care."

Still, the prospect of a vote raised the potential for Congress to use one of its most severe punishments against a former president for the first time. Historically, Congress has given deference to former presi-

dents. None has ever been forced to testify before lawmakers, although a few have voluntarily done so. House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries said earlier Monday that his caucus would have a discussion on the contempt resolutions later in the week but remained noncommittal on whipping votes against them.

Jeffries said he was a "hard no" on contempt and accused Comer of focusing on political retribution rather than investigating the delayed release of case files. Democrats also say the Justice Department has not yet released all the material it has on the late financier.

"They don't want a serious interview, they want a charade," Jeffries said.

Trump urges House to vote quickly to end the partial government shutdown

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump implored the House on Monday to end the partial government shutdown, but neither Republicans nor Democrats appeared ready to quickly approve the federal funding package he brokered with the Senate without first debating their own demands over immigration enforcement operations.

Democrats are refusing to provide the votes House Speaker Mike Johnson needs to push the package forward as they try to rein in the Trump administration's deportation operations after the shooting deaths of two Americans in Minneapolis. That's forcing Johnson to rely on his slim GOP majority, which has its own complaints about the package, to fall in line behind Trump's deal with Senate Democrats.

Voting is expected to begin as soon as Tuesday, which would be day four of the partial shutdown. The Pentagon, Homeland Security and other agencies saw their funding lapse Saturday. And while many operations at those departments are deemed essential, and still functioning, some workers may go without pay or be furloughed.

"We need to get the Government open, and I hope all Republicans and Democrats will join me in supporting this Bill, and send it to my desk WITHOUT DELAY," the president wrote on social media.

"There can be NO CHANGES at this time," Trump insisted. "We will work together in good faith to address the issues that have been raised, but we cannot have another long, pointless, and destructive Shutdown."

The stalemate points to difficult days ahead as Johnson relies on Trump to help muscle the package to passage.

The president struck a deal last week with Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer in which Homeland Security would only be funded temporarily, though Feb. 13, as Congress debates changes to immigration enforcement operations. The Senate overwhelmingly approved the package with the rest of the government funding ahead of Saturday's deadline.

Democrats demand changes to ICE

House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries made it clear Monday that his side sees no reason to help Johnson push the bill forward in a procedural step, something that the majority party typically handles on its own.

With Johnson facing unrest from his own Republican ranks, Jeffries is seizing the leverage it provides Democrats to demand changes to immigration operations.

"On rare occasions have we stepped in to deal with Republican dysfunction," Jeffries said at the Capitol.

Democrats are demanding restraints on Immigration and Customs Enforcement that go beyond \$20 million for body cameras that already is in the bill. Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem announced Monday that officers on the ground in Minneapolis, including ICE, will be immediately issued body-worn cameras, and the program would be expanded nationwide as funding is available.

But Democrats are pressing for more. They want to require that federal immigration agents unmask — noting that few, if any, other law enforcement agencies routinely mask themselves in the U.S. — and they want officers to rely on judicial, rather than administrative, warrants in their operations.

They also want an end to roving patrols, amid other changes.

Jeffries said the administration needs to begin negotiations now, not over the next two weeks, on changes

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to immigration enforcement operations.

Certain Democrats, however, are splintering with the leader, and pushing for quicker passage of the funding package to avoid government disruptions.

Republicans launch their own demands

At the same time, House Republicans, with some allies in the Senate, are making their own demands, as they work to support Trump's clampdown on immigrants in the U.S.

The House Freedom Caucus has insisted on fuller funding for Homeland Security while certain Republicans pushed to include the SAVE Act, a longshot Trump priority that would require proof of citizenship before Americans are eligible to participate in elections and vote. Critics say it would disenfranchise millions of voters.

Late Monday, Rep. Anna Paulina Luna, R-Fla., dropped her demand to attach the voting bill to the funding package after she and Rep. Tim Burchett, R-Tenn., met with Trump at the White House. She posted afterward that it would be better to try to advance that bill separately through the Senate, and keep the government open.

The development was seen as helping Johnson push ahead.

"Obviously the president really wants this," Majority Leader Steve Scalise said at the Capitol.

"We always work 'til the midnight hour to get the votes," Scalise said. "You never start the process with everybody on board. You work through it."

Workers without pay if partial government shutdown drags on

Meanwhile, a number of federal agencies are snared in the funding standoff after the government went into a partial shutdown over the weekend.

Defense, health, transportation and housing are among those that were given shutdown guidance by the administration, though many operations are deemed essential and services are not necessarily interrupted. Workers could go without pay if the impasse drags on. Some could be furloughed.

Lawmakers from both parties are increasingly concerned the closure will disrupt the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which they rely on to help constituents after deadly snowstorms and other disasters.

This is the second time in a matter of months that federal government operations have been disrupted as lawmakers use the annual funding process as leverage to extract policy changes. Last fall, Democrats sparked what became the longest federal shutdown in history, 43 days, as they protested the expiration of health insurance tax breaks.

That shutdown ended with a promise to vote on proposals to extend the Affordable Care Act tax credits. But with GOP opposition, Democrats were unable to achieve their goal of keeping the subsidies in place. Insurance premiums spiked in the new year for millions of people.

Trump tries to prevent another long shutdown

Trump is already working on an immigration deal to ensure the shutdown doesn't drag on.

Johnson said he was in the Oval Office last week when Trump, along with border czar Tom Homan, spoke with Schumer of New York as they discussed the immigration changes.

Body cameras, which are already provided for in the package, and an end to the roving patrols by immigration agents are areas of potential agreement, Johnson said.

But Johnson drew a line at other Democratic demands. He said he does not think that requiring immigration officers to remove their masks would have support from Republicans because it could lead to problems if their personal images and private information is posted online by protesters.

And Senate Majority Leader John Thune tapped the brakes on the demand from Democrats to require judicial warrants for officers' searches, saying it's likely to be a part of the negotiations ahead.

"It's going to be very difficult to reach agreement in two weeks," Thune said at the Capitol.

Democrats, however, said the immigration operations are out of control, and must end in Minneapolis and other cities.

Growing numbers of lawmakers are also calling for Noem to be fired or impeached.

Authorities believe 'Today' show host Savannah Guthrie's mother was taken against her will

By JACQUES BILLEAUD and SEJAL GOVINDARAO Associated Press

TUCSON, Ariz. (AP) — Authorities believe the 84-year-old mother of "Today" show host Savannah Guthrie was kidnapped, abducted or otherwise taken against her will, and the sheriff said Monday it's imperative she's found soon because she could die without her medication.

Nancy Guthrie was last seen around 9:30 p.m. Saturday at her home in the Tucson area, where she lived alone. Her family reported her missing around noon Sunday. The Pima County Sheriff's Department is investigating the possibility she was taken overnight, spokesperson Angelica Carrillo said.

Guthrie had limited mobility, and officials don't believe she left on her own. Sheriff Chris Nanos said Guthrie was of sound mind.

"This is not dementia-related. She's as sharp as a tack," Nanos said at a news conference earlier in the day. "The family wants everyone to know that this isn't someone who just wandered off."

Nanos said a family member received a call from someone at church saying Guthrie wasn't there, leading family to search for her at her home and then calling 911. Nanos said Guthrie needs her daily medication, and the sheriff urged whoever has her to free her.

"If she's alive right now her meds are vital. I can't stress that enough. It's been better than 24 hours, and the family tells us if she doesn't have those meds, it can become fatal," Nanos said.

Searchers were using drones and search dogs to look for her, Nanos said. Search and rescue teams were supported by volunteers and Border Patrol, and the homicide team was also involved, he said. It is not standard for the homicide team to get involved in such cases, Nanos said. The FBI has offered to help, Carrillo said.

"This one stood out because of what was described to us at the scene and what we located just looking at the scene," Nanos said Sunday. He was not ruling out foul play.

On Monday morning, Nanos said search crews worked hard but have since been pulled back.

"We don't see this as a search mission so much as it is a crime scene," the sheriff said.

Even so, a sheriff's helicopter flew over the desert Monday afternoon near Guthrie's home in the affluent Catalina Foothills area on the northern edge of Tucson. Her brick home has a gravel driveway and a yard covered in Prickly Pear and Saguaro cactus.

Savannah Guthrie issued a statement Monday, NBC's "Today" show reported.

"On behalf of our family, I want to thank everyone for the thoughts, prayers and messages of support," she said. "Right now, our focus remains on the safe return of our dear Nancy."

"Today" opened Monday's show with the disappearance of the co-anchor's mother, but Savannah Guthrie was not at the anchor's desk. Nanos said during the Monday news conference that Savannah Guthrie is in Arizona. Savannah Guthrie grew up in Tucson, graduated from the University of Arizona and previously worked as a reporter and anchor at KVOA-TV in Tucson.

Nancy Guthrie appeared in a November 2025 story her daughter did about her hometown. Over a meal, Savannah Guthrie asked her mother what made the family want to plant roots in Tucson in the 1970s.

"It's so wonderful. Just the air, the quality of life," Nancy Guthrie said. "It's laid back and gentle."

She said she likes to see the javelinas, pig-like desert mammals, eat her plants.

Government says it's fixing redactions in Epstein-related files that may have had victim information

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, LARRY NEUMEISTER and PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The Justice Department said Monday that it had withdrawn several thousand documents and "media" related to disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein after lawyers told a New York judge that the lives of nearly 100 victims had been "turned upside down" by sloppy redactions in the government's latest release of records.

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The exposed materials include nude photos showing the faces of potential victims as well as names, email addresses and other identifying information that was either unredacted or not fully obscured.

The department blamed it on "technical or human error."

In a letter to the New York judges overseeing the sex trafficking cases brought against Epstein and confidant Ghislaine Maxwell, U.S. Attorney Jay Clayton wrote that the department had taken down nearly all materials identified by victims or their lawyers, along with a "substantial number" of documents identified independently by the government.

Clayton said the department has "revised its protocols for addressing flagging documents" after victims and their lawyers requested changes. Documents are promptly pulled down when flagged by victims, then evaluated before a redacted version of the document can be reposted, "ideally within 24 to 36 hours."

Two lawyers for Epstein victims wrote the court Sunday seeking "immediate judicial intervention" because of what they described as thousands of instances when the government had failed to redact names and other personally identifying information.

Eight women who identify as Epstein victims added comments to the letter to Judge Richard M. Berman. One wrote that the records' release was "life threatening." Another said she'd gotten death threats after 51 entries included her private banking information, forcing her to try to shut down her credit cards and accounts.

"There is no conceivable degree of institutional incompetence sufficient to explain the scale, consistency, and persistence of the failures that occurred — particularly where the sole task ordered by the Court and repeatedly emphasized by DOJ was simple: redact known victim names before publication," the lawyers, Brittany Henderson and Brad Edwards, wrote.

Berman, who presided over Epstein's sex trafficking case, scheduled a conference for Wednesday.

Also Monday, a section of the Justice Department's Epstein files website that had contained public court records from Epstein and Maxwell's criminal cases and civil lawsuits was no longer functioning.

A message seeking comment on the website issue was left for the Justice Department.

Uncensored photos

Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche said in an interview Sunday on ABC's "This Week" that there have been sporadic errors in redacting, or blacking out, sensitive information but that the Justice Department has tried to work quickly to address them.

