

Groton Daily Independent

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Thursday, Feb. 5

Senior Menu: Salisbury steak, mashed potatoes, carrots, fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Cereal

School Lunch: Corn dogs, baked beans.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Nigeria Circle, 2 p.m.

Basketball Doubleheader at Deuel: (JV girls at 4 p.m.; JV boys at 5 p.m., Varsity girls at 6 p.m., varsity boys to follow.

2nd Grade BB practice, 5 p.m., elementary gym.

Boys Wrestling at Deuel, 5 p.m.

4th grade BB practice, 6 p.m., gym.

High School Softball practice, 6 p.m., gym

Friday, Feb. 6

Senior Menu: Baked fish, baked potato, antigua



blend, fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Egg wraps.

School Lunch: Cheese pizza, green beans.

3rd grade BBB practice, 3:30 p.m., elementary gym.

Varsity girls wrestling at Yankton, 4 p.m.

Varsity boys wrestling at Lyman Quad, 5 p.m.

JH BBB hosts Waubay/Summit (7th at 6 p.m., 8th at 7 p.m.)

Saturday, Feb. 7

Varsity girls wrestling at Dell Rapids, 9 a.m.

Pickleball at Elementary gym, 9:30 a.m.

Boys Varsity Wrestling at Big Dakota Conference Tournament, 10 a.m., in Pierre

Dak XII-NEC Clash: Groton Area vs. Canton, 5 p.m., Madison Auxiliary Gym.

HOSA Middle School dance in the gym.

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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.

Iran Talks in Oman

Representatives from the US and Iran will meet overnight in Muscat, Oman (10 am Friday local time) for rare face-to-face talks. White House envoy Steve Witkoff and adviser Jared Kushner are expected to meet with Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, among others.

US-Iran tensions have escalated in recent weeks amid Iran's crackdown on protests last month. Senior Iranian officials estimate the death toll at 30,000 people or more within 48 hours—a pace seen in the September 1941 Nazi massacre at Babyn Yar. The US has sought to negotiate with Iran on two tracks: multilateral talks over Iran's human rights violations, missile program, and support for militant groups, as well as bilateral nuclear negotiations. The delegations were scheduled to meet in Istanbul; however, Iran recently pushed to relocate talks to Oman and limit the scope to direct nuclear talks.

The meeting comes days after alleged Iranian attempts to target a US-flagged ship and aircraft carrier.

Washington Post Layoffs

The Washington Post yesterday announced it is laying off one-third of its staff, reportedly over 300 people. The Jeff Bezos-owned paper will enact changes, including restructuring its local news division, scaling back foreign coverage, and eliminating the sports desk.

The layoffs come days after the Post cut Olympics coverage from over a dozen journalists to four. The 148-year-old paper, which played a pivotal role in uncovering the 1970s Watergate scandal, has undergone multiple rounds of layoffs and buyouts since Bezos bought it for \$250M in 2013. Under the Amazon founder's leadership, the Post has also ended presidential endorsements, adopted a more conservative approach to its opinion section, and introduced AI-powered search.

Meanwhile, longtime competitor The New York Times has more than doubled its staff over the past decade and yesterday reported \$802.3M in 2025 fourth-quarter revenue, up 10.4% from 2024. As a private company, the Post does not have to share revenue, but reports suggest it lost about \$100M in 2024.

Live from London

UK broadcaster Sky released a premiere date yesterday for the British version of "Saturday Night Live." The six-episode series will debut March 21 and feature 11 cast members, including sitcom actors, comedians, and contestants from British game show "Taskmaster."

"Saturday Night Live" has been on air since 1975. Since 1993, there have been over a dozen international spinoffs, including in Brazil, Egypt, France, Poland, and South Korea. Most have not lasted more than two years; South Korea's has lasted the longest after a hiatus from 2017 to 2021. SNL creator Lorne Michaels will serve as executive producer for the UK spinoff, which—like the original version—will feature a live studio audience, topical sketches, celebrity hosts, and musical guests. The show will be adapted with "a British lens," per Sky.

Research suggests British humor tends to be more ironic and dry than American humor, which tends to be more direct.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

NBC taps sportscaster Mary Carillo to cohost Olympic Opening Ceremony coverage as search continues for "Today" coanchor Savannah Guthrie's mother.

Guthrie and siblings release video plea to potential kidnapper.

Author-vlogger brothers Hank and John Green turn educational media company, Complexly, into a non-profit to keep content free and advertiser-independent.

Mickey Lolich, former Detroit Tigers pitcher and 1968 World Series MVP, dies at age 85; Lolich is the last pitcher to earn three complete-game wins in a World Series.

Science & Technology

Amazon makes AI-powered voice assistant, Alexa+, widely available in the US; Alexa+ can take actions on a user's behalf, like ordering an Uber ride.

Researchers identify DNA marker that helps malaria-carrying mosquitoes survive insecticide exposure, paving the way for better management strategies.

Snakes can go without food for months due to loss of the ghrelin gene, which regulates appetite and signals the body to burn fat, according to an analysis of 112 reptile species' genomes.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 -0.5%, Dow +0.5%, Nasdaq -1.5%).

AMD shares fall 17% in worst day since 2017 after disappointing guidance.

Alphabet tops earnings estimates, forecasts larger-than-expected increase in AI spending.

Uber shares slide on earnings miss; announces new CFO and plans to expand robotaxi service to Houston, Hong Kong, Madrid, and Zurich.

Texas Instruments to acquire chip designer Silicon Laboratories in deal valued at \$7.5B, including cash and debt.

Politics & World Affairs

Border czar Tom Homan says 700 immigration officers will leave Minnesota immediately.

Supreme Court allows California to use redistricted map for 2026 midterm elections; redrawn map is expected to favor Democrats.

Russia and Ukraine begin US-brokered peace talks in Abu Dhabi, the second round of negotiations since last month; sticking points include borders, control of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant currently in Russian-occupied territory.

Would-be assassin Ryan Routh is sentenced to life in prison after September 2024 attempt to kill President Donald Trump on his Florida golf course.

Name Released in Charles Mix County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash
Where: SD Highway 1804, 10 miles southwest of Platte, SD
When: 11:22 p.m., Saturday, January 31, 2026

Driver 1: Dagan Jerik Burns, 21-year-old male from Belle Fourche, SD, fatal injuries
Vehicle 1: 2023 GMC Sierra K1500 Denali
Seat belt Used: Under investigation

Charles Mix County, S.D.- A Belle Fourche man died in a single vehicle crash Saturday evening 10 miles southwest of Platte, SD.

Preliminary crash information indicates Dagan Jerik Burns, the driver of a 2023 GMC Sierra, was traveling southbound on SD Highway 1804 when the vehicle left the roadway and entered the ditch off the right shoulder. The vehicle hit an approach, went airborne and flipped onto its roof. Burns was pronounced deceased at the scene.

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

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

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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 Dance Team performed at half time of the boys varsity game with Roncalli on Tuesday. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Groton Senior Citizens

On January 12 Groton Seniors met for their meeting and cards.

Thirteen members were present. President Ruby Donovan opened the meeting with allegiance to the flag. Minutes and treasures report were read and accepted. It was brought up to quite Senior Citizens or continue It was decided to continue. Darlene Fisher was voted to be president, Bev Sombke Treasures and Elda Stange Sec. Meeting was adjourned and cards played. The winners of each game. 1- Pinochle- John Aldrich, 2- Pinochle- Kelly Miracle, Whist- Elda Stange, Canasta -Ruby Donovan. Door Prizes Julie Shilhank, Don Hoops, Darlene Fischer. Lunch was served before going home.

On January 19th Thirteen Groton Seniors met to play cards. President Darlene Fischer had the flag pledge. Cards were played. The winners of each game, 1- Pinochle- Don Hoops, 2- Pinochle- Julie Shilhank, Whist- Darlene Fischer, Canasta- Eunice McCollister. Door prizes Julie Shilhank, Bev Sombke, and Darlene Fischer. Darlene Fischer's birthday was celebrated with cake and ice cream,

On January 26 Groton Seniors met for their potluck dinner. Fourteen members attended. President Darlene Fischer had the flag pledge and table prayer, after dinner bingo was played. Julie Shilhank won black out. Cards were played after bingo. Door prizes Pat Larson, Elda Stange, and Eunice McCollister. Dessert was served after cards.

Highway Fatalities Reach Five-Year Low in South Dakota

PIERRE, S.D. — In 2025, South Dakota recorded 110 fatal crashes resulting in 123 deaths, marking a five-year low and a significant improvement in roadway safety, according to preliminary data from the South Dakota Department of Public Safety's Office of Accident Records.

The total represents a 16.9% decrease in the number of fatalities from 2024, with 25 fewer deaths statewide, and an 18.5% decrease in the number of fatal crashes.

"South Dakota saw a significant improvement in roadway safety in 2025. This progress is a direct result of the commitment of our state troopers, our highway safety partners, and South Dakota drivers who are doing their part to keep roads safer," said Col. Casey Collins, Superintendent of the South Dakota Highway Patrol (SDHP). "However, one fatal crash is still too many, and we will continue our tireless work to keep South Dakota roadways safe for everyone."

Despite the overall decline, data shows seat belt use remains a critical safety issue. Of the fatalities where seat belt use was applicable, 59% of those deaths included people who were not wearing their seat belt.

Twenty-one fatalities were attributed to excessive speed, compared to 27 the previous year, showing a 22% decrease. The five-year average for speed-related fatalities is 36.

Twenty-three of the 123 fatalities last year included motorcyclists. Motorcycle fatalities showed a significant reduction last year representing a 30% decline from 2024. Last year, 376 basic rider motorcycle safety courses were provided to 1,876 students and 28 advanced braking and cornering clinics trained 78 students.

Alcohol-related fatalities increased slightly in 2025. Thirty-five deaths were linked to impaired driving, up from 33 in 2024, a 6% increase. The five-year average for alcohol-related fatalities is 45.

The SDHP and the Office of Highway Safety continue to promote safe driving habits through a variety of outreach efforts. These include statewide media and social media campaigns, community presentations, interviews, and teen safe driver programs designed to educate young drivers before unsafe habits form.

Officials urge motorists to remain vigilant and committed to safe driving behaviors as efforts continue to reduce traffic fatalities across the state. The Office of Highway Safety has kicked off a new campaign called, "It Starts With You."

The South Dakota Highway Patrol, Office of Highway Safety and Office of Accident Records are agencies of the South Dakota Dept. of Public Safety.

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What can **\$20**
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**BEST
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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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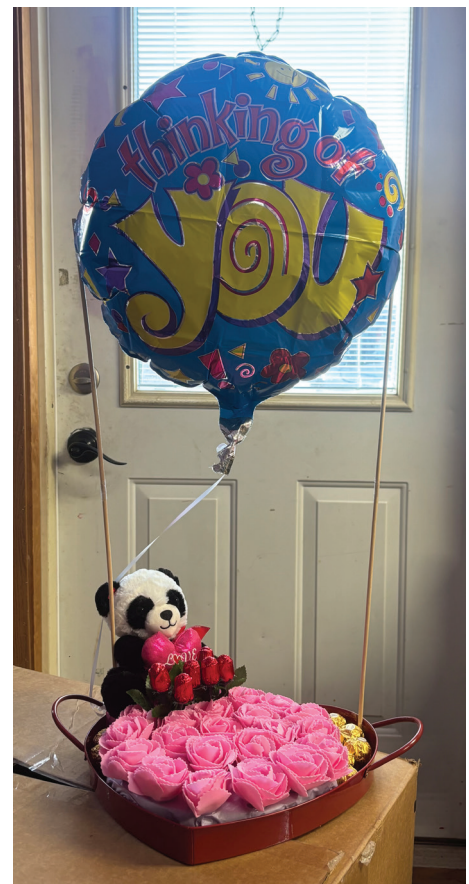
**Hersheys cake with strawberry drops and mini Hersheys on top
\$40.00**



**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**



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

South Dakota House of Representatives advances food stamp soda ban

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER

Lawmakers in the South Dakota House of Representatives endorsed a bill Wednesday barring the purchase of soft drinks with benefits from a food assistance program.

The House voted 58-11 in favor of House Bill 1056, which would require the state Department of Social Services to submit a federal waiver request to exclude soda from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, known by the acronym SNAP or colloquially as food stamps.

SNAP benefits are available to income-eligible families, and can be used to purchase nearly any kind of food or beverage. A waiver from the federal government would allow South Dakota to limit the kinds of food or beverages that can be purchased using the benefits, which are loaded onto cards that function like debit cards.

Eighteen states have been approved for SNAP waivers, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Rep. Taylor Rehfeldt, R-Sioux Falls, introduced the bill. She told lawmakers that the bill would be a "first step in aligning" SNAP with tighter restrictions in the federal Women, Infants and Children nutrition program.

"A taxpayer-funded nutrition program should promote actual nutrition," Rehfeldt said.

Rehfeldt said SNAP benefits are commonly used to buy sugary sodas and other sweetened drinks that contribute to a host of health problems, among them heart disease, obesity and diabetes.

Since over three-fourths of people who received SNAP benefits in 2022 had their health insurance covered by Medicaid, Rehfeldt said the restriction would save the state on Medicaid costs because patients would be healthier.

Opponents to the bill said the change doesn't address food insecurity or poor nutrition. Rep. Liz May, R-Kyle, owns a grocery store. She said "banning foods or policing grocery carts" would burden grocery and convenience store owners with costs to adhere to program changes.

"If our goal is better nutrition, we should reward nutritious choices instead of punishing food choices," May said.

Gov. Larry Rhoden's office opposed the bill in committee, saying it would cost the state about \$500,000 annually to hire three employees and pay a contractor to administer the change to program eligibility.

The bill will head to a Senate committee 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.

Grant County man visits public places in Brookings, Milbank while infectious with measles

All six South Dakota measles cases in 2026 have come from Grant County

BY: JOHN HULT

Visits to five total places in Brookings and Milbank by a Grant County man infected with measles prompted a notice from the South Dakota Department of Health on Wednesday.

All six of the measles cases reported in South Dakota in 2026 have been in Grant County. Sixteen cases were reported in 2025, the largest number coming from Lincoln County, with eight.

The dates and times for potential exposures to the Grant County man last week were:

VFW Bar in Milbank on Jan. 30, from 6 to 9 p.m.

Sly's Steakhouse in Milbank on Jan. 30 from 7 to 10:30 p.m.