"Every time we hear from a victim or their lawyer that they believe that their name was not properly redacted, we immediately rectified that. And the numbers we're talking about, just so the American people understand, we're talking about .001 percent of all the materials," Blanche said.

Dozens of Associated Press reporters analyzing the files have so far found multiple occasions where a name was redacted in one document, only to be left exposed in another version of the same file.

In other places, names and email addresses are crossed out but not fully blackened out, so they're still visible. Other text redactions can be easily overridden by simply double clicking on them to reveal the hidden text underneath.

The Justice Department has said all nude or pornographic images were redacted from the 2,000-some videos and 180,000 images in the release, even if they were commercially produced, as the agency considered all women depicted in the images as potential victims.

But reporters with The New York Times still found dozens of uncensored photos of naked young people with their faces unredacted.

The newspaper said the images have since been largely removed or redacted after it notified the Justice Department. It said some of the images appeared to have been taken on the beach at Epstein's private Caribbean island while others are in a bedroom setting.

In another instance, the AP found a set of more than 100 images of a young, unidentified female lounging on a bed, standing on a beach and at other summertime locations while wearing a short top.

The images are almost fully blacked out so only the person's arms and legs are clearly visible, save for the very last image, a profile photo that is completely unredacted and reveals her face.

Elsewhere in the files, the face of one of Epstein's alleged underage victims was clearly shown on an

organizational chart created by federal investigators.

The poor redactions didn't just involve victim information.

One email showed Epstein's entire credit card number, expiration date and security code. An interview transcript from the investigation into Epstein's suicide included a jail worker's full Social Security number and date of birth. Some email addresses were visible under thin cross-outs.

Practical consequences in an unrelated court case

At an unrelated sex trafficking trial in New York on Monday, lawyers for two high-end real estate brokers and their brother asked for a mistrial because their names had appeared in some of the Epstein documents.

Deanna Paul, a defense lawyer at the trial of Tal, Oren and Alon Alexander, said prosecutors had "destroyed the possibility of a fair trial" by letting documents get out that falsely suggested an association with Epstein. The brothers have pleaded not guilty to drugging and raping multiple girls and women from 2008 to 2021. They aren't accused of having anything to do with Epstein's abuse of underage girls.

Judge Valerie E. Caproni rejected the mistrial request after she individually questioned jurors, all of whom said they hadn't seen any news about the brothers. Still, she confronted a prosecutor about the matter, asking, "Government, really?"

"Yes, I understand where the court's coming from," replied Assistant U.S. Attorney Elizabeth Espinosa. She said the documents had been withdrawn from public circulation.

Musk Inc.? Billionaire combines his rocket and AI businesses before an expected IPO this year

By BERNARD CONDON and MATT O'BRIEN AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — Elon Musk is joining his space exploration and artificial intelligence ventures into a single company before what's expected to be a massive initial public offering for the business later this year.

His rocket venture, SpaceX, announced on Monday that it had bought xAI in an effort to help the world's richest man dominate the rocket and artificial intelligence businesses. The deal will combine several of his offerings, including his AI chatbot Grok, his satellite communications company Starlink, and his social media company X.

Musk has talked repeatedly about the need to speed development of technology that will allow data centers to operate in space. He believes that will help overcome the problem of huge costs in electricity and other resources in building and running AI systems on Earth.

It's a goal that Musk suggested in his announcement of the deal could become easier to reach with a combined company.

"In the long term, space-based AI is obviously the only way to scale," Musk wrote on SpaceX's website Monday, then added in reference to solar power, "It's always sunny in space!"

Musk said in his announcement he estimates "that within 2 to 3 years, the lowest cost way to generate AI compute will be in space."

SpaceX will be competing in that realm with Google, which is working on a research project called Project Suncatcher that would equip solar-powered satellites with AI computer chips, with a prototype that could launch as soon as next year.

But Musk's prediction of a near future of space-based AI supercomputers is not shared by many other companies building data centers, including Microsoft.

"I'll be surprised if people move from land to low-Earth orbit," Microsoft's president, Brad Smith, told The Associated Press last month, when asked about the alternatives to building data centers in the U.S. amid rising community opposition.

Musk is already facing stiff competition in artificial intelligence, where he's been scrambling to compete against rivals such as OpenAI, which is also working toward an IPO. Musk's dislike of OpenAI, which he helped to found more than a decade ago, is part of what drove him to start xAI in 2023 and build the ChatGPT alternative he named Grok.

Musk has equally ambitious plans for Tesla as he tries to pivot a company with shrinking car sales to

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focus more on self-driving taxis and humanoid robots, driven by artificial intelligence.

Tesla recently announced a \$2 billion investment in xAI.

Musk has used his control over multiple companies to combine operations before. Tesla bought SolarCity, a decade ago. And he recently had xAI buy his social media platform X, formerly called Twitter.

Chatter on Wall Street about the billionaire continuing to meld his many ventures together in a massive Musk Inc. has taken off in recent months, with some investors speculating that Tesla could combine with SpaceX, too.

Forbes magazine puts Musk's net worth at \$768 billion. He also owns a brain implant company called Neuralink and a tunnel digging business named the Boring Company.

Terms of the SpaceX purchase of xAI were not disclosed. Among outside investors in the companies is a fund in which President Donald Trump's son, Don Jr., is a partner. That firm, 1789 Capital, has made more than \$1 billion worth of investments in various Musk companies in the past year, including SpaceX, xAI, and X, according to data provider Pitchbook, though it cashed out of some already.

While pursuing space data centers, xAI is also moving rapidly to expand on Earth. Mississippi officials last month announced that the company is set to spend \$20 billion to build a data center near the state's border with Tennessee.

The data center, called MACROHARDRR, a likely pun on Microsoft's name, will be its third one in the greater Memphis area.

Musk is also hoping the combined company can eventually help reach another goal he has long talked about — the need to colonize other planets in case there is a natural disaster or human-made disaster on Earth.

When speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos last week, Musk mused about humanity being a "tiny candle in a vast darkness, a tiny candle of consciousness that could easily go out."

Trump plans to lower tariffs on Indian goods to 18% after India agreed to stop buying Russian oil

By JOSH BOAK, AAMER MADHANI and RAJESH ROY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said Monday that he plans to lower tariffs on goods from India to 18%, from 25%, after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi agreed to stop buying Russian oil.

The move comes after months of Trump pressing India to cut its reliance on cheap Russian crude. India has taken advantage of reduced Russian oil prices as much of the world has sought to isolate Moscow for its February 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Trump said that India would also start to reduce its import taxes on U.S. goods to zero and buy \$500 billion worth of American products.

"This will help END THE WAR in Ukraine, which is taking place right now, with thousands of people dying each and every week!" Trump said in a Truth Social post announcing the tariff reduction on India.

Modi posted on X that he was "delighted" by the announced tariff reduction and that Trump's "leadership is vital for global peace, stability, and prosperity."

"I look forward to working closely with him to take our partnership to unprecedented heights," Modi said.

Trump has long had a warm relationship with Modi, only to find it complicated recently by Russia's war in Ukraine and trade disputes.

Trump has struggled to make good on a campaign pledge to quickly end the Russia-Ukraine war and has been reluctant since his return to office to place pressure on Russian President Vladimir Putin. He has simultaneously imposed tariffs without going through Congress to achieve his economic and foreign policy aims.

The announcement of the agreement with India comes as his special envoy, Steve Witkoff, and son-in-law Jared Kushner are expected to hold another round of three-way talks with Russian and Ukrainian officials in Abu Dhabi later this week aimed at finding an endgame to the war, according to a White House official who requested anonymity to describe the upcoming meeting.

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Trump has voiced that he believes that targeting Russia's oil revenue is the best way to get Moscow to end its nearly four-year war against Ukraine, a view that dovetails with his devotion to tariffs.

In June, Trump announced the United States would impose a 25% tariff on goods from India after his administration felt the country had done too little to narrow its trade surplus with the U.S. and open up its markets to American goods. In August, Trump imposed additional import taxes of 25% on Indian products because of its purchases of Russian oil, putting the combined rate increase at 50%.

With the commitment to stop buying Russian oil and the lower rate, the tariff rate on Indian products could fall to 18%, which is close to the 15% rate charged on goods from the European Union and Japan, among other nations.

Historically, India's relationship with Russia revolves more around defense than energy. Russia provides only a small fraction of India's oil but the majority of its military hardware.

But India, in the aftermath of the Russian invasion, used the moment to buy discounted Russian oil, allowing it to increase its energy supplies while Russia looked to cut deals to boost its beleaguered economy and keep paying for its brutal war.

The announced tariff reduction comes days after India and the European Union reached a free trade agreement that could affect as many as 2 billion people after nearly two decades of negotiations. That deal would enable free trade on almost all goods between the EU's 27 members and India, covering everything from textiles to medicines, and bringing down high import taxes for European wine and cars.

The deal between two of the world's biggest markets also reflected a desire to reduce dependence on the U.S. after Trump's import tax hikes disrupted established trade flows. While the cost of Trump's tariffs have largely been borne by American businesses and consumers, the taxes can reduce trade volumes among countries.

In recent months, India has accelerated a push to finalize several trade agreements. It signed a deal with Oman in December and concluded talks for a deal with New Zealand.

Trump seemed to hint at a positive call with Modi on Monday morning, posting to social media a picture of the two of them on a magazine cover.

When the pair met last February, the U.S. president said that India would start buying American oil and natural gas. But the talks proved frustrating and the tariffs imposed last year by Trump did little to initially change India's objections.

While the U.S. has been seeking greater market access and zero tariff on almost all its exports, India has expressed reservations on throwing open sectors such as agriculture and dairy, which employ a bulk of the country's population for livelihood, Indian officials said.

The Census Bureau reported that the U.S. ran a \$53.5 billion trade imbalance in goods with India during the first 11 months of last year, meaning it imported more than it exported.

At a population exceeding 1.4 billion people, India is the world's most populous country and viewed by many government officials and business leaders as geopolitical and economic counterbalance to China.

Palestinians allowed in to Gaza and patients are evacuated to Egypt as the Rafah crossing reopens

By SAMY MAGDY and JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — A dozen Palestinian returnees were allowed into Gaza from Egypt late Monday after the long-awaited reopening of the Rafah border crossing was marred by delays. Their arrival came hours after a small group of medical evacuees was ferried from the territory into Egypt.

The reopening of the crossing marked a key step in the Israel-Hamas ceasefire but mostly a symbolic one, with few people allowed to travel and no goods allowed to pass through. The limitations were apparent Monday as crossings fell well short of the 50 people officials had said would be allowed to move in each direction.

About 20,000 Palestinian children and adults needing medical care hope to leave the devastated territory via the crossing, according to Gaza health officials. Thousands of other Palestinians outside the territory

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hope to enter and return home.

The crossing had been closed since Israeli troops seized it in May 2024. The number of travelers is expected to increase over time if the system is successful. Israel has said it and Egypt will vet people for exit and entry.

Ambulances queued for hours at the border before ferrying patients into Egypt, the state-run Al-Qahera News satellite television channel showed. Just before midnight, a bus arrived in Gaza carrying Palestinian returnees who had fled the fighting early in the war. As the vehicle entered the compound of a hospital in Khan Younis, a girl wearing barrettes and an older woman stood just inside the front door, waving to relatives anxious for their return.