Brookings High School (wrestling tournament), Jan. 31 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Larsen Ice Center (ice hockey game) in Brookings, Jan. 31 from 3 to 5:30 p.m.

Pints & Quarts in Brookings, Jan. 31 from 6 to 10 p.m.

The news release from the Health Department urged anyone who may have been exposed to monitor for symptoms for the next 21 days.

Measles symptoms appear in two stages. The first could include a runny nose, cough, and a slight fever, red eyes sensitive to light and a rising fever. Between the third and seventh days of infection, a person with measles will have a temperature of 103-105 degrees and develop a red blotchy rash, typically beginning on the face before spreading to the entire body.

"As South Dakotans, it is our personal responsibility to help prevent the spread of measles in our state," Dr. Joshua Clayton, state epidemiologist, said in a news release. "Following DOH guidance after a known exposure to measles is crucial. Knowing your immune status, monitoring for symptoms, and staying home if you feel sick are critical steps to protect yourself, your family, and your community."

People who are not immune to measles, or unsure of their status, should contact their medical provider, the notice says.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there have been 588 confirmed measles cases nationwide in 2026 across 17 states. Those states include South Dakota, Minnesota and Nebraska.

There were 2,267 confirmed cases across the U.S. in 2025, according to the CDC.

Measles was considered fully eradicated in the U.S. in 2000. Falling measles vaccination rates in recent years have contributed to its return. Several areas of the U.S. now have vaccination rates below the 95% threshold needed to prevent outbreaks.

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

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.

47 complaints, 14 criminal investigations of state employees logged in six months

Public Integrity Unit created by 2025 legislation, began work in July

BY: JOHN HULT

A state Public Integrity Unit fielded 47 complaints of state employee misconduct in its first six months of operations, according to the South Dakota Attorney General's Office.

Of those complaints, 14 resulted in criminal investigations, four of which have resulted in criminal charges thus far.

The figures are part of a report delivered this week to the Legislature's Government Operations and Audit Committee.

At a press conference on the findings Wednesday, Attorney General Marty Jackley said the unit was born of legislation passed last year meant to tighten protections for whistleblowers and address the crush of state employee misconduct allegations that preceded the 2025 legislative session.

The complaints and charges should not cast disparagement over the state's "14,000 hard-working, dedicated employees," Jackley said, but should show the state's commitment to ethical government operations. "We will not allow a few to tarnish the sterling reputation of the majority," Jackley said.

A bill passed in 2025 required disclosure of suspected wrongdoing by state employees and affixed criminal penalties for a failure to do so.

The bill also cleared a path for the Public Integrity Unit, which includes Auditor General Russell Olson, a Division of Criminal Investigation agent and a public integrity prosecutor with Jackley's office.

Just under half the complaints originated with two agencies, the Department of Social Services and the Department of Corrections, which were responsible for 23% and 21% of the complaints, respectively.

Thirty of the complaints were managed at the administrative level, Jackley said, without criminal sanctions. Two others fell outside the unit's purview, meaning the alleged behavior fell outside the "statutory requirements" for legal and ethical behavior of state employees or "no reasonable cause was shown."

Three complaints were unsubstantiated, the report says, and three others were deemed substantiated, but Jackley's office opted against prosecutions:

A Department of Labor employee resigned after an investigation found excessive mileage logged in their state vehicle, excessive litter and inaccurate travel logs.

A Department of Corrections employee kicked closed a cuff port — a small opening in a cell door used to deliver food or medicine to inmates — while an inmate's hands were still in the port and after the officer had just experienced a "fluid assault," the report said.

A Board of Regents employee was found to have used a state vehicle to haul rock from a campus building to their home for personal use; the matter was handled administratively after consultation with legal counsel for the board.

Five of the 14 criminal investigations remain open. The four cases that have drawn criminal charges involve:

A former social services employee accused of fraud for allegedly falsifying abuse and neglect reports.

A former correctional officer accused of helping to provide drugs to inmates.

A former South Dakota State University employee accused of grand theft for allegedly using state dollars and resources to pay veterinary bills.

A former driver's license examiner accused of accessing state driver's license photos, possession of computer-generated pornography and, in one instance, solicitation of rape.

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.

47 complaints, 14 criminal investigations of state employees logged in six months

Public Integrity Unit created by 2025 legislation, began work in July

BY: JOHN HULT

WASHINGTON — The top two Democrats in Congress on Wednesday outlined their proposal for restrictions on immigration enforcement, including body cameras and a ban on masks, though they had no details to share about when actual negotiations would begin.

Lawmakers from both political parties have less than two weeks to find a solution before the stopgap law funding the Department of Homeland Security expires Feb. 13, which could force all of its components, including the Coast Guard and Federal Emergency Management Agency, into a shutdown. However, Immigration and Customs Enforcement still has access to \$75 billion in funding included in the massive tax cuts and spending package signed into law last year.

House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y., said the offer that he and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., were sending to Republicans was the result of "a very productive discussion."

"Dramatic changes are necessary at the Department of Homeland Security with respect to its enforcement activities so that ICE and other agencies are conducting themselves like every other law enforcement agency in the country, not in so many instances in a rogue or lawless manner," Jeffries said.

Democrats will insist that federal immigration agents:

Wear body cameras

Only wear masks to conceal their identities in "extraordinary and unusual circumstances"

Do not undertake roving patrols

Do not detain people in certain locations, like houses of worship, schools, or polling places

Do not engage in racial profiling

Do not detain or deport American citizens

Jeffries said that judicial, as opposed to administrative, warrants should be required "before everyday Americans are ripped out of their homes or snatched out of cars violently.

"The Fourth Amendment is not an inconvenience, it's a requirement embedded in our Constitution that everyone should follow."

That amendment states the government shall not violate the "right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures" and that warrants can only be issued with probable cause.

Administrative warrants are not signed by a judge, but approved by ICE officers themselves. Under U.S. immigration law, ICE also has some authority to conduct warrantless arrests if an immigration officer comes across a person suspected to be in the country unlawfully and believes that person will escape before a warrant can be obtained.

Accountability measures

Democrats will also press Republicans to agree to what Schumer described as "real accountability."

"There's got to be outside, independent oversight by state and local governments, by individuals," Schumer said. "And there's got to be a right to sue, there's got to be a right to go to court and stop this."

Schumer criticized Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., for saying that immigration agents should be able to wear masks, referring to them as "secret police" who need "to be identified more than any other group."

"I would bet when Speaker Johnson goes down to Louisiana, the sheriffs and the police deputies are well identified, as they are in almost every city," he said.

When pressed about Johnson saying Republicans wouldn't agree to require judicial warrants, Jeffries said the speaker had "articulated unreasonable positions."

"He's actually supporting the notion that masked and lawless ICE agents should be deployed in communities throughout America," Jeffries said. "Mike Johnson called the Fourth Amendment an inconvenience. It's not an inconvenience. It's part of the fabric and DNA of our country, just like the First Amendment,

yes even the Second Amendment, the 10th Amendment, the Fourth Amendment.

"We're standing up for all of these constitutional privileges that have been part of who we are since the very beginning."

Negotiation timeline

Schumer said during the press conference that Democrats from the House and Senate were prepared to begin negotiations with Republicans, but would insist on changes "to rein in ICE in very serious ways."

"If they're not serious and they don't put in real reform, they shouldn't expect our votes, plain and simple," he said.

Schumer appeared somewhat skeptical that Alabama Republican Sen. Katie Britt, whom Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., put forward as their top negotiator, was truly empowered to cut a deal on behalf of every GOP senator.

Britt, chairwoman of the Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee, told reporters Wednesday that she expects lawmakers will need to approve another stopgap spending bill for the department, signaling she doesn't expect a deal within the next two weeks.

"We need a little more time, so hopefully (Democrats) see the good effort that we've made ... and we'll have another CR," she said, referring to the technical name for a short-term funding bill, a continuing resolution.

Britt did not say how long that temporary funding measure for the Department of Homeland Security would last.

Any spending bill, whether short or long, will need Democratic support to move through procedural votes in the Senate.

Congress has approved 11 of the 12 annual funding bills, so DHS would be the only part of the federal government to shut down if lawmakers cannot approve its full-year bill or another stopgap measure before its funding expires.

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.

\$2.5 million teacher retention proposal moves to Legislature's budget panel

BY: MEGHAN O'BRIEN

PIERRE — The South Dakota House Education Committee advanced a proposal Wednesday to create a statewide educator retention initiative.

The bill, brought by Sioux Falls Democratic Rep. Erik Muckey, asks for a \$2.5 million appropriation for the state Department of Education to provide grants to school districts and accredited non-public schools, potentially working with an outside organization to come up with data-driven approaches.

A few committee members expressed concern about the price tag, but the bill moved to the Legislature's budget panel, the Joint Committee on Appropriations, on an 8-5 vote.

It's more expensive to fill a teaching position than it is to keep a person on staff, Muckey told the committee.

"Teachers are vital public servants in our communities," he said. "Keeping the profession at the forefront is really important for our state, not just for our schools and our students, but for the workforce needs of our state."

Learning how to create a strong work environment is an important part of addressing the teacher shortage in the state, according to Nathan Eklund, founder of Vital Network. It's a consulting firm that's been working with North Dakota school districts to address the same concern.

Last year, 1,000 teachers in South Dakota left the profession, Eklund said. There are about 10,000 teachers in the state. When teachers leave, it can impact students and their communities, especially in rural areas.

"When we lose our teachers, we lose our schools, and when we lose our schools, we lose our communities," Eklund said. "We look at this as more of a retention issue, almost more so than a teacher shortage."

Joseph Graves, secretary of the South Dakota Department of Education, said the department has had conversations with Vital Network about the project.

Salary and workload are important components of getting teachers to stay, but so are learning how to help them regulate student behavioral issues, some committee members noted.

Those that voted against the bill mostly cited concerns about the amount of funding.

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

Suspect in deadly shooting of Guard member pleads not guilty amid death penalty discussion

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA

WASHINGTON — Department of Justice attorneys said during a Wednesday hearing in federal court that a final decision will be made by May as to what kind of death penalty charges could be pursued for the suspect accused of shooting two West Virginia National Guard members in the nation's capital, killing one and seriously wounding the other.

The accused, 29-year-old Rahmanullah Lakanwal, appeared before U.S. District Judge Amit P. Mehta for an arraignment hearing, where he pleaded not guilty to all nine federal charges.

His next court hearing is May 6 in the District Court for the District of Columbia, where it was moved from the local court.

Attorney General Pam Bondi had said shortly after the incident in an interview with Fox News that DOJ would seek the death penalty if either guard member died of their injuries.

Thanksgiving eve shooting blocks from White House

The shooting in Washington, D.C., took place on the eve of the Thanksgiving holiday, blocks away from the White House.

U.S. Army Spc. Sarah Beckstrom, 20, died as a result of her injuries, and U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Andrew Wolfe, 24, was severely wounded but recovered.

A U.S. marshal officer pushed Lakanwal into the courtroom. He is using a wheelchair because he was also shot in the Nov. 26 shooting. Lakanwal, an Afghan national who entered the United States in September 2021, was later granted asylum.

The hearing was somewhat delayed because Lakanwal could not hear his translator in his headphones.

Charges against Lakanwal

After the shooting, FBI Director Kash Patel, a Metropolitan Police Department leader and Mayor Muriel Bowser said the shooting was "targeted." In initial charges from December, officials alleged that Lakanwal drove from his residence in Washington state to the district.

He is charged with first-degree murder while armed and assault with intent to kill while armed.

He is also charged with transportation of a firearm and ammunition with the intent to commit a felony; four counts of possession of a firearm during a crime of violence; and two counts of assault with the intent to kill

Beckstrom and Wolfe were part of the 2,000 troops stationed in the district since last August, after President Donald Trump declared a "crime emergency." The White House has said National Guard members will remain in the district until the end of the year.

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

Data center tax break proposal fails in South Dakota legislative committee

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER

A bill that would have created a 50-year sales tax break on equipment and software purchases for data centers was stopped at the committee level on Wednesday at the South Dakota Capitol in Pierre.

Members of the House State Affairs Committee voted 9-3 against the bill, though some members expressed interest in attempting to revive it later this legislative session, which continues into March.

The tax exemption would be granted by the state Department of Revenue, requiring the data center to have an electric service agreement that avoids shifting costs to other utility customers. The data center would also be required to notify local water providers to ensure consumption is compatible for the location.

Supporters said the bill would remove a barrier keeping data centers from being built in the state. South Dakota's biggest data center consumes 30 megawatts of electricity, and the state has none of the vastly larger data centers that have proliferated elsewhere. Some of those bigger data centers, often for cryptocurrency and artificial intelligence, need up to 1,000 megawatts of energy, which is equivalent to the demand from 800,000 residential customers.

At least 37 states offer some sort of data center incentive, ranging from sales and use tax exemptions to property tax abatements, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

The bill is sponsored by Rep. Kent Roe, R-Hayti.

"If we choose to sit this out, we don't stay neutral, we fall behind," Roe said. "The jobs, the investment, the long-term tax base will simply go to Iowa, Nebraska, Wyoming and North Dakota."

Opponents raised concerns about South Dakota's ability to meet data center electricity demands; potentially rising costs of electricity for ratepayers across the state; and the impact on agriculture, land prices and public service needs in rural areas where data centers would be built.

House Speaker Jon Hansen, R-Dell Rapids, said he doesn't believe the protections for ratepayers in the bill are sufficient, questioning the transparency around implementing the tax breaks and controlling rate increases for customers. He added that South Dakota shouldn't "give away tax breaks to big techs."

"They are some of the world's largest companies and I think we should prioritize the people of our state over the world's largest tech companies," Hansen said.

More data center bills

Other bills related to data centers are making their way through the legislative process:

HB 1038 requires data centers to pay for costs incurred by a contract review by the South Dakota Public Utilities Commission; the bill passed the House of Representatives with a 60-5 vote and heads to the Senate Commerce and Energy Committee.

HB 1198 requires that "high energy use facilities" obtain conditional use permits from adjacent counties and municipalities if the property is within a mile of the boundary; the bill has not been heard in committee yet.

HB 1246 prohibits nondisclosure agreements related to data centers and classifies such agreements as public record; the bill has not been heard in committee yet.

SB 127 limits "nuisances" caused by data centers by restricting the facilities from being built within a mile of a residential area and prohibiting them from exceeding 45 decibels of noise at the nearest residential property line; the bill has not been heard in committee yet.

SB 128 defines "large use customer" as an electric customer with at least 2 megawatts of demand and sets regulations for water and electric use; the bill, which hasn't been heard in committee yet, also requires utilities to set rates for large-load customers to protect other customers from rate increases, requires a closed-loop cooling system, and requires regular water and electric use reports, among other regulations.

SB 135 bars new state sales tax breaks for data centers, restricts utilities from increasing rates caused by large power demands, requires compatibility with local water supplies, and preserves local control over siting; the bill has not been heard in committee yet.

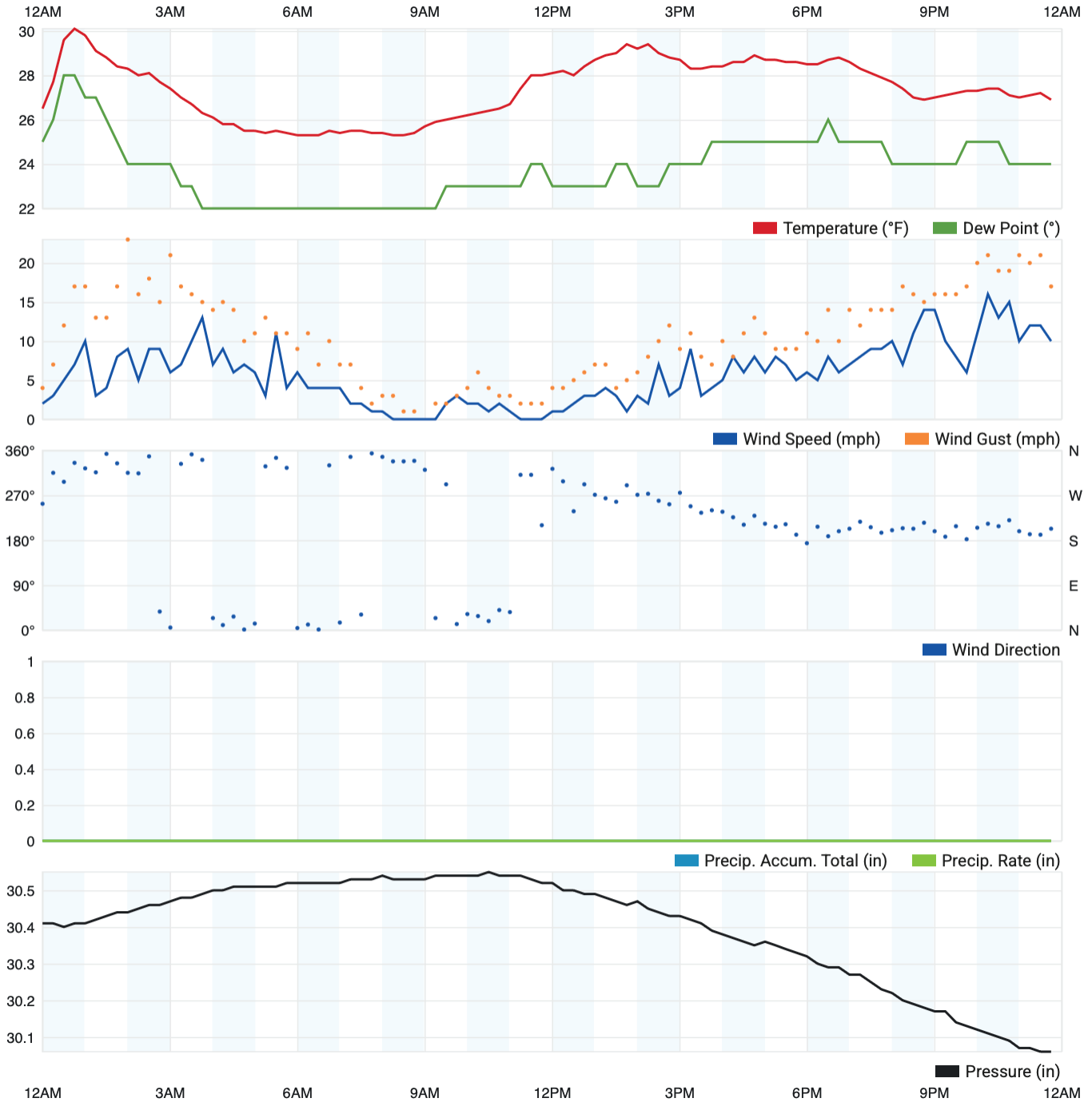
SB 193 defines "backup electric generation"; data centers are increasingly required across the country to switch to backup power during peak hours.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

February 4, 2026



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Today

Tonight

Friday

Friday Night

Saturday



High: 48 °F

Low: 28 °F

High: 36 °F ↓↓

Low: 17 °F

High: 41 °F

Mostly Sunny

Increasing
Clouds

Partly Sunny

Mostly Cloudy

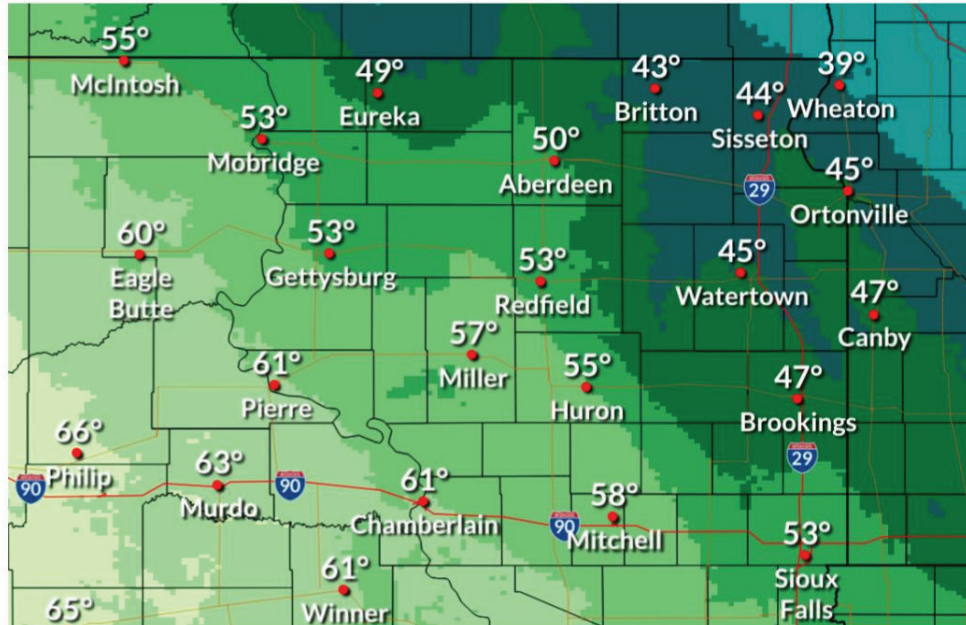
Partly Sunny



Mild Temperatures Today

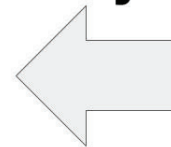
February 5, 2026
2:12 AM CST

Highs 15 to 30 Degrees Above Normal



- Cooler but still above normal temperatures for Friday...
 - Highs 30s to mid 40s
- Milder air returns for Sunday Monday Tuesday
 - Sun: Mid 30s - Mid 50s
 - Mon/Tues: 40s and 50s

Today's Highs



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Mild and dry conditions are on through early next week. A weak cold front will bring us a taste of some 'cooler' weather for Friday but overall shaping up to be a pleasant next few days.

Groton Daily Independent

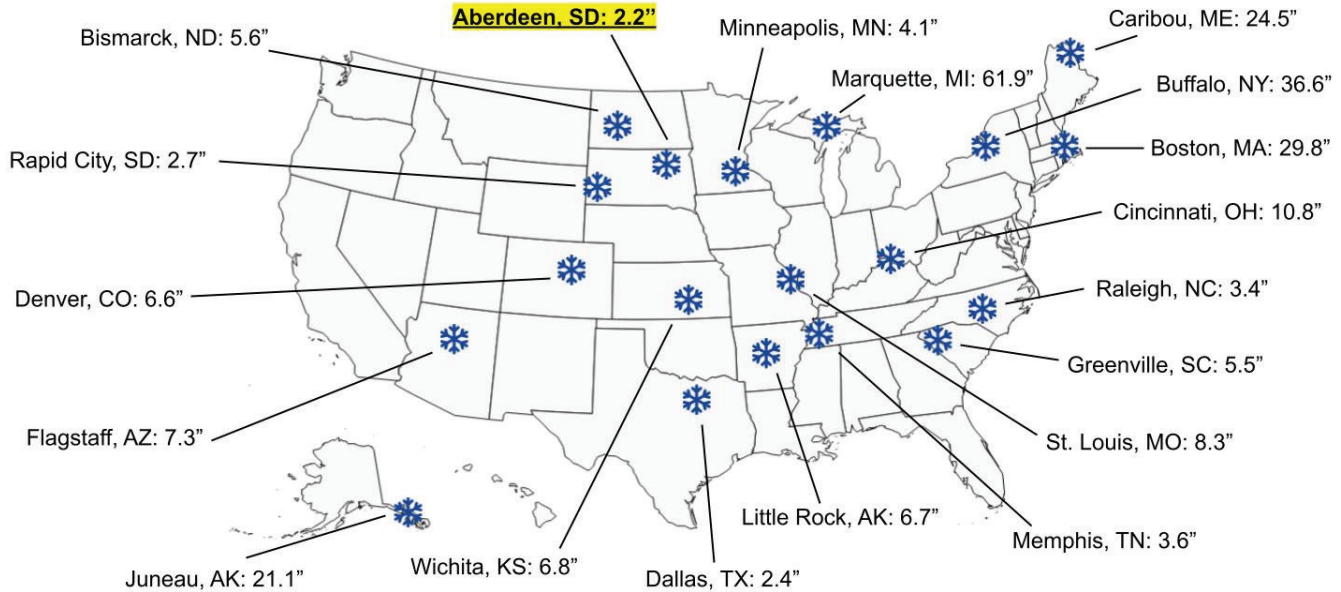
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Which cities had more snow than Aberdeen, SD in January?

February 4, 2026
8:14 AM CST

Another Dry January leaves Aberdeen short on snow.



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

This January, there was a lack of snow over our area. In fact, many cities much further south than Aberdeen saw more snow in the month than we did! Here's a look at some of the major cities that had more January snow than our 2.2". For those who are missing the snow, stay tuned! While there's not much in our current 7 day forecast, the CPC's February outlook calls for near-normal precip, which is about 7" over the course of the month.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 30 °F at 12:38 AM

Low Temp: 25 °F at 6:04 AM

Wind: 23 mph at 1:58 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 57 in 1991

Record Low: -36 in 1907

Average High: 26

Average Low: 3

Average Precip in Feb.: 0.10

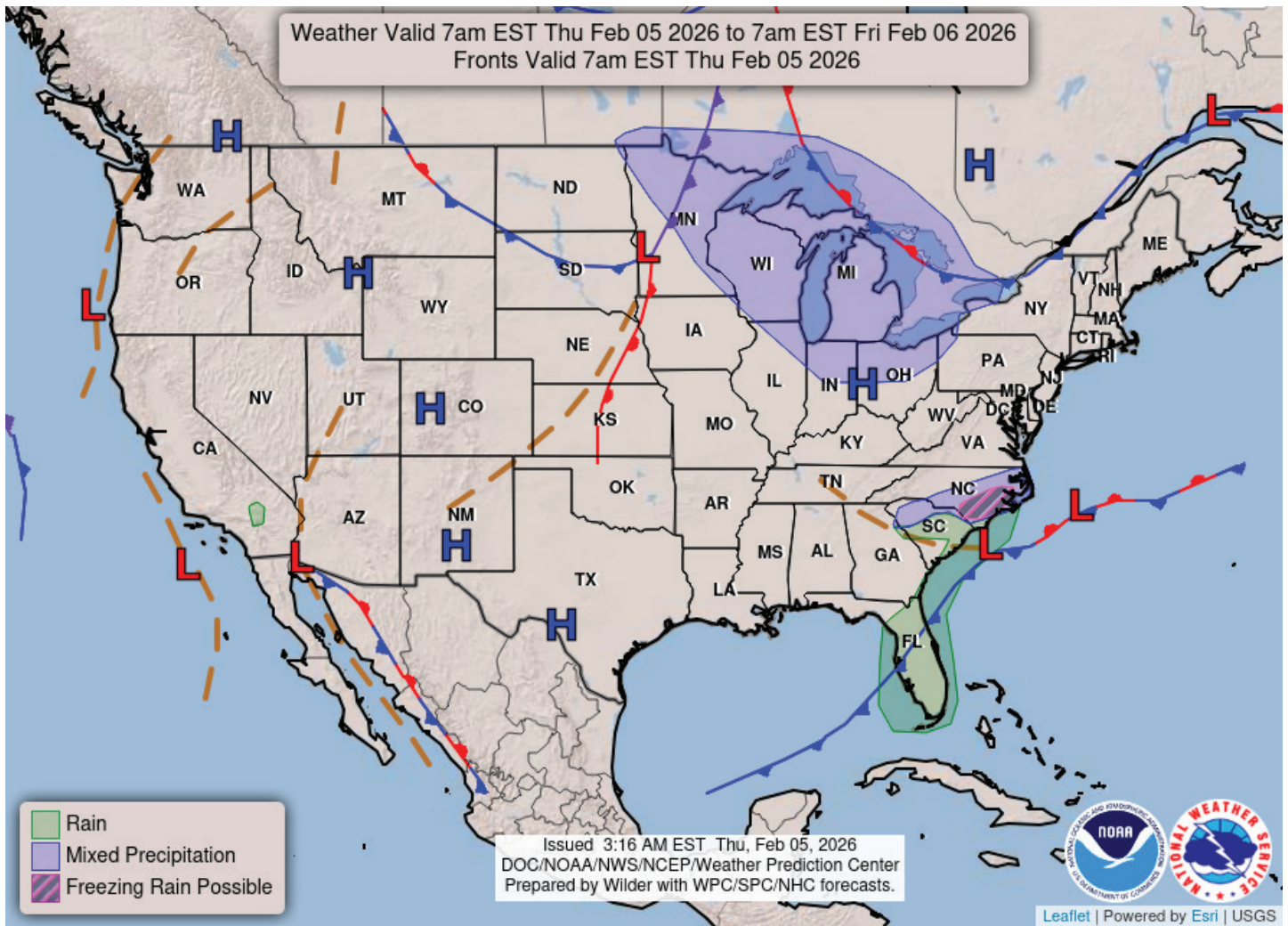
Precip to date in Feb.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 0.65

Precip Year to Date: 0.00

Sunset Tonight: 5:44 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:47 am



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Today in Weather History

February 5, 1978: Another winter blizzard plagued the northern half of the state, beginning on February 5th and continuing until the 9th. The unusual aspect of this blizzard was that the wind came from the southeast between 25 to 45 mph. Only one to three inches of new snow accumulation fell during the five days but was piled high on the existing large snowdrifts. Most of the northern half of the state was paralyzed due to blocked roads. Eighteen counties across the north part of South Dakota were declared a disaster by the governor. There were also numerous livestock losses.