Before the war, Rafah was the main crossing for people moving in and out of Gaza. The territory's handful of other crossings are all shared with Israel. Under the terms of the ceasefire, which went into effect in October, Israel's military controls the area between the Rafah crossing and the zone where most Palestinians live.

Violence continued across the coastal territory Monday. Gaza hospital officials said an Israeli navy ship had fired on a tent camp, killing a 3-year-old Palestinian boy. Israel's military said it was looking into the incident.

Egypt prepares to receive the wounded

Rajaa Abu Mustafa stood outside a Gaza hospital where her 17-year-old son Mohamed awaited evacuation. He was blinded by a shot to the eye last year as he joined desperate Palestinians seeking food from aid trucks outside the southern city of Khan Younis.

"The health ministry called and told us that we will travel to Egypt for (his) treatment," she said.

About 150 hospitals across Egypt are ready to receive patients evacuated from Gaza through Rafah, authorities said. But the isolated crossing is separated from Cairo by a six-hour drive. The Egyptian Red Crescent said it has readied "safe spaces" on the Egyptian side of the border to support those evacuated.

More than 10,000 patients have been evacuated from Gaza since the war began, according to the World Health Organization. But Israel's seizure of the Rafah crossing brought the pace of evacuations to a crawl, with an average of 17 patients a week leaving for most of the time since.

Israel has banned sending patients to hospitals in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and east Jerusalem since the war began, cutting off what was previously the main outlet for Palestinians needing medical treatment unavailable in Gaza.

U.N. officials on Monday called on other countries to take in more patients from Gaza "so that everyone receives the treatment they need."

With the crossing reopened, Gaza residents looked forward to the return of family members who fled earlier in the war.

"This time it's real," said Iman Rashwan, anticipating the arrival of her mother and sister. They left Gaza a year ago when her mother's heart condition worsened and she was referred for treatment in Egypt.

"They called us yesterday and said they received news that they will leave," Rashwan said. "We have been waiting for it for too long."

The Rafah crossing will be supervised by European Union border patrol agents with a small Palestinian presence. Historically, Israel and Egypt have vetted Palestinians applying to cross. Fearing that Israel could use the crossing to push Palestinians out of the enclave, Egypt has repeatedly said it must be open for them to enter and exit Gaza.

Palestinian toddler killed by Israeli fire

A 3-year-old Palestinian was killed when Israel's navy hit tents sheltering displaced people in Khan Younis, Palestinian hospital authorities said. According to Nasser hospital, which received the body, the attack happened in Muwasi, a tent camp area on Gaza's coast.

Also on Monday, Israel's military said it killed four Palestinians in northern Gaza who approached troops near the line marking Israeli-controlled territory, "posing an imminent threat to them."

More than 520 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire since the ceasefire went into effect on Oct.

10, according to Gaza's health ministry. They are among the over 71,800 Palestinians killed since the start of the war, according to the ministry, which does not say how many were fighters or civilians.

The ministry, part of Gaza's Hamas-led government, keeps detailed casualty records that are seen as generally reliable by U.N. agencies and independent experts.

Rafah's opening represents ceasefire progress

Israel had said seizing the Rafah crossing in May 2024 was part of efforts to combat arms-smuggling by the Hamas militant group. The crossing was briefly opened for the evacuation of medical patients during a ceasefire in early 2025.

Israel had resisted reopening the Rafah crossing, but the recovery of the remains of the last hostage in Gaza cleared the way to move forward.

The reopening is seen as a key step as the U.S.-brokered ceasefire agreement moves into its second phase.

The truce halted more than two years of war between Israel and Hamas that began with the Hamas-led attack on southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023. Its first phase called for the exchange of all hostages held in Gaza for hundreds of Palestinians held by Israel, an increase in badly needed humanitarian aid and a partial pullback of Israeli troops.

The second phase of the ceasefire deal is more complicated. It calls for installing the new Palestinian committee to govern Gaza, deploying an international security force, disarming Hamas and taking steps to begin rebuilding.

Every Homeland Security officer in Minneapolis is now being issued a body-worn camera, Noem says

By REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Every Homeland Security officer on the ground in Minneapolis, including those from Immigration and Customs Enforcement, will be immediately issued body-worn cameras, Secretary Kristi Noem said Monday, in the latest fallout after the shooting deaths of two U.S. citizens at the hands of federal agents.

Noem said the body-worn camera program is being expanded nationwide as funding becomes available.

"We will rapidly acquire and deploy body cameras to DHS law enforcement across the country," Noem said in a social media post on X.

The news of the body cameras comes as Minneapolis has been the site of intense scrutiny over the conduct of federal officers after two U.S. citizens protesting immigration enforcement activities in the city were shot and killed.

It is the latest apparent effort by the Trump administration to ratchet down tensions after the shootings triggered protests and widespread criticism.

The shooting deaths sparked calls for accountability

In the immediate hours after ICU nurse Alex Pretti's death, Noem went on the offensive, saying several times that Pretti "came with a weapon and dozens of rounds of ammunition and attacked" officers, who took action to "defend their lives." Other administration officials painted a similar picture.

Multiple videos that emerged of the shooting contradicted that claim, showing Pretti had only his mobile phone in his hand as officers tackled him to the ground, with one removing a handgun from the back of his pants as another officer began firing shots into his back.

Homeland Security has said that at least four Customs and Border Protection officers on the scene when Pretti was shot were wearing body cameras. The body camera footage from Pretti's shooting has not been made public.

The department has not responded to repeated questions about whether any of the ICE officers on the scene of the killing of 37-year-old mother of three Renee Good earlier in January were wearing the cameras.

The shootings, and the narrative coming from some in the administration, sparked demands for account-

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ability, including among some Republicans.

President Donald Trump sent his border czar Tom Homan to Minneapolis to take control of operations there, displacing Border Patrol commander Gregory Bovino, who has become a lightning rod for criticism in the various operations he's joined in cities like Chicago and Los Angeles.

The Justice Department has also opened a federal civil rights investigation into Pretti's shooting, which it has not done in the case of Good.

Critics have increasingly called for Homeland Security to require its immigration enforcement officers to wear body cameras.

In response to Noem's announcement, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz said on X that body cameras should have been worn "long before (officers) killed two Americans."

Lawmakers consider restraints in DHS funding bill

Noem's announcement comes as the administration and Democrats are locked in a congressional battle over funding for the Department of Homeland Security.

Democrats have been demanding changes to rein in the Trump administration's immigration enforcement operations. An additional \$20 million for body cameras was included in the bipartisan federal funding package that was approved by the Senate late last week ahead of a deadline to prevent a government shutdown.

But the House has yet to approve the package, launching a partial government shutdown for certain agencies, including Homeland Security, last Saturday. But because many Homeland Security operations are deemed essential, they continue despite the federal funding lapse.

Body cameras have become a flashpoint in previous immigration enforcement operations under the Trump administration's mass deportations agenda, including during a major operation in Chicago last fall. A U.S. district judge ordered uniformed agents there to wear cameras, if available, and turn them on when engaged in arrests, frisks and building searches or when being deployed to protests.

A 2022 executive order on police reform by President Joe Biden directed federal law enforcement officers to wear body cameras. Trump had rescinded that directive after starting his second term.

Trump backs body-worn cameras

Noem's move comes after Trump over the weekend endorsed the idea of body cameras for immigration officers.

After Noem's announcement Monday, Trump said the decision was up to the secretary but said that he thought it was generally good for law enforcement to wear cameras.

"They generally tend to be good for law enforcement because people can't lie about what's happening," he said in the Oval Office Monday, adding, "If she wants to do the camera thing, that's OK with me."

Aaron Reichlin-Melnick, a senior fellow with the American Immigration Council, an advocacy group, said Noem didn't need to wait for more money to enforce the new policy nationwide, pointing to the massive immigration enforcement funding measure that Congress passed last summer that gave ICE nearly \$30 billion for "enforcement and removal operations" including spending on information technology.

"That buys a lot of body cameras," he said.

US-brokered talks on Russia's war on Ukraine will resume in Abu Dhabi

By ILLIA NOVIKOV and DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A new round of U.S.-brokered talks on ending Russia's war on Ukraine is set to go ahead this week after a brief postponement, a senior Kremlin official said Monday, with negotiations taking place against a backdrop of continued front-line fighting and deadly long-range attacks on rear areas.

The trilateral talks will take place on Wednesday and Thursday in Abu Dhabi, where a previous meeting was held last month, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov confirmed.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Sunday that he would be sending a delegation to the meeting, which initially was to be held at the weekend but was delayed by what Peskov said were sched-

uling conflicts.

The Trump administration has over the past year pushed the two sides to find compromises. But breaking the deadlock on key issues appears no closer as the fourth anniversary of Russia's all-out invasion of its neighbor approaches later this month.

Peskov described the talks as "very complex."

"On some issues, we have certainly come closer because there have been discussions, conversations, and on some issues it is easier to find common ground," he told reporters. "There are issues where it's more difficult to find common ground."

Russian presidential envoy Kirill Dmitriev was in Miami, Florida, at the weekend for talks with American officials, but Peskov refused to provide any details of the meeting.

A key sticking point is whether Russia gets to keep the Ukrainian territory its army has occupied, especially in Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland. Moscow is also demanding possession of other Ukrainian land there that it hasn't been able to capture.

Russian drones and missiles have continued to bombard civilian areas, killing 12 miners in a bus on Sunday in the most recent mass aerial attack. The barrages have also wrecked the Ukrainian power grid, leaving people without heating, light and running water in bitter winter cold.

Defense Minister Mykhailo Fedorov said Monday that authorities are taking steps to prevent Russia using Starlink satellite services to steer its drones toward their targets.

Fedorov asked Elon Musk's SpaceX to help deny Russia use of the service in Ukraine. Starlink is a global internet network that relies on around 10,000 satellites orbiting Earth.

Ukraine is requiring civilian and military Starlink users to register their terminals on a database, allowing approved devices to function while unregistered terminals would be disabled inside Ukraine, Fedorov said.

"Looks like the steps we took to stop the unauthorized use of Starlink by Russia have worked," Musk said Sunday on X. "Let us know if more needs to be done."

Virginia man in 'au pair affair' case convicted of murdering wife and another man in elaborate ruse

By OLIVIA DIAZ and TRAVIS LOLLER Associated Press/Report for America

A Virginia man having an affair with the family's Brazilian au pair was found guilty Monday of murdering his wife and another man that prosecutors say was lured to the house as a fall guy.

Brendan Banfield, a former IRS law enforcement officer, told police he came across Joseph Ryan attacking his wife, Christine Banfield, with a knife on the morning of Feb. 24, 2023. He shot Ryan and then Juliana Magalhães, the au pair, shot him, too.

But officials argued in court that the story was too good to be true, telling jurors that Banfield set Ryan up in a scheme to get rid of his wife. It later came out that Brendan Banfield and Magalhães had been having an affair.

The verdict comes after the gruesome and complicated double homicide was catapulted into mainstream media in Brazil, the U.S. and elsewhere in the world.

"The details of this case attracted national attention — because it involved an affair, a fetish website and a premeditated plot," Fairfax County Commonwealth's Attorney Steve Descano said following the verdict. "But beyond the spectacle, we are here today because of the tragic deaths of two of our community members, Christine Banfield and Joseph Ryan."

Prosecutors argued that Banfield and Magalhães impersonated Christine Banfield, a pediatric intensive care nurse, on a website for sexual fetishes. Officials said they used the site to lure Ryan to the house for a sexual encounter involving a knife, left the front door open and staged the scene to look as though they had shot an intruder who was attacking the wife.

Magalhães pleaded guilty to manslaughter in 2024 and testified against her former lover at trial, corroborating prosecutors' theory.

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Defense attorney John Carroll argued that Magalhães' testimony could not be trusted because she was cooperating with prosecutors to try to avoid a long prison sentence. In his own testimony, Banfield said that the testimony was "absolutely crazy."

Carroll also introduced evidence showing that there was dissent within the police department over the theory that Magalhães and Brendan Banfield impersonated Christine Banfield on social media in a "catfishing" scheme. An officer who concluded from digital evidence that Christine Banfield was behind the social media account was later transferred in what Carroll said was punishment for disagreeing with a theory favored by the department's higher-ups.

But prosecutor Jenna Sands pushed back on the notion that Banfield was unfamiliar with social media platforms for people interested in fetishes and couldn't be capable of such catfishing.

"You had multiple affairs, correct?" Sands asked the defendant, followed by, "And one of those affairs was with a woman named Danielle, who you met on a fetish site searching for 'sugar babies.' Is that correct?"

Banfield replied: "I would not call it a fetish site." When pressed as to how he would describe the website, Banfield testified that he had an arranged relationship with someone who knew he was married.

In closing arguments, Sands told the jury they did not have to rely solely on Magalhães' testimony, pointing to what she called a "plethora of evidence." That included expert testimony that blood stains on Ryan's hands suggested Christine Banfield's blood had been dripped onto him from above.

Banfield was also convicted of child endangerment. Banfield's daughter, 4 years old at the time, was in the home's basement on the day of the killings, though physically unharmed.

The jury deliberated for nearly nine hours across two days before reaching a verdict. Banfield faces the possibility of life in prison at his sentencing hearing, which is scheduled for May 8.

Magalhães was scheduled to be sentenced after Banfield's trial. Attorneys have said she could be allowed to walk free if she is sentenced to time served and return to her home in Brazil.

FACT FOCUS: Images of NYC mayor with Jeffrey Epstein are AI-generated. Here's how we know

By MELISSA GOLDIN Associated Press

Multiple AI-generated photos falsely claiming to show New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani as a child and his mother, filmmaker Mira Nair, with disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein and his confidant Ghislaine Maxwell, along with other high-profile public figures, were shared widely on social media Monday.

The images originated on an X account labeled as parody after a huge tranche of new Epstein files was released by the Justice Department on Friday. They are clearly watermarked as AI and other elements they contain do not add up.

Here's a closer look at the facts.

CLAIM: Images show Mamdani as a child and his mother with Jeffrey Epstein and other public figures linked to the disgraced financier.

THE FACTS: The images were created with artificial intelligence. They all contain a digital watermark identifying them as such and first appeared on a parody X account that says it creates "high quality AI videos and memes."

In one of the images, Mamdani and Nair appear in the front of a group photo with Maxwell, Epstein, former President Bill Clinton, Amazon founder Jeff Bezos and Microsoft founder Bill Gates. They seem to be posing at night on a crowded city street. Mamdani looks to be a preteen or young teenager.

Another supposedly shows the same group of people, minus Nair, in what appears to be a tropical setting. Epstein is pictured holding Clinton sitting in his arms, while Maxwell has her arm around Mamdani, who appears slightly younger.

Other AI-generated images circulating online depict Mamdani as a baby being held by Nair while she poses with Epstein, Clinton, Maxwell and Bezos. None of Epstein's victims have publicly accused Clinton, Gates or Bezos of being involved in his crimes.

Google's Gemini app detected SynthID, a digital watermarking tool for identifying content that has been

generated or altered with AI, in all the images described above. This means they were created or edited, either entirely or in part, by Google's AI models.

The X account that first posted the images describes itself as "an AI-powered meme engine" that uses "AI to create memes, songs, stories, and visuals that call things exactly how they are — fast, loud, and impossible to ignore."

An inquiry sent to the account went unanswered. However, a post by the account seems to acknowledge that it created the images.

"Damn you guys failed," it reads. "I purposely made him a baby which would technically make this pic 34 years old. Yikes."

The photos began circulating after an email emerged in which a publicist, Peggy Siegal, wrote to Epstein about seeing a variety of luminaries, including Clinton, Bezos and Nair, an award-winning Indian filmmaker, at 2009 afterparty for a film held at Maxwell's townhouse.

While Mamdani appears as a baby or young child in all of the images, he was 18 in 2009, when Nair is said to have attended the party.

The images have led to related falsehoods that have spread online in their wake. For example, one claims that Epstein is Mamdani's father. This is not true — Mamdani's father is Mahmood Mamdani, an anthropology professor at Columbia University.

The NYC Mayor's Office did not respond to a request for comment.

Father of 5-year-old detained in Minnesota disputes government assertion he abandoned the boy

By MIKE CATALINI, STEVE KARNOWSKI and SHARON LURYE Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The father of a 5-year-old boy who was detained by immigration officers and held at a federal facility in Texas denied government accounts Monday that he abandoned his son last month while being pursued by authorities.

As the pair returned to Minnesota, Adrian Conejo Arias, who is originally from Ecuador, told ABC News that he loves his son, Liam, and would never abandon him, disputing statements from the Department of Homeland Security, which alleged that Arias had left his child in a vehicle. He also said his son got sick while in federal custody but was denied medicine.

Assistant Homeland Security Secretary Tricia McLaughlin said in a statement that Arias fled on foot before he was arrested, "abandoning his child." She said Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers stayed with the boy.

"The facts in this case have NOT changed: The father who was illegally in the country chose to take his child with him to a detention center," she said.

McLaughlin did not address Arias' statement that his son was denied medication while in custody.

Arias also said he was arrested unjustly and contended he was in the country legally, with a pending court hearing for asylum.

The comments come after a federal judge ordered over the weekend that the pair be freed. They were released Sunday and returned to Minnesota, according to Rep. Joaquin Castro of Texas.

The family's arrest and release unfolded during President Donald Trump's crackdown on immigration, which has led to daily protests that included the shooting deaths of two American citizens by federal officers.

The president last week ordered his top border adviser to oversee the crackdown days after the fatal shooting of 37-year-old Alex Pretti, an intensive care nurse at a Veterans Affairs hospital. Border czar Tom Homan suggested that mistakes have been made, but he said agents would continue to enforce federal law and called on local and state officials to cooperate with federal officers.

In the latest fallout, Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said on Monday every DHS officer in Minneapolis would immediately be issued body-worn cameras. President Donald Trump said body cameras tend to be good for law enforcement "because people can't lie about what's happening,"

Bomb threats at schools

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Neighbors celebrated the boy's return but his school in Columbia Heights had to cancel class after receiving bomb threats. Authorities said they did not find any dangerous devices, and school was set to resume Tuesday.

Even before the threats, the district has felt under siege. Over two dozen parents of students at Liam's school, Valley View Elementary, have been detained, Principal Jason Kuhlman said Friday in an interview, leaving children without their caretakers.

"We hate Mondays. And it's because we find out how many of our parents were taken over the weekend," Kuhlman said.

The school started offering online classes last week because many parents were afraid to come to school, even with volunteers patrolling grounds during drop-off and dismissal times. Almost 200 students were absent one day in a school of around 570, said Kuhlman. Normally, only 20 or 30 kids would be absent.

The boy with the Spider-Man backpack

The boy's detention drew outrage as images of immigration officers surrounding the young boy in a blue bunny hat and Spider-Man backpack began to surface.

The government said the boy's father entered the U.S. illegally from Ecuador in December 2024. The family's lawyer said he has a pending asylum claim that allows him to stay in the U.S.

The vast majority of asylum-seekers are released in the United States, with adults having eligibility for work permits, while their cases wind through a backlogged court system.

The Justice Department's Executive Office for Immigration Review's online court docket shows no future hearings for Liam's father.

Other children in custody

Liam's return gave some hope to other families in similar circumstances.

On Sunday, Luis Zuna held up photographs of his 10-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, whom he said had been detained, along with her mother, Rosa, while they were heading to the school bus stop on Jan. 6. They've been held for nearly a month at the same facility where Liam and his father were held.

Zuna sends them some money for calls and for food because Elizabeth especially doesn't like the meals there. They're from Ecuador and they've been in Minnesota for four years.

"It's been really hard to come home and there's nobody," he said. "And they are there locked up. My daughter wants to get out of there."

Carolina Gutierrez, who works as a secretary at the school that Elizabeth attended, compared the situation to Liam's "but there were no pictures," she said.

Zuna, following word of Liam and his father's return, sounded somewhat optimistic.

"For me, it's a hope that very soon I can also be the same, with all my family back," he said in Spanish.

'No beds, no real blankets' at detention center, congresswoman says

A member of Congress who was denied entry into an ICE detention facility in Minnesota last month said she saw inhumane conditions when she finally got in over the weekend.

And on Monday, a federal judge in Washington issued a temporary restraining order requested by the representative and 12 other members of Congress against a Trump administration policy that had blocked lawmakers' access to ICE detention facilities.

Democratic Rep. Kelly Morrison of Minnesota, who is a physician, said there was no nurse present during her visit and that no real medical care is being offered to detainees.

"There are no beds, no real blankets, minimal food, extremely cold temperatures. People are in locked cells, in leg shackles," Morrison said Sunday in a social media post.

Morrison, along with fellow Minnesota Democratic Reps. Ilhan Omar and Angie Craig, were turned away from the facility on the edge of Minneapolis Jan. 10, three days after an ICE officer shot and killed U.S. citizen Renee Good in Minneapolis.

While the three had an appointment, they were told after they arrived that members of Congress now needed to provide at least a week's notice before any visit.

They were turned away even though a federal judge in Washington in December temporarily blocked the Trump administration from enforcing limits on congressional visits to immigration facilities. Several

members of Congress had sued earlier after they were denied entry to detention facilities.

On Monday, the same judge, Jia Cobb, issued a new temporary restraining order requested by the 13 members of Congress, including Morrison, after Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem on Jan. 8 tried to reinstate the seven-day notice policy. The judge said the plaintiffs had shown a strong likelihood that they would win in the end.

Separately, another federal judge lifted a temporary restraining order prohibiting federal investigators from destroying evidence in Pretti's shooting. U.S. District Judge Eric Tostrud said he concluded authorities weren't likely to destroy or improperly alter evidence. ___

Catalini reported from Trenton, New Jersey. Lurye reported from Philadelphia. Associated Press reporters Jake Offenhartz, Giovanna Dell'Orto and Bianca Vázquez Toness in Minneapolis, and Audrey McAvoy in Honolulu contributed to this report.

Attorney says Gabbard is holding up a complaint about her actions, which her office denies

By DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard has withheld a complaint made about her conduct from members of Congress for eight months, claiming the delay is needed for a legal review, an attorney for the person making the allegations said Monday.

The complaint was reviewed by the office of the intelligence community's inspector general, which deemed it not credible, Gabbard's office said. The person then sought to have the complaint referred to members of Congress' intelligence committees, as is permitted by federal law, but that has not occurred.