1745: Today is National Weatherman/Meteorologist day, commemorating the birth of John Jeffries in 1745. Jeffries, one of America's first weather observers, began taking daily weather observations in Boston, MA, in 1774, and he made the first balloon observation in 1784. You can read a narrative from the [Library of Congress](#) of the two aerial voyages of Doctor Jeffries with Mons. Blanchard: with meteorological observations and remarks. The first voyage was on November 13th, 1784, from London into Kent. The second was on January 7th, 1785, from England into France.

1887: San Francisco experienced its most significant snowstorm of record. Nearly four inches was reported in downtown San Francisco, and the western hills of the city received seven inches. Excited crowds went on a snowball throwing rampage.

1920: An intense nor'easter dumped 17.5 inches of snow over three days in New York City Central Park, New York. Boston, MA, saw 12.2 inches of snow on this day.

1976: Record-breaking snowfall of just two inches fell in Sacramento, California. February 5, 1976, is the only time since November 1941 when snow was reported in Sacramento.

1986: A supercell thunderstorm tracked through the Tomball area northwest of Houston, TX, and produced four tornadoes along with damaging microburst winds and up to tennis ball size hail. An F3 tornado killed two people, injured 80 others, and devastated a mobile home park and the David Wayne Hooks Airport. In addition, 300 aircraft were either damaged or destroyed. Much of the more substantial hail was propelled by 60 to 80 mph winds, resulting in widespread moderate damage. The total damage from this storm was 80 million dollars.

1987 — Thunderstorms in the Southern Plains Region caused flooding in parts of south central Texas. Del Rio TX was soaked with two inches of rain in two hours prior to sunrise. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 — Cold and snow invaded the southern U.S. Roswell NM was buried under 16.5 inches of snow in 24 hours, an all-time record for that location. Parts of the Central Gulf Coast Region reported their first significant snow in fifteen years. Strong winds in Minnesota and the Dakotas produced wind chill readings as cold as 75 degrees below zero. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 — Severe cold gripped much of the nation. Thirty cities reported new record low temperatures for the date. Morning lows of 9 above at Astoria OR and 27 below zero at Ely NV were records for February. In Alaska, Point Barrow warmed to 24 degrees above zero, and Nome reached 30 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 — For the second time in two days, and the third time in a week, high winds plagued the northwestern U.S. Winds in Oregon gusted to 60 mph at Cape Disappointment, and wind gusts in Washington State reached 67 mph at Bellingham. The first in a series of cold fronts began to produce heavy snow in the mountains of Washington and Oregon. Ten inches of snow fell at Timberline OR. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2006 — Mount Washington Observatory in New Hampshire reaches a high of 41°F, the warmest February 5th on record at the summit and two degrees off the monthly mark, where records have been kept since 1932. The Weather Doctor

2008 — The deadliest round of tornadoes in nearly a quarter century kill 58 people in the south. The storms kill 32 people in Tennessee, 14 in Arkansas, seven in Kentucky and five in Alabama. Damage is likely to be in the hundreds of millions of dollars. The Weather Doctor

2008: The Super Tuesday 2008 Tornado Outbreak has been one of the deadliest tornado outbreaks in the US, with 59 fatalities reported. So far, it ranks in the top 15 deadly tornado outbreaks (and the highest number of tornado deaths since 1985). According to the SPC Storm Reports, there were over 300 reports of tornadoes, large hail (up to 4.25 inches in diameter in Texas, Arkansas, and Missouri), and damaging wind gusts from Texas to Ohio and West Virginia. The outbreak produced at least 64 tornadoes, some producing EF-3 and EF-4 damage.

2010 — A mega-snowstorm, which President Obama dubbed Snowmageddon, buried the Washington D.C. area with more than 30 inches of snow in some areas. At American University in Washington the official snowfall was 27.5 inches. Snowfall totals in the Washington DC area range from a low of 17.9 inches at Ronald Reagan National Airport to 40 inches in the northern suburb of Colesville, MD. Dulles Airport reported 32.4 inches, which established a new two-day snowfall record. The Baltimore-Washington International Airport, MD, measured 24.8 inches from the storm breaking the record for the largest two day snowfall there. It is one of the worst blizzards in the city's history.

God's Provision in Life's Storms

When life feels overwhelming,

God remains present and provides what we need for endurance.

Matthew 14:22-34: 22 Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the crowds away.

23 After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone.

24 But the boat was already a long distance from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary.

25 And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea.

26 When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear.

27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid."

28 Peter said to Him, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water."

29 And He said, "Come!" And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

30 But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!"

31 Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

32 When they got into the boat, the wind stopped.

33 And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, "You are certainly God's Son!"

34 When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret.

None of us likes suffering. But in God's hands, trials can become tools that shape us into the people He created us to be.

In our own strength, we often lack the resources and abilities to meet life's big challenges. So God provides just what we need and gives us an awareness of His presence. In today's reading, the disciples thought they were alone in a storm. When they initially spotted the Lord, they were afraid because they mistook Him for a ghost. To quickly calm their fears, Jesus said, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid" (v. 27). During a crisis, we may not sense God's presence, but He's promised always to be with us (Deuteronomy 31:6). Assurance of His presence provides immediate comfort and a sense of confidence that helps us endure.

Another promise God makes is to provide a path through trials. The disciples must have wondered if they'd make it safely to shore. But had they somehow avoided this storm, they would have missed the demonstration of Jesus' power. God wants to reveal His might to us as well.

Ask the Lord to let you experience His abiding presence. He will provide strength to endure and wisdom to identify the way through your troubles.

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:

02.03.26

5 11 22 25 69 21

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$346,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 15

DRAW: Mins 59 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.04.26

2 14 30 43 45 10

All Star Bonus: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$14,980,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 30

DRAW: Mins 59 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.04.26

6 13 15 36 46 18

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 16 Hrs 45 Mins 59

DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.04.26

10 11 16 22 26

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$253,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 45

DRAW: Mins 59 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.04.26

10 43 49 54 55 10

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 15

DRAW: Mins 0 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

02.04.26

27 29 30 37 58 15

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$102,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 15

DRAW: Mins 0 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Fens and South Dakota win 82-75 in OT against Kansas City

By The Associated Press undefined

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — Cameron Fens scored 23 points and Jordan Crawford added eight in overtime as South Dakota took down Kansas City 82-75 on Wednesday night.

Fens added 12 rebounds for the Coyotes (13-12, 5-5 Summit League). Uzziah Buntyn scored 20 points and added five rebounds and four steals. Crawford finished with 16 points.

The Roos (4-20, 1-9) were led by Chris Dockery, who recorded 17 points and eight rebounds. CJ Evans added 16 points and four assists for UMKC. Jerome Palm finished with 14 points. The loss was the Roos' eighth straight.

South Dakota entered halftime down 31-23, but outscored UMKC by eight points in the second half to end regulation tied 64-64. Crawford scored the Coyotes' eight the overtime points going 2 of 3 from the field.

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

Minessale's 26 help St. Thomas beat South Dakota State 77-62

By The Associated Press undefined

BROOKINGS, S.D. (AP) — Nolan Minessale had 26 points in St. Thomas' 77-62 win against South Dakota State on Wednesday.

Minessale added eight rebounds for the Tommies (19-6, 8-2 Summit League). Nick Janowski scored 23 points while going 9 of 16 (5 of 9 from 3-point range) to go with six rebounds.

The Jackrabbits (11-13, 4-5) were led by Joe Saylor, who posted 16 points. Matthew Mors added 13 points for South Dakota State and Jaden Jackson put up 11.

St. Thomas carried a slim three-point lead into halftime, as Janowski led the way with 14 points. St. Thomas took the lead for good with 14:46 remaining in the second half.

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

Indian teacher who created hundreds of learning centers wins \$1 million Global Teacher Prize

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — An Indian teacher and activist known for creating hundreds of learning centers and painting educational murals across the walls of slums won the \$1 million Global Teacher Prize on Thursday.

Rouble Nagi accepted the award at the World Governments Summit in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, an annual event that draws leaders from across the globe.

Her Rouble Nagi Art Foundation has established more than 800 learning centers across India. They aim to have children who never attended school begin to have structured learning. They also teach children already in school.

Nagi also paints murals that teach literacy, science, math and history, among other topics.

The prize is awarded by the Varkey Foundation, whose founder, Sunny Varkey, established the for-profit GEMS Education company that runs dozens of schools in Egypt, Qatar and the UAE.

"Rouble Nagi represents the very best of what teaching can be – courage, creativity, compassion, and an unwavering belief in every child's potential," Varkey said in a statement posted to the Global Teacher Prize website. "By bringing education to the most marginalised communities, she has not only changed

individual lives, but strengthened families and communities.”

Nagi plans to use the \$1 million to build an institute that offers free vocational training.

Stefania Giannini, UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Education, said Nagi’s prize “reminds us of a simple truth: teachers matter.”

In comments carried on the prize website, Giannini said UNESCO was “honoured to join the Global Teacher Prize in celebrating teachers like you, who, through patience, determination, and belief in every learner, help children into school — an act that can change the course of a life.”

Nagi is the 10th teacher to win the award, which the foundation began handing out in 2015.

Past winners of the Global Teacher Prize have included a Kenyan teacher from a remote village who gave away most of his earnings to the poor, a Palestinian primary school teacher who teaches her students about non-violence and a Canadian educator who taught a remote Arctic village of Inuit students. Last year’s winner was Saudi educator Mansour al-Mansour, who was known for his work with the poor in the kingdom.

GEMS Education, or Global Education Management Systems, is one of the world’s largest private school operators and is believed to be worth billions. Its success has followed that of Dubai, where only private schools offer classes for the children of the foreigners who power its economy.

The last US-Russia nuclear pact expires, prompting fears of a new arms race

MOSCOW (AP) — The last remaining nuclear arms pact between Russia and the United States expires Thursday, removing any caps on the two largest atomic arsenals for the first time in more than a half-century.

The termination of the New START Treaty could set the stage for what many fear could be an unconstrained nuclear arms race.

Russian President Vladimir Putin last year declared readiness to stick to the treaty’s limits for another year if Washington follows suit, but U.S. President Donald Trump has been noncommittal about extending it. He has indicated that he wants China to be a part of it — a push Beijing has rebuffed.

Putin discussed the pact’s expiration with Chinese leader Xi Jinping on Wednesday, Kremlin adviser Yuri Ushakov said, noting Washington hasn’t responded to his proposed extension.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Thursday that Moscow views the expiration of the treaty “negatively” and regrets its.

“In any case, the Russian Federation will retain its responsible, thorough approach to stability when it comes to nuclear weapons. And, of course, it will be guided primarily by its national interests,” Peskov said.

Russia’s Foreign Ministry on Wednesday night said in a statement that “under the current circumstances, we assume that the parties to the New START Treaty are no longer bound by any obligations or symmetrical declarations within the context of the Treaty, including its core provisions, and are fundamentally free to choose their next steps.”

New START, signed in 2010 by then-President Barack Obama and his Russian counterpart, Dmitry Medvedev, restricted each side to no more than 1,550 nuclear warheads on no more than 700 missiles and bombers — deployed and ready for use. It was originally supposed to expire in 2021 but was extended for five more years.

The pact envisioned sweeping on-site inspections to verify compliance, although they stopped in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic and never resumed.

In February 2023, Putin suspended Moscow’s participation, saying Russia couldn’t allow U.S. inspections of its nuclear sites at a time when Washington and its NATO allies have openly declared Moscow’s defeat in Ukraine as their goal. At the same time, the Kremlin emphasized it wasn’t withdrawing from the pact altogether, pledging to respect its caps on nuclear weapons.

In offering in September to abide by New START’s limits for a year to buy time for both sides to negotiate a successor agreement, Putin said the pact’s expiration would be destabilizing and could fuel nuclear

proliferation.

New START followed a long succession of U.S.-Russian nuclear arms reduction pacts. Those have been terminated, as well.

Trump has indicated he would like to keep limits on nuclear weapons but wants to involve China in a potential new treaty.

"I actually feel strongly that if we're going to do it, I think China should be a member of the extension," Trump told The New York Times last month. "China should be a part of the agreement."

Beijing has balked at any restrictions on its smaller but growing nuclear arsenal, while urging the U.S. to resume nuclear talks with Russia.

"China's nuclear forces are not at all on the same scale as those of the U.S. and Russia, and thus China will not participate in nuclear disarmament negotiations at the current stage," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said Thursday.

He said China regrets the expiration of the treaty, calls on the U.S. to resume nuclear dialogue with Russia soon and to positively respond to Moscow's suggestion that the two sides continue observing the core limits of the treaty for now.

Russia and Ukraine hold a second day of US-brokered peace talks in Abu Dhabi

By KAMILA HRABCHUK Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Negotiators from Moscow and Kyiv on Thursday held a second day of U.S.-brokered talks in Abu Dhabi on ending their war amid an escalation in Russia's winter attacks on Ukraine's power grid and after a sharp rise last year in Ukrainian civilians killed in the fighting.

"We are working in the same formats as yesterday: trilateral consultations, group work, and further synchronization of positions," said Rustem Umerov, Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council chief, who was present at the meeting.

The delegations from Moscow and Kyiv were joined in the capital of the United Arab Emirates by U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff and U.S. President Donald Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, according to Umerov. They were also at last month's talks in the same place as the Trump administration tries to steer the two countries toward a settlement.

General Alexis Grynkeiwich, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, was also present at the talks, according to a spokesman for the general who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive matters.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy urged allied countries to press Moscow into ending its all-out invasion, which began almost four years ago on Feb. 24 2022, and said his country needs security guarantees to deter any postwar Russian attacks.

Ukrainians must feel that there is genuine progress toward peace and "not toward a scenario in which the Russians exploit everything to their advantage and continue their strikes," Zelenskyy said on social media late Wednesday.

Fighting has continued in parallel with the talks. Russia has hammered Ukraine's electricity network, aiming to deny civilians power and weaken their appetite for the fight, while a grinding war of attrition continues along the roughly 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line snaking along eastern and southern parts of Ukraine.

Last year saw a 31% increase in Ukrainian civilian casualties compared with 2024, the advocacy group Human Rights Watch said in a report published Wednesday.

Almost 15,000 Ukrainian civilians have been killed and just over 40,000 injured since the start of the war through last December, according to the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine.

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Bitcoin plunges up to 8% and South Korea's Kospi sinks nearly 4% in the latest tech-led sell-off

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer

World shares retreated Thursday in Asia on heavy selling of technology stocks, while the price of bitcoin fell as much as 8%.

The latest round of jitters over high prices for tech shares sent South Korea's Kospi down nearly 4%. Oil prices sank more than \$1 a barrel.

Bitcoin was trading near \$71,000 early Thursday, down 7.3% after crashing to about \$69,000 earlier in the day, according to CoinDesk. That's its lowest level since November 2024.

Cryptocurrencies like bitcoin have dropped after U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, said in answer to questions in the House Financial Services Committee on Wednesday that he did not have the authority to order banks to buy such assets.

In share trading, Germany's DAX slipped 0.2% to 24,568.67 and the CAC 40 in Paris edged 0.2% higher to 8,278.99. Britain's FTSE 100 gave up 0.3% to 10,371.83.

The future for the S&P 500 was up 0.2% while that for the Dow Jones Industrial Average edged 0.1% lower.

In Asian trading, Tokyo's Nikkei 225 shed 0.9% to 53,818.04, while the Kospi in South Korea skidded 3.9%, to 5,163.57.

Shares in South Korea's biggest company, Samsung Electronics, lost 5.9%. Chip maker SK Hynix plunged 6.7%.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng regained early losses, closing 0.1% higher at 26,885.24. The Shanghai Composite index gave up 0.6% to 4,075.92.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 fell 0.4% to 8,889.20, while Taiwan's Taiex lost 1.5%.

On Wednesday, the S&P 500 fell 0.5% for its fifth modest loss in the last six days. The Dow rose 0.5% and the Nasdaq composite sank 1.5%.

More than twice as many stocks rose within the S&P 500 than fell, but sinking technology stocks weighed on the index for a second straight day.

Advanced Micro Devices dropped 17.3% even though the chip company reported a stronger profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected. It also gave a forecast for revenue for the start of 2026 that topped analysts' expectations, but that may not have satisfied investors after its stock doubled over the last 12 months.

Tech stocks are under pressure even when they deliver stronger-than-expected profits after their prices shot higher as they've grown to dominate markets. Companies like software makers, meanwhile, are struggling with questions about whether they'll lose in the future to competitors powered by artificial-intelligence technology.

Uber Technologies also dragged on the market after falling 5.1%. The ride-hailing company reported results for the latest quarter that fell short of analysts' expectations. It also gave a forecast for profit in the current quarter that was below analysts' expectations, while naming a new chief financial officer.

Some tech stocks nevertheless climbed, including a 13.8% rise for Super Micro Computer. The company, which sells AI servers and other equipment, delivered a stronger profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected.

Walmart edged up by 0.2%, a day after its total market value topped \$1 trillion for the first time. The retailer has broken into a small club dominated by Big Tech companies like Nvidia and Apple, which are each worth more than \$4 trillion.

In other dealings early Thursday, U.S. benchmark crude oil fell \$1.05 to \$64.09 per barrel. Brent crude, the international standard, lost \$1.11 to \$68.35 per barrel.

Prices of precious metals resumed their roller coaster ride, as gold bounced up 0.2% while silver dropped 4.6%.

Their prices have surged and swooned recently as investors sought safer places to keep their money

amid worries about everything from tariffs to a weaker U.S. dollar to heavy debt loads for governments worldwide. But critics have said their prices rose too far, too fast and were due for a pullback.

The dollar rose to 157.03 Japanese yen from 156.88 yen. The euro fell to \$1.1805 from \$1.1809.

The Gaza ceasefire began months ago. Here's why the fighting persists

By SAM METZ Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — As the bodies of two dozen Palestinians killed in Israeli strikes arrived at hospitals in Gaza on Wednesday, the director of one asked a question that has echoed across the war-ravaged territory for months.

"Where is the ceasefire? Where are the mediators?" Shifa Hospital's Mohamed Abu Selmiya wrote on Facebook.

At least 556 Palestinians have been killed in Israeli strikes since a U.S.-brokered truce came into effect in October, including 24 on Wednesday and 30 on Saturday, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. Four Israeli soldiers have been killed in Gaza in the same period, with more injured, including a soldier whom the military said was severely wounded when militants opened fire near the ceasefire line in northern Gaza overnight.

Other aspects of the agreement have stalled, including the deployment of an international security force, Hamas' disarmament and the start of Gaza's reconstruction. The opening of the Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt raised hope of further progress, but fewer than 50 people were allowed to cross on Monday.

Hostages freed as other issues languish

In October, after months of stalled negotiations, Israel and Hamas accepted a 20-point plan proposed by U.S. President Donald Trump aimed at ending the war unleashed by Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack into Israel.

At the time, Trump said it would lead to a "Strong, Durable, and Everlasting Peace."

Hamas freed all the living hostages it still held at the outset of the deal in exchange for thousands of Palestinian prisoners held by Israel and the remains of others.

But the larger issues the agreement sought to address, including the future governance of the strip, were met with reservations, and the U.S. offered no firm timeline.

The return of the remains of hostages meanwhile stretched far beyond the 72-hour timeline outlined in the agreement. Israel recovered the body of the last hostage only last week, after accusing Hamas and other militant groups of violating the ceasefire by failing to return all of the bodies. The militants said they were unable to immediately locate all the remains because of the massive destruction caused by the war — a claim Israel rejected.

The ceasefire also called for an immediate influx of humanitarian aid, including equipment to clear rubble and rehabilitate infrastructure. The United Nations and humanitarian groups say aid deliveries to Gaza's 2 million Palestinians have fallen short due to customs clearance problems and other delays. COGAT, the Israeli military body overseeing aid to Gaza, has called the U.N.'s claims "simply a lie."

Ceasefire holds despite accusations

Violence has sharply declined since the ceasefire paused a war in which more than 71,800 Palestinians have been killed, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. The ministry is part of the Hamas-led government and maintains detailed records seen as generally reliable by U.N. agencies and independent experts.

Hamas-led militants killed some 1,200 people in the initial October 2023 attack and took around 250 hostage.

Both sides say the agreement is still in effect and use the word "ceasefire" in their communications. But Israel accuses Hamas fighters of operating beyond the truce line splitting Gaza in half, threatening its troops and occasionally opening fire, while Hamas accuses Israeli forces of gunfire and strikes on residential areas far from the line.

Palestinians have called on U.S. and Arab mediators to get Israel to stop carrying out deadly strikes, which often kill civilians. Among those killed on Wednesday were five children, including two babies. Hamas, which accuses Israel of hundreds of violations, called it a "grave circumvention of the ceasefire agreement."

In a joint statement on Sunday, eight Arab and Muslim countries condemned Israel's actions since the agreement took effect and urged restraint from all sides "to preserve and sustain the ceasefire."

Israel says it is responding to daily violations committed by Hamas and acting to protect its troops. "While Hamas' actions undermine the ceasefire, Israel remains fully committed to upholding it," the military said in a statement on Wednesday.

"One of the scenarios the (military) has to be ready for is Hamas is using a deception tactic like they did before October 7 and rearming and preparing for an attack when it's comfortable for them," said Lt. Col. Nadav Shoshani, a military spokesperson.

Some signs of progress

The return of the remains of the last hostage, the limited opening of the Rafah crossing, and the naming of a Palestinian committee to govern Gaza and oversee its reconstruction showed a willingness to advance the agreement despite the violence.

Last month, U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff, who played a key role in brokering the truce, said it was time for "transitioning from ceasefire to demilitarization, technocratic governance, and reconstruction."

That will require Israel and Hamas to grapple with major issues on which they have been sharply divided, including whether Israel will fully withdraw from Gaza and Hamas will lay down its arms.

Though political leaders are holding onto the term "ceasefire" and have yet to withdraw from the process, there is growing despair in Gaza.

On Saturday, Atallah Abu Hadaiyed heard explosions in Gaza City during his morning prayers and ran outside to find his cousins lying on the ground as flames curled around them.

"We don't know if we're at war or at peace," he said from a displacement camp, as tarpaulin strips blew off the tent behind him.

What to know about the attacks in Nigeria that killed over 160 people

By DYEPAZAH SHYBAYAN and MARK BANCHEREAU Associated Press

ABUJA, Nigeria (AP) — Gunmen killed scores of people during an attack on two villages in Western Nigeria in one of the deadliest assaults in the West African country in recent months.

The attack on Tuesday evening targeted the neighboring villages of Woro and Nuku, in Kwara state. A lawmaker who represents the area said that at least 162 people were killed, while Amnesty International said the gunmen killed over 170 people, razed homes and looted shops. The rights group deplored "a stunning security failure."

There has been a surge of deadly attacks and kidnappings by Islamic militants and armed gangs in Nigeria in recent months, as the country's overstretched military has struggled to contain an array of security challenges.

Here's what to know about the deadly attacks.

Nigeria faces overlapping security crises

Nigeria is in the grip of a complex security crisis, including an insurgency by Islamic militants and a surge in kidnappings for ransom by criminal gangs.

For years, so-called "bandits" have mainly been active in northwestern Nigeria, but they have recently been moving to other parts of the country including Kwara state.

Islamic militants have also been increasingly active in Kwara as a decades-long insurgency, which until recently mostly affected northeastern Nigeria, has spilled over to western and central regions.

The most notorious are the homegrown jihadis Boko Haram, who took up arms in 2009 to fight Western education and impose their radical version of Islamic law. Boko Haram killed at least 36 people in northeastern Nigeria last week during separate attacks.

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Other extremist armed groups in Nigeria also include at least two affiliated with the Islamic State: a Boko Haram offshoot known as the Islamic State West Africa Province, and the Islamic State Sahel Province, known locally as Lakurawa, which is mostly prominent in the northwest.

Extremist groups suspected of being behind the attacks

No group has claimed responsibility for the Tuesday attacks.

Mohammed Omar Bio, the area's representative in parliament, said the attacks were carried out by the Islamic State group-affiliated Lakurawa.

James Barnett, a researcher at the Washington-based Hudson Institute, said the attack was more likely perpetrated by the Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad, a Boko Haram faction that has been responsible for other recent massacres in the area.

Kwara State Gov. AbdulRahman AbdulRazaq said Tuesday's attack was likely carried out in response to recent counter-terrorism operations in the region.

AbdulRazaq said the attack was an attempt to distract security forces "who have successfully hunted down several terrorist and kidnapping gangs across many parts of the state."

Attacks come as US intensifies response to the security crisis

The attacks came days after the United States took military action against armed groups in Nigeria.

On Tuesday, the head of U.S. Africa Command said the United States had sent a small team of military officers to Nigeria. Gen. Dagvin R.M. Anderson said the deployment came at Nigeria's request and was focused on intelligence support.

Nigeria has been in the diplomatic crosshairs of the U.S. in recent months following threats by U.S. President Donald Trump to attack the country, alleging it is not doing enough to protect its Christian citizens.

While Christians have been among those targeted, analysts say the majority of victims of armed groups are Muslims in Nigeria's Muslim-majority north, where most attacks occur.

But the diplomatic tensions have since been reworked into cooperation between the two countries. In December, U.S. forces launched airstrikes on IS-affiliated militants in Nigeria.

Last month, Nigeria's government said the U.S. has pledged to deliver outstanding military equipment purchased by the country over the past five years, including drones and helicopters. Some of the equipment was delayed in recent years over concerns about possible human rights abuses by Nigeria's security forces.

Taiwan-US ties are 'rock solid,' the island's president says after Trump-Xi call

By SIMINA MISTREANU Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — Taiwan's ties with the United States are "rock solid," the island's president said Thursday, hours after President Donald Trump and Chinese leader Xi Jinping spoke on the phone about topics that included the self-ruled island's future.

"The Taiwan-U.S. relationship is rock solid, and all cooperation projects will continue uninterrupted," Taiwan President Lai Ching-te told reporters during a visit to textile merchants in western Taiwan.

The comments came after Xi, in his first call with Trump since November, warned the U.S. president to be "prudent" about supplying arms to the self-ruled island, according to a readout of their call provided by China's Foreign Ministry.

Taiwan is a self-ruled democracy that China claims as its own territory, to be annexed by force if necessary. Beijing prohibits all countries it has diplomatic relations with — including the U.S. — from having formal ties with Taipei.

Still, while the U.S. doesn't officially recognize Taiwan as a country, it is the island's strongest informal backer and arms supplier.

In December, the U.S. State Department announced its largest-ever arms sales package to Taiwan, valued at more than \$11.1 billion and including missiles, artillery systems and drones. The package is yet to be approved by Congress.

China reacted angrily to the proposed arms sales, conducting two days of military drills around the island

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in late December, for which it dispatched air, navy and missile units.

The arms sales are also facing pushback from Taiwan's opposition KMT party and some of its population, along with a proposed increase of defense spending to 3.3% of Taiwan's gross domestic product.

Taiwan's opposition-controlled parliament has blocked Lai's budget plan, including a \$40 billion special defense budget, proposing instead a much smaller defense spending plan.

Trump said the call with Xi was "excellent" and "thorough" in a post late Wednesday on Truth Social.

He added that he is looking forward to a trip to China in April that will be the first of his current term in office.

Trump also said China is considering buying 20 million tons of U.S. soybeans in the current season, up from 12 million tons in the previous season.

What to know as Iran and US set for nuclear talks in Oman

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran and the United States will hold talks Friday in Oman, their latest over Tehran's nuclear program after Israel launched a 12-day war on the country in June and the Islamic Republic launched a bloody crackdown on nationwide protests.

U.S. President Donald Trump has kept up pressure on Iran, suggesting America could attack Iran over the killing of peaceful demonstrators or if Tehran launches mass executions over the protests. Meanwhile, Trump has pushed Iran's nuclear program back into the frame as well after the June war disrupted five rounds of talks held in Rome and Muscat, Oman, last year.

Trump began the diplomacy initially by writing a letter last year to Iran's 86-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to jump start these talks. Khamenei has warned Iran would respond to any attack with an attack of its own, particularly as the theocracy he commands reels following the protests.