Andrew Bakaj, the attorney for the person who made the complaint, said he could not identify his client, their employer or offer specifics about the allegations because of the nature of their work. But he said there's no justification for keeping the complaint from Congress since last spring.

There was no delay in getting the complaint to members of the intelligence committees, Gabbard's press secretary Olivia Coleman said, though she added that the number of classified details in the complaint made the review process "substantially more difficult."

Gabbard's office disputed the claims, which were first reported by The Wall Street Journal. Coleman noted that the inspector general who deemed the complaint non-credible wasn't selected by Gabbard and began their work during then-President Joe Biden's administration.

"Director Gabbard has always and will continue to support whistleblower's and their right, under the law, to submit complaints to Congress, even if they are completely baseless like this one," Coleman wrote in a post on X.

Gabbard coordinates the work of the nation's 18 intelligence agencies. In an unusual role for a spy chief, she was on site last week when the FBI served a search warrant on election offices in Georgia central to Trump's disproven claims about fraud in the 2020 election, raising questions from Democrats on the House and Senate intelligence committees.

Bakaj, meanwhile, has asked Congress to investigate the handling of the complaint.

A spokesperson for Sen. Mark Warner of Virginia, the top Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee, said Gabbard pledged under oath during her confirmation hearing that she would protect whistleblowers and make sure Congress was kept informed.

"We expect her to honor those commitments and comply with both the letter and the spirit of the law," Warner's office said in a statement.

The inspector general's office, which is tasked with providing independent oversight of the intelligence community, did not immediately respond to questions about the complaint.

A former intelligence officer with the CIA, Bakaj previously represented an intelligence community whistleblower whose account of a phone call between President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy helped initiate the first of two impeachment cases against the Republican leader during his first team.

Trump was impeached by the House but acquitted by the Senate in February 2020 over the call during which he asked the Ukrainian president for a "favor" — to announce he was investigating Democrats including 2020 rival Joe Biden.

British politician Peter Mandelson faces pressure to quit House of Lords over Jeffrey Epstein ties

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — A year ago, Peter Mandelson was Britain's ambassador to Washington, the latest high-profile post in a rocky but consequential political career.

Friendship with Jeffrey Epstein cost him that job. Now, after new revelations, Mandelson — like other powerful men including King Charles III's brother Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor — is facing new demands he come clean about his relationship with the late sex offender.

Mandelson resigned from the governing Labour Party on Sunday following new claims he received payments from Epstein two decades ago. Mandelson said he was stepping aside to avoid causing "further embarrassment," even as he denied the allegations stemming from a trove of more than 3 million pages of documents relating to Epstein released by the U.S. Department of Justice.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who fired Mandelson from his ambassadorial job over earlier revelations about his Epstein ties, is now urging him to quit politics altogether and testify in the U.S. about what he knew of the financier's activities.

Opposition politicians, joined by some lawmakers from the governing Labour Party, called for police to investigate claims Mandelson gave Epstein sensitive government information. The Metropolitan Police force said it had received "a number of reports relating to alleged misconduct in a public office" and would review them "to determine if they meet the criminal threshold for investigation."

Starmer urged Mandelson on Monday to resign from his lifetime seat in the House of Lords — Parliament's upper chamber of appointed politicians, donors and assorted notables — and to give up his noble title, Lord Mandelson.

The alternative if he does not go willingly would be a lengthy process requiring Parliament to pass legislation — a process last undertaken more than a century ago to remove the titles of aristocrats who sided with Germany in World War I.

"The prime minister believes that Peter Mandelson should not be a member of the House of Lords or use the title," said Starmer spokesman Tom Wells. "However, the prime minister does not have the power to remove it."

Mandelson — like Mountbatten-Windsor, the former Prince Andrew — is also facing calls to testify about Epstein in the U.S.

Cabinet minister Steve Reed said Monday that both men have a "moral obligation" to share any information that could help Epstein's victims.

Epstein died by suicide in a jail cell in 2019 while awaiting trial on U.S. federal charges accusing him of sexually abusing dozens of girls. Years before he had avoided federal prosecution by pleading guilty to state charges in Florida of solicitation of prostitution involving a minor and another charge.

New allegations about ties to Epstein

The latest release of Epstein files includes hundreds of text and email messages exchanged between Mandelson and the financier, revealing the British politician's warm relationship with the man he called "my best pal" in 2003.

Several documents seem to refer to payments from Epstein to Mandelson or his partner, Reinaldo Avila da Silva. What appear to be bank statements from 2003 and 2004 suggest an Epstein account sent three payments totaling \$75,000 to accounts connected to Mandelson.

Mandelson has questioned the authenticity of the bank statements. In a letter to Labour resigning from the party, Mandelson said he had no recollection of receiving that money and would investigate.

"While doing this I do not wish to cause further embarrassment to the Labour Party and I am therefore

stepping down from membership of the party," he wrote.

Mandelson added that he wanted to "repeat my apology to the women and girls whose voices should have been heard long before now."

Other documents suggest that in 2009 Epstein sent da Silva 10,000 pounds (about \$13,650 at today's rates) to pay for an osteopathy course.

The documents also include an email exchange from 2009 in which Mandelson, then a U.K. government minister, appeared to tell Epstein he would lobby other members of the government to reduce a tax on bankers' bonuses.

Documents also suggest Mandelson sent details of sensitive U.K. government discussions to Epstein after the 2008 global financial crisis.

Starmer on Monday ordered the civil service to conduct an "urgent" review of all of Mandelson's contacts with Epstein while he was in government.

Also among the files is a photo of Mandelson in a shirt and underwear, standing near an unidentified woman in a bathrobe.

A email requesting comment on the documents was sent to Mandelson through the House of Lords.

The end of a turbulent career

Mandelson, 72, has been a major, if contentious, figure in the center-left Labour Party for decades. He is a skilled — critics say ruthless — political operator whose mastery of political intrigue earned him the nickname "Prince of Darkness."

The grandson of former Labour Cabinet minister Herbert Morrison, he was an architect of the party's return to power in 1997 as centrist, modernizing "New Labour" under Prime Minister Tony Blair.

Mandelson served in senior government posts under Blair between 1997 and 2001, and under Prime Minister Gordon Brown from 2008 to 2010. In between, he was the European Union's trade commissioner.

Mandelson twice had to resign from government during the Blair administration over allegations of financial or ethical impropriety, acknowledging mistakes but denying wrongdoing.

He later returned to government, and was back on the political front line when Starmer named him to the key post of ambassador to Washington at the start of U.S. President Donald Trump's second term. Mandelson's trade expertise and comfort around the ultra-rich were considered major assets with the administration. He helped secure a trade deal in May that spared Britain some of the tariffs Trump has imposed on countries around the world.

But Starmer fired him in September after emails were published showing Mandelson's friendship with Epstein continued even after the financier's 2008 guilty plea.

NASA hit by fuel leaks during a practice countdown of the moon rocket that will fly with astronauts

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — NASA ran into exasperating fuel leaks during a make-or-break test of its new moon rocket Monday, calling into question how soon astronauts could take off for a trip around the moon.

The leaks — reminiscent of the rocket's delayed debut three years ago — sprang just a couple hours into the daylong fueling operation at Kennedy Space Center.

Launch controllers began loading the 322-foot (98-meter) rocket with super-cold hydrogen and oxygen at midday. More than 700,000 gallons (2.6 million liters) had to flow into the tanks and remain on board for several hours, mimicking the final stages of an actual countdown.

But excessive hydrogen quickly built up near the bottom of the rocket. Hydrogen loading was halted at least twice as the launch team scrambled to work around the problem using techniques developed during the previous Space Launch System countdown in 2022. That first test flight was plagued by hydrogen leaks before finally soaring without a crew.

The four astronauts assigned to the mission — three Americans and one Canadian — monitored the criti-

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cal dress rehearsal from nearly 1,000 miles (1,600 kilometers) away in Houston, home to Johnson Space Center. They have been in quarantine for the past 1½ weeks, awaiting the practice countdown's outcome.

Monday's fueling demo will determine when they can blast off on the first lunar voyage by a crew in more than half a century.

At best, NASA could launch commander Reid Wiseman and his crew to the moon no sooner than Sunday. The rocket must be flying by Feb. 11 or the mission will be called off until March. The space agency only has a few days in any given month to launch the rocket, and the extreme cold already has shortened February's launch window by two days.

Running behind because of the bitter cold snap, the countdown clocks began ticking Saturday night, giving launch controllers the chance to go through all the motions and deal with any lingering rocket problems. The clocks were set to stop a half-minute before reaching zero, just before engine ignition.

The nearly 10-day mission will send the astronauts past the moon, around the mysterious far side and then straight back to Earth, with the goal of testing the capsule's life support and other vital systems. The crew will not go into lunar orbit or attempt to land.

NASA last sent astronauts to the moon during the 1960s and 1970s Apollo program. The new Artemis program aims for a more sustained lunar presence, with Wiseman's crew setting the stage for future moon landings by other astronauts.

Arizona remains No. 1 in AP Top 25, Michigan jumps UConn for No. 2

By DAVE SKRETTA AP Basketball Writer

Arizona remained the unanimous No. 1 in the AP Top 25 men's college basketball poll Monday while Michigan jumped over UConn and into second place following wins over previously unbeaten Nebraska and rival Michigan State.

The Wildcats, who are off to a school-record 22-0 start, earned all 59 votes from a national media panel to stay atop the poll for the eighth consecutive week. UConn and Michigan were followed by Duke and Illinois in rounding out the top five.

"We value steadiness," said Arizona coach Tommy Lloyd, whose team visits Oklahoma State on Saturday before a four-game grinder against Kansas, Texas Tech, BYU and Houston. "A lot of people talk about momentum, momentum, momentum. I understand what momentum is, but I think there's way more value in being steady and consistent."

If the Wildcats beat the Cowboys, they would set a school record with their 23rd consecutive win. This bunch is currently tied with Arizona teams from 1914-17 that won 22 in a row under its arena namesake, Pop McKale, over a three-year span.

Gonzaga remained at No. 6 while Iowa State and Houston climbed one spot apiece. The Huskers fell four spots to No. 9 after losses to Michigan and the Illini, while the Spartans fell three spots to No. 10 after beating Rutgers and their own loss to the Wolverines.

The losses by Nebraska left only Arizona and No. 23 Miami (Ohio) unbeaten in Division I men's college basketball.

"Obviously, back-to-back losses, we just have to look at the film and learn from it," Huskers forward Pryce Sandfort said. "Keep our heads high and flush it as we get ready for Rutgers this week."

Kansas climbed three spots to No. 11 following its win over BYU on Saturday, while Purdue remained at No. 12 and Texas Tech — which played the Jayhawks on Monday night — was at No. 13. North Carolina and Vanderbilt rounded out the first 15.

BYU, Florida, Virginia, Saint Louis and Clemson were next. The Billikens, who have won 15 consecutive games, have reached their best ranking since March 10, 2014, when they were at No. 18 the year they won the Atlantic 10 championship.

Arkansas, St. John's, Miami (Ohio), Louisville and Tennessee held down the final five spots in the Top 25. The RedHawks bumped up one from last week and are at their highest point since they were No. 22 on Nov. 30, 1998.

"The further you go," RedHawks coach Travis Steele said following a win over Northern Illinois on Saturday, "the harder it gets."

Rising and falling

Kansas, Vanderbilt and St. John's made up the most ground this week, climbing three spots apiece, while the Volunteers — who were ranked as high as No. 13 this season — climbed back into the poll at No. 25 after two weeks out of it.

Tennessee returned at the expense of Alabama. The Crimson Tide had the fifth-longest active poll streak snapped at 42.

Update on the NET

The latest NET rankings released Sunday, which the NCAA uses to help select its tournament field, installed Duke at No. 1 with the Wildcats second and Michigan third. The rest of the rankings largely mirrored the AP poll with one notable exception: The RedHawks were at No. 53 in the NET rankings by virtue of a soft schedule that has produced no Quad 1 win.

Conference watch

The Big 12 led with six teams in the Top 25, while the Big Ten and ACC had five apiece — though the Big Ten had four of its five in the top 10. The SEC had four ranked teams, the Big East had two and the West Coast, A-10 and MAC had one apiece.

2-month-olds see the world in a more complex way than scientists thought, study suggests

By LAURA UNGAR AP Medical Writer

A new study suggests that babies are able to distinguish between the different objects they see around them at 2 months old, which is earlier than scientists previously thought.

The findings, published Monday in *Nature Neuroscience*, may help doctors and researchers better understand cognitive development in infancy.

"It really tells us that infants are interacting with the world in a lot more complex of a way than we might imagine," said lead author Cliona O'Doherty. "Looking at a 2-month-old, we maybe wouldn't think that they're understanding the world to that level."

The study looked at data from 130 2-month-olds who underwent brain scans while awake. The babies viewed images from a dozen categories commonly seen in the first year of life, such as trees and animals. When babies looked at an image like a cat, their brains might "fire" a certain way that researchers could record, O'Doherty said. If they looked at an inanimate object, their brains would fire differently.

The technique — known as functional magnetic resonance imaging, or fMRI — allowed scientists to examine visual function more precisely than in the past. Many previous studies relied on how long an infant looked at an object, which can be difficult to assess at younger ages. Some of those past studies suggested that infants as young as 3 to 4 months could distinguish between categories such as animals and furniture.

"What we're showing is that they really already have this ability to group together categories at two months," O'Doherty said. "So it's something much more complex than we would've thought before."

In the new study, many of the babies returned at 9 months, and researchers successfully collected data from 66 of them. In the 9-month-olds, the brain was able to distinguish living things from inanimate objects much more strongly than in the 2-month-olds, O'Doherty said.

Someday, researchers said, scientists may be able to connect such brain imaging to cognitive outcomes later in life.

Liuba Papeo, a neuroscientist at the National Center for Scientific Research in France, said the number of babies in the study is one thing that makes the work "impressive and unique." Brain imaging with very young infants presents challenges.

"One — perhaps the most obvious — is that the infant needs to (lie) comfortably in the fMRI scanner while awake without moving," she said in an email.

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O'Doherty, who did the work at Trinity College Dublin in Ireland, said the key was making the experience as comfortable as possible for the babies. Inside the scanner, they reclined on a bean bag so they were snug.

The images "appear really big above them while they're lying down," she said. "It's like IMAX for babies."

Punxsutawney Phil is said to have seen his shadow, forecasting 6 more weeks of wintry weather

By MARK SCOLFORO, TASSANEE VEJPONGSA and KATHY McCORMACK Associated Press

PUNXSUTAWNEY, Pa. (AP) — Punxsutawney Phil predicted six more weeks of wintry weather Monday, a forecast sure to disappoint many after what's already been a long, cold season across large parts of the United States.

His annual prediction and announcement that he had seen his shadow was translated by his top hat-wearing handlers in the Punxsutawney Groundhog Club at Gobbler's Knob in western Pennsylvania.

The news was greeted with a mix of cheers and boos from the tens of thousands who braved temperatures in the single-digits Fahrenheit to await the annual prognostication. The extreme cold kept the crowd bundled up and helped keep people on the main stage dancing.

Usually guests can come up on stage and take pictures of Phil after his prediction, but this year the announcer said it was too cold for that and his handlers were afraid to keep him out too long. Instead, the audience was asked to come to the stage, turn around and "do a selfie."

In New York, the ceremony for Staten Island Chuck was streamed live but closed to the public because of the cold. Chuck was said to have also predicted six more weeks of winter.

The Punxsutawney club says that when Phil is deemed to have not seen his shadow, that means there will be an early spring. When he does see it, it's six more weeks of winter. Phil tends to predict a longer winter far more often than an early spring.

The annual ritual goes back more than a century, with ties to ancient farming traditions in Europe. Punxsutawney's festivities have grown considerably since the 1993 movie "Groundhog Day," starring Bill Murray.

Other Groundhog Day predictions roll in

Phil isn't the only animal being consulted for long-term weather forecasts Monday. There are formal and informal Groundhog Day events in many places in the U.S., Canada and beyond.

Michael Venos, who tracks Groundhog Day predictions at countdowntogroundhogday.com, said the early results Monday indicated a split verdict — 25 for winter and 22 for spring.

That's just the start — Venos expects to tally about 100 events.

Agreeing with Punxsutawney Phil that more winter weather is on the way this year have been Buffalo Bert, a New York groundhog, and groundhog mascot Dover Doug in Pennsylvania. Also in the "more winter" camp were That Dog Named Gidget, a Havanese in New York, and possum Birmingham Jill in Alabama.

In Georgia, General Beauregard Lee waddled outside and tried to get into the hollow part of a log before an announcer proclaimed that he had seen his shadow, prompting groans from the crowd at the Dauset Trails Nature Center southeast of Atlanta.

Those predicting an early spring include groundhogs Buckeye Chuck in Ohio, Fig Newton in North Carolina and Shubenacadie Sam in Nova Scotia, along with Benny the Bass, a fish in Ohio, and Pennsylvania ferret Jessup Giuseppe.

A crowd cheered in Albertville, Alabama, when Sam Mountain Sam, a possum, was said to have predicted an early spring. Sam arrived for his annual forecast carried in a whiskey barrel pulled by a convoy of wagons and horses.

Thousands brave cold weather to see Punxsutawney Phil

Lisa Gibson of Pittsburgh was at her 10th Groundhog Day in Punxsutawney, wearing a lighted hat that resembled the tree stump from which Phil emerged shortly after daybreak.

"Oh man, it just breaks up the doldrums of winter," said Gibson, accompanied by her husband — dressed up as Elvis Presley — and teenage daughter. "It's like Halloween and New Year's Eve all wrapped up into

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one holiday.”

Groundhog Day falls on Feb. 2, the midpoint between the shortest, darkest day of the year on the winter solstice and the spring equinox. This time of year also figures in the Celtic calendar and the Christian holiday of Candlemas.

Rick Siger, Pennsylvania’s secretary of community and economic development, said the outdoor thermometer in his vehicle read 4 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 15 degrees Celsius) on his way to Gobbler’s Knob.

“I think it’s just fun — folks having a good time,” said Siger, attending his fourth straight Groundhog Day in Punxsutawney. “It brings people together at a challenging time. It is a unifying force that showcases the best of Pennsylvania, the best of Punxsutawney, this area.”

Last year’s announcement was six more weeks of winter, not much of a surprise during the first week of February. His handlers insist Phil’s “groundhogese” of winks, purrs, chatters and nods are being interpreted when they relate the meteorological marmot’s musings about the days ahead.

AccuWeather’s chief long-range weather expert, meteorologist Paul Pastelok, said early Monday some clouds moved into Punxsutawney overnight, bringing flurries he called “microflakes.”

Pastelok said the coming week will remain cold, with below-average temperatures in the eastern United States.

Bad Bunny wins album of the year at the 2026 Grammy Awards, a first for a Spanish-language album

By MARIA SHERMAN AP Music Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Bad Bunny won album of the year at the 2026 Grammy Awards for his critically-acclaimed “Debí Tirar Más Fotos,” closing out a surprising and history-making night. It is the first time a Spanish-language album has taken home the top prize.

“Puerto Rico, believe me when I tell you that we are much bigger than 100 by 35,” he said in his acceptance speech in Spanish, referring to a Puerto Rican colloquialism about the island’s small size. “And there is nothing we can’t achieve. Thank God, thank you to the Academy, thank you to all the people who have believed in me throughout my career.

“To all the people who worked on this album, thank you mami for giving birth to me in Puerto Rico, I love you,” he continued.

Then he switched to English: “I want to dedicate this award to all the people who had to leave their homeland to follow their dreams.”

Harry Styles presented the award — the English singer previously took home the top prize in 2023 for “Harry’s House.” He beat Bad Bunny that year, who was nominated for “Un Verano Sin Ti” -- the first Spanish-language album to be up in the category.

Anti-ICE messages from the stage

Billie Eilish won song of the year for “Wildflower” and used the moment to add her voice to the chorus of musicians criticizing immigration authorities Sunday.

“No one is illegal on stolen land,” she said while accepting the award for the song from her 2024 album “Hit Me Hard and Soft.” “(Expletive) ICE is all I want to say.”

Immigration was a central theme of the night. The first time Bad Bunny was on stage — after winning the award for música urbana album — he used his speech to share an anti-ICE message, highlighting the humanity of all people.

“Before I say thanks to God, I’m going to say ICE out,” he said, starting out his speech in English to huge applause. “We’re not savage, we’re not animals, we’re not aliens. We are humans and we are Americans.”

Before that, Olivia Dean was named best new artist.

“I never really imagined that I would be up here,” she said, receiving her first Grammy while wiping away tears. “I’m up here as a granddaughter of an immigrant. I wouldn’t be here ... I am a product of bravery, and I think that those people deserve to be celebrated.”

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Those statements all aired live on the CBS telecast. Earlier in the day, at the Premiere Ceremony where 86 Grammys are handed out, artists were equally as pointed about ICE and immigration enforcement.

Shaboozey accepted the award for country duo/group performance with tears in his eyes. "I want to thank my mother, who as of today, has retired from her job of 30 years ... working as a registered nurse in a psych ward ... as an immigrant in this country. Thank you, mom.

"Immigrants built this country, literally, actually. So, this for them," he concluded. "Thank you for bring your culture, your music and your stories."

Kehlani, after winning her first Grammy, ended her acceptance speech with "Imma leave this and say, (expletive) ICE."

"I'm scared," Gloria Estefan said of the current political moment backstage at the Grammys. "There are hundreds of children in detention centers. ... I don't recognize my country in this moment right now."

Kendrick Lamar, Lady Gaga, Jelly Roll and more win big

Kendrick Lamar and SZA won record of the year at an electric 2026 Grammy Awards Sunday night for "Luther."

Cher presented the award and mistakenly said it goes to "Luther Vandross" instead of Kendrick Lamar and SZA.

One of the song's producers, Sounwave, began the acceptance speech by saying, "Let's give a shoutout to the late and great Luther Vandross."

Lamar also won the first televised award of the night, rap album for "GNX," accepting the trophy from Queen Latifah and Doechii.

"It's an honor to be here," he said in his acceptance speech. "Hip-hop is always going to be right here ... We're gonna be having the culture with us."

The victory means Lamar broke Jay-Z's record to become the rapper with the most career Grammys. Jay-Z has 25; after he took home rap album and record of the year, Lamar's total is 27.