Here's what to know about Iran's nuclear program and the tensions that have stalked relations between Tehran and Washington since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Trump writes letter to Khamenei

Trump dispatched the letter to Khamenei on March 5, 2025, then gave a television interview the next day in which he acknowledged sending it. He said: "I've written them a letter saying, 'I hope you're going to negotiate because if we have to go in militarily, it's going to be a terrible thing.'"

Since returning to the White House, the president has been pushing for talks while ratcheting up sanctions and suggesting a military strike by Israel or the U.S. could target Iranian nuclear sites.

A previous letter from Trump during his first term drew an angry retort from the supreme leader.

But Trump's letters to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in his first term led to face-to-face meetings, though no deals to limit Pyongyang's atomic bombs and a missile program capable of reaching the continental U.S.

Oman mediated previous talks

Oman, a sultanate on the eastern edge of the Arabian Peninsula, has mediated talks between Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and U.S. Mideast envoy Steve Witkoff. The two men have met face to face after indirect talks, a rare occurrence due to the decades of tensions between the countries.

It hasn't been all smooth, however. Witkoff at one point made a television appearance in which he suggested 3.67% enrichment for Iran could be something the countries could agree on. But that's exactly the terms set by the 2015 nuclear deal struck under former President Barack Obama, from which Trump unilaterally withdrew America. Witkoff, Trump and other American officials in the time since have maintained Iran can have no enrichment under any deal, something to which Tehran insists it won't agree.

Those negotiations ended, however, with Israel launching the war in June on Iran.

The 12-day war and nationwide protests

Israel launched what became a 12-day war on Iran in June that included the U.S. bombing Iranian nuclear sites. Iran later acknowledged in November that the attacks saw it halt all uranium enrichment in the country, though inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency have been unable to visit

the bombed sites.

Iran soon experienced protests that began in late December over the collapse of the country's rial currency. Those demonstrations soon became nationwide, sparking Tehran to launch a bloody crackdown that killed thousands and saw tens of thousands detained by authorities.

Iran's nuclear program worries the West

Iran has insisted for decades that its nuclear program is peaceful. However, its officials increasingly threaten to pursue a nuclear weapon. Iran now enriches uranium to near weapons-grade levels of 60%, the only country in the world without a nuclear weapons program to do so.

Under the original 2015 nuclear deal, Iran was allowed to enrich uranium up to 3.67% purity and to maintain a uranium stockpile of 300 kilograms (661 pounds). The last report by the International Atomic Energy Agency on Iran's program put its stockpile at some 9,870 kilograms (21,760 pounds), with a fraction of it enriched to 60%.

U.S. intelligence agencies assess that Iran has yet to begin a weapons program, but has "undertaken activities that better position it to produce a nuclear device, if it chooses to do so." Iranian officials have threatened to pursue the bomb.

Decades of tense relations between Iran and the US

Iran was once one of the U.S.'s top allies in the Mideast under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who purchased American military weapons and allowed CIA technicians to run secret listening posts monitoring the neighboring Soviet Union. The CIA had fomented a 1953 coup that cemented the shah's rule.

But in January 1979, the shah, fatally ill with cancer, fled Iran as mass demonstrations swelled against his rule. The Islamic Revolution followed, led by Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, and created Iran's theocratic government.

Later that year, university students overran the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, seeking the shah's extradition and sparking the 444-day hostage crisis that saw diplomatic relations between Iran and the U.S. severed. The Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s saw the U.S. back Saddam Hussein. The "Tanker War" during that conflict saw the U.S. launch a one-day assault that crippled Iran at sea, while the U.S. later shot down an Iranian commercial airliner that the U.S. military said it mistook for a warplane.

Iran and the U.S. have seesawed between enmity and grudging diplomacy in the years since, with relations peaking when Tehran made the 2015 nuclear deal with world powers. But Trump unilaterally withdrew America from the accord in 2018, sparking tensions in the Mideast that persist today.

ICE agents can't make warrantless arrests in Oregon unless there's a risk of escape, US judge rules

By CLAIRE RUSH Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — U.S. immigration agents in Oregon must stop arresting people without warrants unless there's a likelihood of escape, a federal judge ruled Wednesday.

U.S. District Judge Mustafa Kasubhai issued a preliminary injunction in a proposed class-action lawsuit targeting the Department of Homeland Security's practice of arresting immigrants they happen to come across while conducting ramped-up enforcement operations — which critics have described as "arrest first, justify later."

The department, which is named as a defendant in the suit, did not immediately comment in response to a request from The Associated Press.

Similar actions, including immigration agents entering private property without a warrant issued by a court, have drawn concern from civil rights groups across the country amid President Donald Trump's mass deportation efforts.

Courts in Colorado and Washington, D.C., have issued rulings like Kasubhai's, and the government has appealed them.

In a memo last week, Todd Lyons, the acting head of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement,

emphasized that agents should not make an arrest without an administrative arrest warrant issued by a supervisor unless they develop probable cause to believe that the person is in the U.S. illegally and likely to escape from the scene before a warrant can be obtained.

But the judge heard evidence that agents in Oregon have arrested people in immigration sweeps without such warrants or determining escape was likely.

The daylong hearing included testimony from one plaintiff, Victor Cruz Gamez, a 56-year-old grandfather who has been in the U.S. since 1999. He told the court he was arrested and held in an immigration detention facility for three weeks even though he has a valid work permit and a pending visa application.

Cruz Gamez testified that he was driving home from work in October when he was pulled over by immigration agents. Despite showing his driver's license and work permit, he was detained and taken to the ICE building in Portland before being sent to an immigration detention center in Tacoma, Washington. After three weeks there, he was set to be deported until a lawyer secured his release, he said.

He teared up as he recounted how the arrest impacted his family, especially his wife. Once he was home they did not open the door for three weeks out of fear and one of his grandchildren did not want to go to school, he said through a Spanish interpreter.

Afterward a lawyer for the federal government told Cruz Gamez he was sorry about what he went through and the effect it had on them.

Kasubhai said the actions of agents in Oregon — including drawing guns on people while detaining them for civil immigration violations — have been “violent and brutal,” and he was concerned about the administration denying due process to those swept up in immigration raids.

“Due process calls for those who have great power to exercise great restraint,” he said. “That is the bedrock of a democratic republic founded on this great constitution. I think we’re losing that.”

The lawsuit was brought by the nonprofit law firm Innovation Law Lab, whose executive director, Stephen Manning, said he was confident the case will be a “catalyst for change here in Oregon.”

“That is fundamentally what this case is about: asking the government to follow the law,” he said during the hearing.

The preliminary injunction will remain in effect while the lawsuit proceeds.

Democrats demand ‘dramatic changes’ for ICE, including masks, cameras and judicial warrants

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats are threatening to block funding for the Homeland Security Department when it expires in two weeks unless there are “dramatic changes” and “real accountability” for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and other law enforcement agencies who are carrying out President Donald Trump’s campaign of federal immigration enforcement in Minnesota and across the country.

Congress is discussing potential new rules for ICE and U.S. Customs and Border Protection after officers shot and killed two Minneapolis protesters in January. Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer and House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries reiterated their party’s demands Wednesday, with Schumer telling reporters that Congress must “rein in ICE in very serious ways, and end the violence.”

Democrats are “drawing a line in the sand” as Republicans need their votes to continue the funding, Jeffries said.

The negotiations come amid some bipartisan sentiment that Congress should step in to de-escalate tensions over the enforcement operations that have rocked Minnesota and other states. But finding real agreement in such a short time will be difficult, if not “an impossibility,” as Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., said Tuesday.

President Donald Trump last week agreed to a Democratic request that funding for the DHS be separated from a larger spending bill and extended at current levels for two weeks while the two parties discuss possible requirements for the federal agents. House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., said this weekend that he was at the White House when Trump spoke with Schumer and that they were “on the path to get

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agreement.”

But it’s unclear if the president or enough congressional Republicans will agree to any of the Democrats’ larger demands that the officers unmask and identify themselves, obtain judicial warrants in certain cases and work with local authorities, among other asks. Republicans have already pushed back.

And House GOP lawmakers are demanding that some of their own priorities be added to the Homeland Security spending bill, including legislation that would require proof of citizenship before Americans register to vote. South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham and other Republican senators are pushing for restrictions on sanctuary cities that they say don’t do enough to crack down on illegal immigration. There’s no clear definition of sanctuary jurisdictions, but the term is generally applied to state and local governments that limit cooperation with federal immigration authorities.

It’s also uncertain if Democrats who are furious over the Trump administration’s increasingly aggressive immigration enforcement operations would be willing to compromise.

“Republicans need to get serious,” said Schumer, a New York Democrat. Late Wednesday, he and Jeffries sent Thune and Johnson their list of “common sense solutions that protect constitutional rights and ensure responsible law enforcement.”

A look at Democrats’ demands and what Republicans are saying about them:

Agreement on body cameras

Republicans say they are open to officer-worn body cameras, a change that was already in the underlying homeland security spending bill. Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem backed that up Monday when she ordered body-worn cameras to be issued to every DHS officer on the ground in Minneapolis, including those from ICE. She said the policy would expand nationwide as funding becomes available.

The bill already directed \$20 million to outfit immigration enforcement agents with body-worn cameras.

Gil Kerlikowske, who served as commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection from 2014 to 2017, said that most agents are “very supportive” of cameras because they could help exonerate officers. But he added that complex questions remain, including when footage should be released and when cameras must be activated.

“When do you turn it on? And if you got into a problem and didn’t have it on, are you going to be disciplined? It’s really pretty complex,” he said.

Schumer said Tuesday that the body cameras “need to stay on.”

Disagreement on masking

As videos and photos of aggressive immigration tactics and high-profile shootings circulate nationwide, agents covering their faces with masks has become a flashpoint. Democrats argue that removing the masks would increase accountability. Republicans warn it could expose agents to harassment and threats.

“State law enforcement, local folks don’t do it,” said Rep. Bennie Thompson, the top Democrat on the Committee for Homeland Security. “I mean, what’s so special about an ICE law enforcement agency that they have to wear a mask?”

But Republicans appear unlikely to agree.

“Unlike your local law enforcement in your hometown, ICE agents are being doxed and targeted. We have evidence of that,” Johnson said on Tuesday. He added that if you “unmask them and you put all their identifying information on their uniform, they will obviously be targeted.”

Immigration officers are already required to identify themselves “as soon as it is practical and safe to do so,” according to federal regulations. ICE officials insist those rules are being followed.

Critics, however, question how closely officers adhere to the regulations.

“We just see routinely that that’s not happening,” said Nithya Nathan Pineau, a policy attorney with the Immigrant Legal Resource Center.

Judicial vs. administrative warrants

Democrats have also demanded stricter use of judicial warrants and an end to roving patrols of agents who are targeting people in the streets and in their homes. Schumer said Tuesday that they want “arrest warrants and an end to racial profiling.”

Most immigration arrests are carried out under administrative warrants, internal documents issued by immigration authorities that authorize the arrest of a specific person but do not permit officers to forcibly enter private homes or other non-public spaces without consent. Traditionally, only warrants signed by judges carry that authority.

But an internal ICE memo obtained by The Associated Press last month authorizes ICE officers to use force to enter a residence based solely on a more narrow administrative warrant to arrest someone with a final order of removal, a move that advocates say collides with Fourth Amendment protections.

Democrats have not made clear how broadly they want judicial warrants used. Jeffries of New York said that Democrats want to see "an end to the targeting of sensitive locations like houses of worship, schools and hospitals."

Johnson said Tuesday that Democrats are trying to "add an entirely new layer" by seeking warrants signed by a judge rather than the administrative warrants that are signed by the department. "We can't do that," he said.

The speaker has said that an end to roving patrols is a potential area of agreement, but he did not give details.

Code of conduct and more accountability

Democrats have also called for a uniform code of conduct for all ICE and federal agents similar to that for state and local law enforcement officers.

Federal officials blocked state investigators from accessing evidence after protester Renee Good was shot and killed by an ICE agent on Jan. 7. Gov. Tim Walz, a Democrat, demanded that the state be allowed to take part, saying that it would be "very difficult for Minnesotans" to accept that an investigation excluding the state could be fair.

Hoping for a miracle

Any deal Democrats strike on the Department of Homeland Security is unlikely to satisfy everyone in the party. Rep. Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts said she would never support an agreement that didn't require unmasking.

"I ran for Congress in 2018 on abolish ICE," Pressley said. "My position has not changed."

Thune, of South Dakota, has repeatedly said it's an "impossibility" to negotiate and pass something so complicated in two weeks. He said any talks should be between Democrats and Trump.

"I don't think it's very realistic," Thune said Tuesday about finding quick agreement. "But there's always miracles, right?"

Washington Post cuts a third of its staff in a blow to a legendary news brand

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

The Washington Post laid off one-third of its staff Wednesday, eliminating its sports section, several foreign bureaus and its books coverage in a widespread purge that represented a brutal blow to journalism and one of its most legendary brands.

The Post's executive editor, Matt Murray, called the move painful but necessary to put the outlet on stronger footing and to weather changes in technology and user habits. "We can't be everything to everyone," Murray said in a note to staff members.

He outlined the changes in a companywide online meeting, and staff members then began getting emails with one of two subject lines — telling them their role was or was not eliminated.

Rumors of layoffs had circulated for weeks, ever since word leaked that sports reporters who had expected to travel to Italy for the Winter Olympics would not be going. But when official word came down, the size and scale of the cuts were shocking, affecting virtually every department in the newsroom.

"It's just devastating news for anyone who cares about journalism in America and, in fact, the world," said Margaret Sullivan, a Columbia University journalism professor and former media columnist at the Post and The New York Times. "The Washington Post has been so important in so many ways, in news

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coverage, sports and cultural coverage.”

Martin Baron, the Post’s first editor under its current owner, billionaire Jeff Bezos, condemned his former boss and called what has happened at the newspaper “a case study in near-instant, self-inflicted brand destruction.”

And former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi called the layoffs “part of a broader reprehensible pattern in which corporate decisions are hollowing out newsrooms across the country.”

In an speech to members of the Washington Press Club Foundation, Pelosi said: “A free press cannot fulfill its mission if it is starved of the resources it needs to survive. And when the newsrooms are weakened, our republic is weakened.”

Journalists pleaded with Bezos for help

Bezos, who has been silent in recent weeks amid pleas from Post journalists to step in and prevent the cutbacks, had no immediate comment.

The newspaper has been bleeding subscribers in part due to decisions made by Bezos, including pulling back from an endorsement of Kamala Harris, a Democrat, during the 2024 presidential election against Donald Trump, a Republican, and directing a more conservative turn on liberal opinion pages.

A private company, the Post does not reveal how many subscribers it has, but it is believed to be roughly 2 million. The Post would also not say how many people it has on staff, making it impossible to estimate how many people were laid off Wednesday. The Post also did not outline its finances.

The Post’s troubles stand in contrast to its longtime competitor The New York Times, which has been thriving in recent years, in large part due to investments in ancillary products such as games and its Wirecutter product recommendations. The Times has doubled its staff over the past decade.

Eliminating the sports section puts an end to a department that has hosted many well-known bylines through the years, among them John Feinstein, Michael Wilbon, Shirley Povich, Sally Jenkins and Tony Kornheiser. The Times has also largely ended its sports section, but it has replaced the coverage by buying The Athletic and incorporating its work into the Times website.

The Post’s Book World, a destination for book reviews, literary news and author interviews, has been a dedicated section in its Sunday paper.

A half-century ago, the Post’s coverage of Watergate, led by intrepid reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, entered the history books. The Style section under longtime Executive Editor Ben Bradlee hosted some of the country’s best feature writing.

All Mideast correspondents and editors laid off

Word of specific cuts drifted out during the day, as when Cairo Bureau Chief Claire Parker announced on X that she had been laid off, along with all of the newspaper’s Middle East correspondents and editors. “Hard to understand the logic,” she wrote.

Lizzie Johnson, who wrote last week about covering a war zone in Ukraine without power, heat or running water, said she had been laid off, too.

Anger and sadness spread across the journalism world.

“The Post has survived for nearly 150 years, evolving from a hometown family newspaper into an indispensable national institution, and a pillar of the democratic system,” Ashley Parker, a former Post journalist, wrote in an essay in The Atlantic. But if the paper’s leadership continues its current path, “it may not survive much longer.”

Fearing for the future, Parker was among the staff members who left the newspaper for other jobs in recent months.

Atlanta paper also makes cuts

Also on Wednesday, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, which stopped print editions and went all-digital at the end of last year, announced that it was cutting 50 positions, or roughly 15% of its staff. Half of the eliminated jobs were in the newsroom.

Murray said the Post would concentrate on areas that demonstrate authority, distinctiveness and impact, and resonate with readers, including politics, national affairs and security. Even during its recent troubles,

the Post has been notably aggressive in coverage of Trump's changes to the federal workforce.

The company's structure is rooted in a different era, when the Post was a dominant print product, Murray said in his note to the staff. In areas such as video, the outlet hasn't kept up with consumer habits, he said.

"Significantly, our daily story output has substantially fallen in the last five years," he said. "And even as we produce much excellent work, we too often write from one perspective, for one slice of the audience."

While there are business areas that need to be addressed, Baron pointed a finger of blame at Bezos — for a "gutless" order to kill a presidential endorsement and for remaking an editorial page that stands out only for "moral infirmity" and "sickening" efforts to curry favor with Trump.

"Loyal readers, livid as they saw owner Jeff Bezos betraying the values he was supposed to uphold, fled The Post," Baron wrote. "In truth, they were driven away, by the hundreds of thousands."

Baron said he was grateful for Bezos' support when he was editor, noting that the Amazon founder came under brutal pressure from Trump during the president's first term.

"He spoke forcefully and eloquently of a free press and The Post's mission, demonstrating his commitment in concrete terms," Baron wrote. "He often declared that The Post's success would be among the proudest achievements of his life. I wish I detected the same spirit today. There is no sign of it."

Epstein files rife with uncensored nudes and victims' names, despite redaction efforts

By PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Nude photos. The names and faces of sexual abuse victims. Bank account and Social Security numbers in full view.

All of these things appeared in the mountain of documents released Friday by the U.S. Justice Department as part of its effort to comply with a law requiring it to open its investigative files on Jeffrey Epstein.

That law was intended to preserve important privacy protections for Epstein's victims. Their names were supposed to have been blacked out in documents. Their faces and bodies were supposed to be obscured in photos.

Mistakes, though, have been rampant. A review by The Associated Press and other news organizations has found countless examples of sloppy, inconsistent or nonexistent redactions that have revealed sensitive private information.

A photo of one girl who was underage when she was hired to give sexualized massages to Epstein in Florida appeared in a chart of his alleged victims. Police reports with the names of several of his victims, including some who have never stepped forward to identify themselves publicly, were released with no redactions at all.

Despite the Justice Department's efforts to fix the oversights, a selfie taken by a nude female in a bathroom and another by a topless female remained on the site, their ages unknown but their faces in full view, as of Wednesday evening.

Some accusers and their lawyers called this week for the Justice Department to take down the site and appoint an independent monitor to prevent further errors.

A judge scheduled a hearing for Wednesday in New York on the matter, then canceled it after one of the lawyers for victims cited progress in resolving the issues. But that lawyer, Brittany Henderson, said they were still weighing "all potential avenues of recourse" to address the "permanent and irreparable" harm caused to some women.

"The failure here is not merely technical," she said in a statement Wednesday. "It is a failure to safeguard human beings who were promised protection by our government. Until every document is properly redacted, that failure is ongoing."

Annie Farmer, who said she was 16 when she was sexually assaulted by Epstein and his confidant, Ghislaine Maxwell, said that while her name has previously been public, other details she'd rather be kept private, including her date of birth and phone number, were wrongly revealed in the documents.

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"At this point, I'm feeling really most of all angry about the way that this unfolded," she told NBC News. "The fact that it's been done in such a beyond careless way, where people have been endangered because of it, is really horrifying."

Trump administration defends its Epstein files redaction efforts

The Justice Department has blamed technical or human errors on the problems and said it has taken down many of the problematic materials and is working to republish properly redacted versions.

The task of reviewing and blacking out millions of pages of records took place in a compressed time frame. President Donald Trump signed the law requiring the disclosure of the documents on Nov. 19. That law gave the Justice Department just 30 days to release the files. It missed that deadline, in part because it said it needed more time to comply with privacy protections.

Hundreds of lawyers were pulled from their regular duties, including overseeing criminal cases, to try and complete the document review — to the point where at least one judge in New York complained that it was holding up other matters.

The database, which is posted on the Justice Department website, represents the largest release of files to date in the yearslong investigations into Epstein, who killed himself in a New York jail cell in 2019 while awaiting trial on federal sex trafficking charges.

Epstein files rife with missed or incomplete redactions

Associated Press reporters analyzing the documents have so far found multiple examples of names and other personal information of potential victims revealed.

They have also found many cases of overzealous redactions.

In one news clipping included in the file, the Justice Department apparently blacked out the name "Joseph" from a photo caption describing a Nativity scene at a California church. "A Nativity scene depicting Jesus, Mary and (REDACTED)," it said.

In an email released in the files, a dog's name appeared to have been redacted: "I spent an hour walking (REDACTED) and then another hour bathing her blow drying her and brushing her. I hope she smells better!!" the email said.

The Justice Department has said staff tasked with preparing the files for release were instructed to limit redactions only to information related to victims and their families, though in many documents the names of many other people were blacked out, including lawyers and public figures.

Images remain uncensored

The Justice Department has said it intended to black out any portion of a photo showing nudity, and any photos of women that could potentially show a victim.

In some photos reviewed by The AP, those redactions did obscure women's faces, but left plenty of their bare skin exposed in a way that would likely embarrass the women anyway. Photos showed identifiable women trying on outfits in clothing store dressing rooms or lounging in bathing suits.

One set of more than 100 images of a young woman were nearly all blacked out, save for the very last image, which revealed her entire face.

On Capitol Hill, Treasury Secretary Bessent's testimony descends into insults and shouting matches

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A hearing about oversight of the U.S. financial system devolved into insults several times Wednesday as Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent clashed with Democratic lawmakers over fiscal policy, the business dealings of the Trump family and other issues.

Appearances by treasury secretaries on Capitol Hill are more typically known for staid exchanges over economic policy than for political theater, but Wednesday's hearing of the House Financial Services Committee hearing featured several fiery exchanges between the Republican Cabinet member and Democrats, with Bessent even lobbing insults back to the lawmakers.

Bessent called Rep. Sylvia Garcia "confused" when she questioned how undocumented immigrants could

affect housing affordability across the country, prompting the Texas Democrat to snap back, "Don't be demeaning to me, alright?"

Bessent later mocked a question from Rep. Stephen Lynch, D-Mass., about shuttered investigations into cryptocurrency firms. Lynch expressed frustration with Bessent's interruptions, saying, "Mister Chairman, the answers have to be responsive if we are going to have a serious hearing."

Bessent replied, "Well, the questions have to be serious."

After a back-and-forth over whether tariffs cause inflation or one-time price increases for consumers, California Democratic Rep. Maxine Waters asked committee leaders to intervene with Bessent: "Can someone shut him up?"

And in a fiery exchange with Rep. Gregory Meeks over the Abu Dhabi royal family's investment into the Trump family's World Liberty Financial cryptocurrency firm last year, the New York Democrat dropped an F-bomb as he shouted at Bessent: "Stop covering for the president! Stop being a flunky!"

The Treasury Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the fireworks.

Bessent's performance was "not a role you typically see a treasury secretary play," said Graham Steele, a former assistant secretary for financial institutions under Biden-era Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen. The department has traditionally "been removed from some of the day-to-day, hand-to-hand political combat," Steele said in an interview.

He recalled his former boss having tense exchanges over climate change and policy issues with Republican lawmakers during committee hearings, but the exchanges were not personal, he said, noting treasury secretaries have to strike a "delicate balance" of working with the White House while safeguarding the "economic stature" of the country internationally.

In recent months, Bessent has ratcheted up his insults when it comes to Democratic leaders.

He has called California Gov. Gavin Newsom "economically illiterate," compared him to the fictional serial killer Patrick Bateman, and called him "a brontosaurus with a brain the size of a walnut." He has on several occasions called Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren an "American Peronist" after she told American financial institutions not to finance the Trump administration's massive support package for Argentina.

Bessent's combativeness is, in part, a sign of the times, said David Lublin, chair of the Department of Government at American University's School of Public Affairs.

"President Trump has shown he likes belligerence and he likes nominees and others who defend him vociferously," Lublin told The Associated Press.

"It's hard to say that this is unusual for this political environment. What used to be the normal modicum of respect for Congress has frayed to the point of vanishing," Lublin said.

What was unusual, in Lublin's view, was for Bessent to reveal his thoughts on monetary policy — normally the purview of the Federal Reserve — and his insistence that Trump has the right to interfere with the decision-making of the central bank. "You have a cabinet secretary defending the president's efforts to erode institutions," Lublin said.

On Thursday, Bessent will get another opportunity to spar with lawmakers. He is scheduled to appear before the Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee on the same topic: the annual report by the Financial Stability Oversight Council, which Bessent leads.

Iran and US agree to hold nuclear talks Friday in Oman as Trump delivers blunt warning to Khamenei

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Nuclear talks between Iran and the United States will take place Friday in Oman, the Iranian foreign minister said, as tensions between the countries remain high following Tehran's bloody crackdown on nationwide protests last month.

The announcement Wednesday by Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi came after hours of indications that the anticipated talks were faltering over changes in the format and content of the talks. U.S. President Donald Trump, meanwhile, sent a blunt warning to Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei

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ahead of the talks.

"I would say he should be very worried," Trump said of Khamenei in an interview with NBC News.

Turkey had been working behind the scenes to host talks in Istanbul with regional countries taking part and discussions focused on issues like Iran's ballistic missile program and other concerns.

Early Wednesday, a regional official said Iran was seeking a "different" type of meeting focused exclusively on the issue of Iran's nuclear program, with participation limited to Iran and the United States. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief the media.

A similar series of talks had been hosted last year by Oman, a sultanate on the eastern edge of the Arabian Peninsula that long as served as an interlocutor between Iran and the West. Those talks ultimately broke down in June as Israel launched what became a 12-day war on Iran that included the U.S. bombing Iranian nuclear sites.

A White House official, who spoke on condition of anonymity as they were not authorized to discuss the talks publicly, confirmed the talks would happen in Oman. The official said several Arab and Muslim leaders urged the Trump administration on Wednesday not to walk away from talks even as Iranian officials pressed to narrow their scope.

The official added that the White House remains "very skeptical" that the talks will be successful but has agreed to go along with the change in plans out of respect for allies in the region.

Alan Eyre, a former U.S. diplomat once involved in past nuclear negotiations with Tehran, similarly offered a skeptical opinion of talks succeeding.

"Opting for indirect talks is the diplomatic equivalent of a surgeon taking a hit of ether and then putting on gloves before a difficult surgery," Eyre wrote on X.

Rubio hopes talks will go beyond nuclear ones

Tensions between the countries spiked after Trump suggested the U.S. might use force against Iran in response to the bloody crackdown on nationwide protests last month that killed thousands of people or if Iran conducted mass executions of detained demonstrators. The U.S.-based Human Rights Activists News Agency reported Wednesday that over 50,000 people also had been arrested over the protests.

Trump also has been pushing Tehran for a deal to constrain its nuclear program.

Iran's reformist President Masoud Pezeshkian on Tuesday said he had instructed the foreign minister to "pursue fair and equitable negotiations" with the U.S., in the first clear sign from Tehran it wants to try to negotiate. That signaled the move is supported by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has the final say on all matters of state and previously dismissed any negotiations.

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the U.S. hoped to discuss a number of concerns beyond the nuclear issue, including discussions on Iran's ballistic missiles, support for proxy networks across the region and the "treatment of their own people."

"The leadership of Iran at the clerical level does not reflect the people of Iran. I know of no other country where there's a bigger difference between the people who lead the country and the people who live there," he told reporters.

Vice President JD Vance told "The Megyn Kelly Show" that diplomatic talks with Iran are challenging because Khamenei oversees Tehran's political system and declines to speak directly with Trump, unlike the leaders of China, North Korea or Russia.

Vance said Trump's bottom line is that Iran cannot be allowed to develop a nuclear weapon, asserting that other states in the region would quickly do the same.

Iran long has insisted its nuclear program is peaceful. However, Iranian officials in recent years have increasingly threatened to pursue the bomb and had been enriching uranium up to 60% purity, a short, technical step away from weapons-grade levels of 90%.

Vance said he believed Trump would work to "accomplish what he can through non-military means. And if he feels like the military is the only option, then he's ultimately going to choose that option."