Pop vocal album went to Lady Gaga for "Mayhem," while pop solo performance went to Lola Young for "Messy," whose speech playfully lived up to the song's spirit.

"I don't know what to say," she joked about "obviously" not having a speech prepared. "I'm very, very grateful for this."

The inaugural contemporary country album category went to Jelly Roll for "Beautifully Broken."

This year, the Grammys renamed country album to contemporary country album and added a traditional country album category, a distinction that exists in other genres. But the news arrived right after Beyoncé's "Cowboy Carter" won best country album, inspiring backlash online.

"I believe music had the power to change my life," Jelly Roll said in his acceptance speech, which he spent the majority of thanking God.

Pharrell Williams received the Dr. Dre Global Impact Award.

"To everyone in this room who believes in the power of Black music," he said, "thank you so much."

A live concert experience

A powerful Grammy Awards in memoriam segment celebrated the legacies of the late D'Angelo and Roberta Flack at the 68th annual ceremony Sunday night.

Ms. Lauryn Hill appeared on the Grammy stage for the first time since 1999, when she became the first hip-hop artist to win album of the year for her "The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill."

The D'Angelo tribute was first: A medley of several songs, among them "Brown Sugar" with Lucky Daye, "Lady" with Raphael Saadiq and Anthony Hamilton and "Devil's Pie" with Leon Thomas.

Then, Hill focused her attention on Roberta Flack: "First Time Ever I Saw Your Face" with Jon Batiste, "Where Is The Love" with John Legend and Chaka Khan, and a mesh of "Feel Like Makin' Love" and "Killing Me Softly with His Song" with her Fugees bandmate Wyclef Jean.

If there was one set that felt like an avant-garde artistic performance piece on Sunday night, it was Tyler, the Creator's medley of "Thought I Was Dead," "Like Him," (in which he was joined by Regina King) and "Sugar On My Tongue." It played out like theater: others would be wise to take note.

All eight nominees in the best new artist category participated in a medley at the award show across multiple stages, the back halls of the arena and even the venue's loading dock. It was an interesting and impressive mod-podge of different styles, from the British soul of Young and Dean to Addison Rae and Katseye's hypnotic pop. The Marias kicked things off with their dreamy indie rock; sombr and Alex Warren offered their radio hits — "12 to 12" and "Ordinary" respectively. Leon Thomas reminded the audience why he's the only nominee also up for album of the year with his fully formed R&B.

The hits arrived fast and furious in the show's first hour. Rosé and Bruno Mars' opened Grammys with an electric rendition of their multicultural pop smash, "APT."; the Blackpink singer channeled a pop-punk Gwen Stefani in her tie and platinum blond hair. Sabrina Carpenter with her "Manchild" kiss-off. Justin Bieber slowed things down with "Yukon" from his comeback record "Swag." Lady Gaga reimaged her hit "Abracadabra" as an electro-rock song.

First-time winners were abundant — even before the show started

During the Premiere Ceremony, the Dalai Lama won his first Grammy for audio book, narration and storytelling recording, beating out Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson. You read that correctly.

"Golden" from "KPop Demon Hunters" won song written for visual media at the Premiere Ceremony, marking the first time a K-pop act has won a Grammy. Songwriters delivered their acceptance speech in both English and Korean, highlighting the song's bilingual appeal.

Music film went to "Music for John Williams," which means director Steven Spielberg has officially won his first Grammy. That makes him an EGOT winner — an artist with an Emmy, Grammy, Tony and Oscar.

Takeaways from investigation into the toxic forever chemical legacy of the South's carpet industry

By The Associated Press undefined

A major investigative collaboration among five newsrooms shows how chemicals used to make carpets stain-resistant have contaminated swaths of the South.

In the mills of northwest Georgia, workers treated carpets with these chemicals starting in the 1970s. Carried in manufacturing wastewater, the chemicals spread into rivers and, ultimately, drinking water.

The odorless and colorless compounds — called PFAS by scientists and known colloquially as forever chemicals because they take decades or more to break down — are now everywhere in the region. That includes in people, where PFAS circulate in blood and lodge in some organs.

As the carpet industry grappled with the risks to human health and the environment, its executives coordinated privately with the local public water utility in ways that would effectively shield their companies from oversight. And carpet makers kept using PFAS for years — even as scientific evidence solidified concerns in the 2000s and 2010s about the threats they can pose, including certain cancers and a compromised immune system.

Major carpet companies say they have complied with all regulations and have stopped using PFAS. They point out that their suppliers falsely assured them older formulations of the chemicals were safe.

The full story of Georgia's power structures prioritizing a prized industry over public health is emerging through interviews and court records from lawsuits against the industry and its chemical suppliers. The reporting shows how the economic engine that sustained northwest Georgia polluted parts of Alabama and South Carolina, too.

Here are takeaways from the investigation's reporting on the toxic legacy of the South's carpet empire. Some linked articles may have restrictions.

'Carpet Capital of the World'

Carpet making in the U.S. has been centered in northwest Georgia for decades. Fleets of semi-trucks stamped with logos of the world's largest carpet companies rumble around a region where textiles have employed families for generations.

Some of those local residents have health conditions linked to forever chemical exposure.

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"Around here, you have to understand the people. That's all we know, right?" said Marie Jackson, a former carpet worker who has PFAS in her blood and nodules growing on her thyroid gland. "You go in, you know your job, you do your job, you go home."

Reporting by The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, The Associated Press and FRONTLINE (PBS) showed how a lack of state and federal regulations let carpet companies and their chemical suppliers legally switch among different versions of PFAS. For decades, mills of the two largest carpet companies — Shaw Industries and Mohawk Industries Inc. — sent PFAS-polluted wastewater through sewer pipes for treatment that did not remove the chemicals. Much of the tainted water ended up in the Conasauga River.

Both Shaw and Mohawk said that they stopped using PFAS in 2019 and that they have operated in accordance with permits issued by Dalton Utilities, the local water provider. The utility said it takes direction from federal and state regulators, who have not prohibited PFAS in industrial wastewater.

Problem found, solution proposed

In South Carolina, detective work identified PFAS contamination — a discovery that led to a lawsuit and then a possible path for companies to reduce future pollution.

The Post and Courier traced a local river watchdog's discovery of forever chemicals to a river by a Shaw Industries factory. Instead of fighting in court, Shaw proposed a solution: Install a special filtration system called granular activated carbon to capture PFAS before it leaves the factory. The watchdog group agreed and withdrew the lawsuit.

It's a story about how state and federal regulators were slow to protect the public. And yet, it's also about how Shaw discovered clues that may help other companies deal with their own PFAS problems.

Drinking water wells at particular risk

The roughly 40 million Americans who get drinking water from private wells are at particular risk when forever chemicals contaminate the supply.

Reporting by the AP drilled into how water from public utilities will be forced to meet federal PFAS limits, but those limits won't apply to private wells.

And well owners are often the last to learn about contamination. At least 20 states don't test private wells beyond areas where PFAS problems are suspected. When a well is tainted, it can take homeowners years to secure a new source of clean water.

Alabama drinking water woes

About 100 miles (160 kilometers) from northwest Georgia's carpet mills, AL.com found cities in Alabama are struggling to manage PFAS in their drinking water with little help from the state.

As residents fight for clean tap water, several small cities sued carpet companies upriver and chemical giants, looking for settlement funds to build new, expensive water treatment systems. In Gadsden, home to 33,000 Alabamians in the foothills of the Appalachians, a new reverse osmosis treatment plant has been under construction thanks to one settlement.

The facility is scheduled to open in 2027. In the meantime, residents worry about the consequences of tainted water on their health.

Frequently asked questions

While PFAS have been in a wide range of consumer products, few industries used them as much as carpet. Huge amounts were needed for stain resistance on an industrial scale, but minuscule amounts — the equivalent of less than a drop in an Olympic-size swimming pool — can make drinking water a health risk.

The carpet industry isn't the only one that used PFAS. The chemicals are in nonstick cooking pans, raincoats, firefighting foam and more.

FRONTLINE explored what to know about how forever chemicals get into our bodies, what risks they pose and how they can be avoided.

The Grammys had lots of Mars, Carpenter soaring and a near-naked Bieber. Here are some key moments

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

He was the only one sitting when it was over, rubbing his eyes in disbelief.

Bad Bunny had made history by winning album of the year for "Debí Tirar Más Fotos," the first time a Spanish-language album took home the Recording Academy's top prize.

Next stop: Super Bowl.

While that emotional win for the Puerto Rican superstar is hard to top, there were some other great moments from the 3 1/2-hour telecast, like when Cher nearly forgot to announce the winner of record of the year.

Justin Bieber stripped his set down, while Lady Gaga added some manic energy and Ozzy Osbourne was honored with a heavy metal classic complete with exploding fire.

Here are some of the night's notable moments:

Bruno and Rosé kicked it off, Lady Gaga kept it up

A pair of high energy performances by Bruno Mars and Rosé to start the show and one by Lady Gaga halfway through kept hearts pumping.

Mars and Rosé — from the K-pop group Blackpink — performed "APT.," one the biggest hits of the year, a song inspired by a South Korean drinking game.

She wore a white tank top, black slacks and a tie, while he matched the color scheme in a dark suit, tie and with his guitar slung with a checkerboard strap. There was plenty of jumping, shredding and smoke — a raucous opening.

Lady Gaga later took it to the weird, singing "Abracadabra" in a feather-festooned costume from inside a basket-like headpiece. She used a gnarly cane, played some synths, twitched and nailed a more rock-funk version of her song.

Lady Gaga would take home the trophy for best pop vocal album. Mars would return to the stage for his latest single, "I Just Might."

Sabrina Carpenter nails her Grammys moment

Sabrina Carpenter turned the Grammys into a busy airport during her performance of "Manchild" — and it soared.

Playing her sexpot, tongue-in-cheek best, the singer-songwriter wore white hot pants, a white neckerchief and a white captain's hat emblazoned with SCA — presumably for Sabrina Carpenter Airlines — as she strutted across a stage filled with baggage carousels and dancers, even singing into an intercom at one point and using a pair of traffic wands used on runways.

"Hey Grammys, how ya doing? It's your captain Sabrina speaking," she said.

The dancers included an astronaut, a UPS worker, a firefighter and an ER doctor. Carpenter ended her overflowing set on a baggage cart and then went into a plane fuselage holding a live dove.

Among those shown grooving along was best new artist nominee Olivia Dean. It was the second straight Grammy appearance by Carpenter, a nominee for best new artist last year.

New artist block

Taking note of what worked last year, the Grammys once again leaned on the best new artist category to spark the crowd. They were clumped into a block and despite their various styles, it showed the future of music is in good hands.

The Los Angeles-based band the Marías started with some shimmering, bilingual dream-pop of "No One Noticed Me" before influencer-turned-pop-artist Addison Rae was shown on the back of a moving truck entering the Crypto.com Arena, jumping off to deliver a sweaty, sultry "Fame Is a Gun."

That led to the six-piece girl group Katseye with their high-energy "Gnarly" as they danced into the arena with gymnastics and booty-shaking. They gave way to Leon Thomas' guitar-driven "Mutt" and then Alex Warren took a microphone from a popcorn vendor and walked through the aisles for his "Ordinary," shrugging off what seemed like earpiece difficulties, before being hoisted into the air on a platform.

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The British powerhouse Lola Young took the baton, seated at a piano to sing "Messy," before Olivia Dean, the old-soul British singer-songwriter, gave an exuberant version of her "Man I Need." The moody pop star somberly ended the block by being lowered onto the stage in a spangly jumpsuit to sing "12 to 12." Chappell Roan, last year's category winner, then anointed her successor — Dean.

The Bieb strips it down

Justin Bieber alone on the Grammy stage in just a pair of shimmering gray boxers shorts and gray socks gave a mesmerizing, somber performance of his "Yukon."

A guitar slung across his back, the shirtless Bieber programmed his song first and then sang along, eyes often closed, opposite a full-size mirror. It was a nod to the way Ed Sheeran has shown audiences how to make a hit song with just looped instruments and a voice.

"One wrong move, and we would have had to put the show on OnlyFans," Noah later joked.

Bieber's darkly, moody set didn't feature any background graphics, musicians or stage decor, and he ended it simply by walking off the stage. It was a performance in stark contrast to the night's highly produced sets, like the one Tyler, the Creator offered, performing with a sports car, gushing water and explosions.

Hailey Bieber, his wife, liked it, swaying and snapping her fingers.

Her husband, a one-time child star who was discovered on YouTube at the age of 12, returned to the Grammys this year at age 31 after a four-year absence as a new father.

A memorable in memoriam

Usually, in memoriam sections are staid affairs, with a harp and a sad song. Not this year.

Post Malone, Chad Smith, Duff McKagan, Slash and Andrew Watt belted a rocking version of Black Sabbath's "War Pigs" in honor of Ozzy Osbourne, compete with fire bursts and plenty of leather. Osbourne's wife, Sharon, and kids Kelly and Jack, seemed deeply moved.

Ms. Lauryn Hill led the tributes to D'Angelo with versions of "Nothing Even Matters," "Brown Sugar," "Lady," "Devils Pie," "Untitled (How Does It Feel)" and "Africa" with such singers as Raphael Saadiq, Jon Batiste and Anthony Hamilton.

Hill then pivoted to a tribute to Roberta Flack, with "First Time Ever I Saw Your Face" "Compared to What," "Closer I Get To You," "Where Is the Love," "Feel Like Makin' Love" and "Killing Me Softly with His Song" featuring John Legend, Chaka Khan, Leon Bridges and Wyclef Jean.

Add to that list a performance of "Trailblazer" by Reba McEntire, Brandy Clark and Lukas Nelson — as well as pre-recorded tributes to Brian Wilson from Bruce Springsteen and one to Bob Weir from John Mayer — and it was a stacked, rollicking goodbye to some musical giants.

A mix of hope and fear settles over Venezuela after US-imposed government change

By REGINA GARCIA CANO Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Time in Venezuela feels like it's moving both too fast and too slow. The pillars of the country's self-proclaimed socialist government are falling at a dizzying pace or not quickly enough. Economic relief is finally on the horizon or already too late.

Thirty days after the U.S. raid and capture of then-President Nicolás Maduro upended Venezuela, adults and children alike are still unsure of what exactly is happening around them. And as the initial shock gives way to a mix of uncertainty, hope and disappointment, a pervasive fear of another attack or more government repression continues to hang over them.

In the capital, Caracas, where government-sponsored billboards and graffiti demand that the U.S. free Maduro, many residents wonder whether his successor, acting President Delcy Rodríguez has any autonomy or is capitulating to White House demands; whether she is Maduro by another name, and — crucial to their immediate needs — whether to believe, as indicated by her, that a long-sought wage increase is on the horizon. Meanwhile, long-silent opposition leaders have finally emerged to speak publicly.

"It's an important change, certainly, but everything is the same, everything," retiree Julio Castillo, 74,

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said of the removal of Maduro from office. "I feel as if nothing much has happened."

'We are acting under coercion'

Venezuela's government and its supporters consider the capture of Maduro and first lady Cilia Flores a kidnapping. Rodríguez and senior officials have pledged to fight for the couple's freedom since U.S. President Donald Trump first announced their seizure in the early hours of Jan. 3.

The ruling party has organized demonstrations to show their loyalty to Maduro, whom the fiery Hugo Chávez anointed as his self-proclaimed socialist revolution's torchbearer before dying in 2013. It has also adjusted its messaging from threatening a Vietnam-like war with the U.S. to admitting being militarily outmatched and needing to transform the relationship with Goliath.

Supporters — a minority compared to the crowds during Chávez's presidency — see Rodríguez as lacking free will but trust that she can carry Chavismo, their political movement, through the next diplomatic battle.

"The Venezuelan state, and Venezuelans, are accepting this new situation in which we are acting under coercion," José Vivens, a Maduro loyalist, said of Rodríguez's decision to allow the Trump administration to control Venezuela's oil money, the country's engine. "They kidnapped our commander. And we have to give in because we have to live for another battle."

Vivens, a justice of the peace, was in his apartment's parking lot in Caracas when he heard a loud whistle, then a deafening explosion the night of the attack. He ducked behind his car, and when he looked up, helicopters were flying unnervingly close to his building.

"They've invaded us," was Vivens' immediate thought. Not exactly, but he would learn a few hours later that the U.S. military's elite had captured Maduro at a nearby compound and loaded him onto a helicopter.

Abandoning a pillar of Chavismo

Rodríguez has used public events and gatherings with Venezuela's private sector to assure anyone listening that she, not the Trump administration, is governing the South American country, even if she later acknowledges having a mutual agenda with the U.S., which was unthinkable weeks earlier.

"The people of Venezuela do not accept orders from any external factor," she said during a meeting with oil executives to discuss an overhaul of the country's energy law. "The people of Venezuela have a government, and this government obeys the people."

Her proposed overhaul, which lawmakers swiftly approved and she signed into law Thursday, opens the nation's oil sector to privatization, abandoning a pillar of Chavismo.

She introduced it following Trump's assertion that his administration would take control of Venezuela's oil exports and revitalize the ailing industry by luring foreign investment.

Testing the waters

Many within the opposition had long expected that Maduro's ouster, especially if led by Trump, would immediately result in one of their own taking the reins of the country. Trump's decision to work with Rodríguez, instead of opposition leader and Nobel Peace Prize laureate María Corina Machado, continues to leave them baffled.

But as Machado's supporters keep looking for signs that the White House will incorporate her meaningfully into its plans for their country, Venezuelans have begun testing Rodríguez's commitment to what she has called "a new political moment" for Venezuela.

For days, dozens of people have kept vigil outside prisons demanding the release of loved ones they believe were detained for political reasons, including journalists, human rights advocates and members of the military. A handful of opposition leaders who had not been seen in public in Venezuela or made any statements for more than a year have spoken out.

"I believe that Venezuela's destiny cannot be an oil agreement and a dictatorship headed by Delcy Rodríguez, because we could simply define that as a continuation of the dictatorship," opposition leader Andrés Velásquez told reporters, reemerging after more than a year in hiding.

A privately owned television channel with national reach on Wednesday even aired a clip of Machado addressing reporters in Washington. Neither public nor private media outlets had shown a similar segment in years.

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Still, many Venezuelans continue to self-censor as they remain deeply fearful of government repression. Their social media posts make no mention of politics. Written or audio messages on WhatsApp do not criticize the government. Some video calls involve writing and erasing information on whiteboards as an extra layer of protection.

There have been no large demonstrations calling for a new government or a presidential election. Nor has anyone dared to publicly celebrate Maduro's capture — even if many had long hoped to see him handcuffed.

Many opposition leaders remain in exile. Wanted posters of Edmundo González, the opposition's candidate during the 2024 presidential election, are still on display at airports and government offices.

Balancing hope and fear

Margaret García's son could not sleep for days after Jan. 3. He also did not want to go back to school fearful of not knowing what to do if another attack happened.

"We thought we were going to die," she said of the moment her family heard a helicopter open fire near their 15-story apartment building near where Maduro was captured.

Her son's fear was far from unique. Some Venezuelans still fear a second attack if Rodríguez's government does not meet U.S. expectations — even as Washington has indicated it has no plans for further escalation.

"I can tell you right now with full certainty, we are not postured to nor do we intend or expect to have to take any military action in Venezuela at any time," U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio told a U.S. Senate committee on Wednesday.

García, a teacher, said she could not understand how anyone could find satisfaction in the U.S. operation that killed dozens. Still, she said she believes that under Rodríguez's watch, the country could see the lasting economic improvements that workers have hoped for more than a decade.

Like García, many public sector workers survive on roughly \$160 per month, while the average private sector employee earned about \$237 a month last year. Venezuela's monthly minimum wage of 130 bolívars, or \$0.35, has not increased since 2022, putting it well below the United Nations' measure of extreme poverty of \$2.15 a day.

"We see that a negative moment has brought us positive things," she said of the potential changes that Rodríguez has signaled will come with an envisioned oil boom.

Today in History: February 3, 'the day the music died'

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Tuesday, Feb. 3, the 34th day of 2026. There are 331 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Feb. 3, 1959, which would become known as "the day the music died," rock 'n roll stars Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens and J.P. "The Big Bopper" Richardson died in a small plane crash near Clear Lake, Iowa.

Also on this date:

In 1870, the 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, granting Black American men the right to vote, was ratified.

In 1913, the 16th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, providing for a federal income tax, was ratified.

In 1917, the United States broke off diplomatic relations with Germany, the same day an American cargo ship, the SS Housatonic, was sunk by a U-boat off Britain (after the crew was allowed to board lifeboats).

In 1943, during World War II, the U.S. transport ship SS Dorchester, which was carrying troops to Greenland, sank after being hit by a German torpedo in the Labrador Sea; only some 230 of the 900 aboard survived.

In 1966, the Soviet probe Luna 9 became the first man-made object to make a soft landing on the moon.

In 1998, a U.S. Marine jet sliced through the cable of a ski gondola near Cavalese, Italy, causing the car to plunge hundreds of feet, killing all 20 people inside.

In 2006, an Egyptian passenger ferry sank in the Red Sea during bad weather, killing more than 1,000 people.

In 2007, a truck bomb exploded in a busy street market in Baghdad, killing more than 100 people in one

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of the deadliest single attacks in the Iraqi capital.

In 2015, a Metro-North Railroad commuter train slammed into an SUV stuck on the tracks at a suburban rail crossing 20 miles north of New York City, killing five train passengers and the SUV driver and injuring about 30 others.

In 2023, more than three dozen freight cars of a train carrying hazardous materials derailed near East Palestine, Ohio, close to the Pennsylvania line. The derailment prompted an immediate evacuation and the intentional burning of toxic vinyl chloride three days later that sent flames and acrid smoke in the air.

Today's birthdays: Football Hall of Famer Fran Tarkenton is 86. Actor Blythe Danner is 83. Football Hall of Famer Bob Griese is 81. Singer-guitarist Dave Davies (The Kinks) is 79. Actor Morgan Fairchild is 76. Actor Nathan Lane is 70. Actor Maura Tierney is 61. Basketball Hall of Famer Vlade Divac is 58. Golf Hall of Famer Retief Goosen is 57. Actor Warwick Davis is 56. Actor Isla Fisher is 50. Reggaeton singer Daddy Yankee is 49. Actor Aimee Lou Wood is 32.