Talks expected even after US shot down Iranian drone

On Tuesday, a U.S. Navy fighter jet shot down an Iranian drone that approached an American aircraft

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carrier. Iranian fast boats from its paramilitary Revolutionary Guard also tried to stop a U.S.-flagged ship in the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf, the Navy said.

Iran did not formally acknowledge either incident, which strained but apparently did not derail hopes for talks with the U.S.

On Wednesday, Iranian military chiefs visited a missile base in an attempt to highlight its military readiness after the 12-day war devastated Iran's air defenses. The base holds the Khorramshahr missile, which has a range of more than 2,000 kilometers (1,250 miles) and was launched toward Israel during the war last year.

Turkey urges diplomacy

Also Wednesday, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan reiterated Turkey's opposition to foreign intervention in neighboring Iran, calling for the resolution of issues through dialogue.

Turkey has been urgently working for the past week to bring the U.S. and Iran to the negotiating table, and was previously expected to host the talks.

"We believe that external interventions involving our neighbor Iran would pose significant risks for the entire region," Erdogan said during a visit to Cairo. "Resolving issues with Iran, including the nuclear file, through diplomatic means is the most appropriate approach."

Legal fight escalates over Georgia voting records as Trump says he wants to 'take over' elections

By KATE BRUMBACK and NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Officials in Georgia's Fulton County said Wednesday they have asked a federal court to order the FBI to return ballots and other documents from the 2020 election that it seized last week, escalating a voting battle as President Donald Trump says he wants to "take over" elections from Democratic-run areas with the November midterms on the horizon.

The FBI had searched a warehouse near Atlanta where those records were stored, a move taken after Trump's persistent demands for retribution over claims, without evidence, that fraud cost him victory in Georgia. Trump's election comment came in an interview Monday with a conservative podcaster and the Republican president reaffirmed his position in Oval Office remarks the next day, citing fraud allegations that numerous audits, investigations and courts have debunked.

Officials in heavily Democratic Fulton County referenced those statements in announcing their legal action at a time of increasing anxiety over Trump's plans for the fall elections that will determine control of Congress.

"This case is not only about Fulton County," said the county chairman, Robb Pitts. "This is about elections across Georgia and across the nation."

In a sign of that broader concern, U.S. Sen. Mark Warner, D-Va., said this week that he once doubted Trump would intervene in the midterms but now "the notional idea that he will ask his loyalists to do something inappropriate, beyond the Constitution, scares the heck out of me."

The White House has scoffed at such fears, noting that Trump did not intervene in the 2025 off-year elections despite some Democratic predictions he would. But the president's party usually loses ground in midterm elections and Trump has already tried to tilt the fall races in his direction.

During an interview with NBC News that aired Wednesday, the president said he will trust Republican losses in the midterms "if the results are honest." It's a strategy Trump has regularly used ahead of elections, suggesting that a loss would only be due to some type of fraud.

Democratic election officials plan for interference in the midterms

Democratic state election officials have reacted to Trump's statements, the seizure of the Georgia election materials and his aggressive deployment of federal officers into Democratic-leaning cities by planning for a wide range of possible scenarios this fall. That includes how they would respond if Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers were stationed outside polling places.

They also have raised concerns about U.S. Department of Justice lawsuits, mostly targeting Democratic

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states, seeking detailed voter data that includes dates of birth and partial Social Security numbers. Secretaries of state have raised concerns that the administration is building a database it can use to potentially disenfranchise voters in future elections.

Trump and his allies have long fixated on Fulton County, Georgia's most populous, since he narrowly lost the state to Democrat Joe Biden in 2020. In the weeks after that election, Trump called Georgia's secretary of state, Republican Brad Raffensperger, urged him to help "find" the 11,780 ballots that would enable Trump to be declared the Georgia winner of the state and raised the prospect of a "criminal offense" if the official failed to comply.

Raffensperger did not change the vote tally, and Biden won Georgia's 16 electoral votes. Days later, rioters swarmed the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, and tried to prevent the official certification of Biden's victory. When Trump returned to the presidency in January 2025, he pardoned more than 1,000 charged in that siege.

"The president himself and his allies, they refuse to accept the fact that they lost," Pitts said. "And even if he had won Georgia, he would still have lost the presidency."

Pitts defended the county's election practices and said Fulton has conducted 17 elections since 2020 without any issues.

'The results will be the same,' says Georgia election official

A warrant cover sheet provided to the county includes a list of items that the agents were seeking related to the 2020 general election: all ballots, tabulator tapes from the scanners that tally the votes, electronic ballot images created when the ballots were counted and then recounted, and all voter rolls.

The FBI drove away with hundreds of boxes of ballots and other documents. County officials say they were not told why the federal government wanted the documents.

The county is also asking the court to unseal the sworn statement from a law enforcement agent that was presented to the judge who approved the search warrant.

The Justice Department declined to comment on the county's motion.

"What they're doing with the ballots that they have now, we don't know, but if they're counted fairly and honestly, the results will be the same," Pitts said.

Tulsi Gabbard, Trump's director of national intelligence, was at the Fulton search last week, and Democrats in Congress have questioned the propriety of her presence because the search was a law enforcement, not intelligence, action.

In a letter to top Democrats on the House and Senate Intelligence committees Monday, Gabbard said Trump asked her to be there "under my broad statutory authority to coordinate, integrate, and analyze intelligence related to election security."

During the NBC News interview, Trump said he didn't know why Gabbard was in Fulton County, but suggested without providing evidence that other countries were meddling in elections: "A lot of the cheating, it's international cheating."

Trump pushes for federal control of elections

White House spokeswoman Karoline Leavitt said Tuesday that the president's "take over" remarks, which included a vague reference to "15 places" that should be targeted, were a reference to the SAVE Act, legislation that would tighten proof of citizenship requirements. Republicans want to bring it up for a vote in Congress.

But in his remarks that day, Trump did not cite the proposal. Instead, he claimed that Democratic-controlled places such as Atlanta, which falls mainly in Fulton County, have "horrible corruption on elections. And the federal government should not allow that."

The Constitution vests states with the ability to administer elections. Congress can add rules for federal races. One of Trump's earliest second-term actions was an executive order that tried to rewrite voting rules nationwide. Judges have largely blocked it because it violates the Constitution.

Trump contended that states were "agents of the federal government to count the votes. If they can't count the votes legally and honestly, then somebody else should take over."

Sen. Thom Tillis, R-N.C., said Wednesday said he supported the SAVE Act but not Trump's desire for

a federal takeover. "Nationalizing elections and picking 15 states seems a little off strategy," Tillis told reporters.

The former Prince Andrew moves to King Charles III's private estate after Epstein document uproar

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The former Prince Andrew has moved out of his longtime home on crown-owned land near Windsor Castle earlier than expected after the latest release of documents from the U.S. investigation of Jeffrey Epstein revived questions about his friendship with the convicted sex offender.

The 65-year-old brother of King Charles III, now known as Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, left the Royal Lodge in Windsor on Monday and is now living on the king's Sandringham estate in eastern England, Britain's Press Association reported. British media reported that Mountbatten-Windsor will live temporarily at Wood Farm Cottage while his permanent home on the estate undergoes repairs.

Mountbatten-Windsor's move to Sandringham was announced in October when Charles stripped him of his royal titles amid continuing revelations about his links to Epstein. But the former prince was expected to remain at Royal Lodge, where he has lived for more than 20 years, until the spring.

The expedited departure came as Thames Valley Police announced they were investigating allegations that Epstein flew a second woman to Britain to have sex with Mountbatten-Windsor. A lawyer for the alleged victim told the BBC that the encounter took place in 2010 at Royal Lodge.

The allegations are separate from those made by Virginia Giuffre, who claimed she had been trafficked to Britain to have sex with Andrew in 2001, when she was just 17. Giuffre died by suicide last year.

Mountbatten-Windsor has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing in his relationship with Epstein. He hasn't responded publicly to the new trafficking allegation.

Mountbatten-Windsor features a number of times in the 3 million pages of documents the U.S. Department of Justice released on Friday.

In an email dated March 23, 2011, the lawyer for an exotic dancer said Epstein and Mountbatten-Windsor asked her to take part in a threesome at the sex offenders' Florida home.

The woman's legal representatives accused the pair of having "prevailed upon her to engage in various sex acts" during the alleged encounter in early 2006 after initially hiring her to dance for them. The woman was only paid \$2,000, not the \$10,000 she was promised, her lawyer said.

The lawyer offered to settle the matter confidentially for \$250,000.

"My client has not pursued her claims against your client until this time because she is not proud of the circumstances of that night," the lawyer wrote. "She was working as an exotic dancer, but she was treated like a prostitute."

In other correspondence between Epstein and someone believed to be Mountbatten-Windsor shows Epstein offering to arrange a date between the man and a 26-year-old Russian woman. The man, who signs off simply as "A," later suggests that he and Epstein have dinner in London, either at a restaurant or Buckingham Palace.

The documents do not show wrongdoing by many of those named. The appearance of famous people in the files often reflect Epstein's extremely wide reach.

The former prince's residence at Royal Lodge has long been a point of contention between the king and his brother.

After Charles became king in 2022, he tried to force his brother to move into a smaller house on the Windsor Castle estate. Mountbatten-Windsor refused, citing a lease on the property that ran through 2078.

But the pressure for him to leave became irresistible in October as lawmakers and the public raised questions about the favorable terms of Mountbatten-Windsor's lease on the 30-room house and surrounding estate, which is managed by the Crown Estate.

The Crown Estate controls properties throughout the country that are technically owned by the monarchy

but are managed for the benefit of British taxpayers.

By contrast, the Sandringham Estate in Norfolk is the personal property of the king.

Trump and Xi discuss Iran in wide-ranging call as US presses China and others to break from Tehran

By AAMER MADHANI and DIDI TANG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said Wednesday that he and Chinese President Xi Jinping discussed the situation in Iran in a wide-ranging call as the U.S. administration pushes Beijing and others to further isolate Tehran.

Trump said the two leaders also discussed a broad range of other critical issues in the U.S.-China relationship, including trade and Taiwan and his plans to visit Beijing in April.

"The relationship with China, and my personal relationship with President Xi, is an extremely good one, and we both realize how important it is to keep it that way," Trump said in a social media posting about the call.

The Chinese government, in a readout of the call, said the two leaders discussed major summits that both nations will host in the coming year that could present opportunities for them to meet. The Chinese statement, however, made no mention of Trump's expected April visit to Beijing.

Trump and Xi discussed Iran as tensions remain high between Washington and Tehran over Iran's bloody crackdown on nationwide protests last month. The U.S. president says he's weighing taking military action against the Middle Eastern country.

Trump is also pressing Iran to make concessions over its nuclear program, which his Republican administration says was already set back by the U.S. bombing of three Iranian nuclear sites during the 12-day war Israel launched against Iran in June.

U.S. and Iranian officials said Wednesday they have agreed to hold high-level talks on Friday in Oman. The talks had initially been slated for Turkey but were shifted to the Gulf country at Iran's insistence. A White House official, who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity, said the administration remains "very skeptical" that the talks will be successful but agreed to go along with the change in plans out of respect for allies in the region.

Trump announced last month that the U.S. would impose a 25% tax on imports to the United States from countries that do business with Iran. China is Iran's biggest trading partner.

Years of sanctions aimed at stopping Iran's nuclear program have left the country isolated. But Tehran still did nearly \$125 billion in international trade in 2024, including \$32 billion with China, \$28 billion with the United Arab Emirates and \$17 billion with Turkey, the World Trade Organization says.

China also made clear that it has no intention of stepping away from its long-term plans of reunification with Taiwan, a self-governing, democratic island operating independently from mainland China, though Beijing claims it as its own territory.

The Trump administration in December announced a massive package of arms sales to Taiwan valued at more than \$10 billion that includes medium-range missiles, howitzers and drones. The move continues to draw an angry response from Beijing.

"Taiwan will never be allowed to separate from China," the Chinese government statement said. "The U.S. must handle the issue of arms sales to Taiwan with prudence."

Neither Trump nor the Chinese government in its statement raised whether the U.S. leader's repeated calls for a U.S. takeover of Greenland, the Arctic territory controlled by Denmark, came up during the conversation.

Trump has made his case for the U.S. taking over the strategic island as necessary to rebuff Chinese and Russian encroachment, even as experts have repeatedly rebuffed Trump's claims of Chinese and Russian military forces lurking off Greenland's coastline. Denmark and Greenland as well as several European government leaders have pushed back against Trump's takeover calls.

Separately, Xi also spoke on Wednesday with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

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Xi's engagement with Trump and Putin comes as the last remaining nuclear arms pact, known as the New START treaty, between Russia and the United States is set to expire Thursday, removing any caps on the two largest atomic arsenals for the first time in more than a half-century.

Trump has indicated he would like to keep limits on nuclear weapons but wants to involve China in a potential new treaty.

"I actually feel strongly that if we're going to do it, I think China should be a member of the extension," Trump told The New York Times last month. "China should be a part of the agreement."

The call with Xi also coincided with a ministerial meeting that the Trump administration convened in Washington with several dozen European, Asian and African nations to discuss how to rebuild global supply chains of critical minerals without Beijing.

Critical minerals are needed for everything from jet engines to smartphones. China dominates the market for those ingredients crucial to high-tech products.

"What is before all of us is an opportunity at self-reliance that we never have to rely on anybody else except for each other, for the critical minerals necessary to sustain our industries and to sustain growth," Vice President JD Vance said at the gathering.

Xi has recently held a series of meetings with Western leaders who have sought to boost ties with China amid growing concerns about Trump's tariff policies and calls for the U.S. to take over Greenland, a Danish territory.

The disruption to global trade under Trump has made expanding trade and investment more imperative for many U.S. economic partners. Vietnam and the European Union upgraded ties to a comprehensive strategic partnership last month, two days after the EU and India announced a free-trade agreement. And Canada struck a deal last month to cut its 100% tariff on Chinese electric cars in return for lower tariffs on Canadian farm products.

Here's what international law says about striking energy facilities in war

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — Russian missiles and drones have pounded Ukraine's energy grid in recent weeks, plunging people into frozen darkness in one of the country's coldest winters on record.

Ukraine has accused Russia of illegally targeting power infrastructure during the war to deny civilians light, heating and running water.

"Taking advantage of the coldest days of winter to terrorize people is more important to Russia than diplomacy," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Tuesday, on the eve of a new round of talks about ending the conflict and as temperatures in Kyiv hovered around minus 20 C (minus 3 F).

Russia says its attacks are a legitimate part of its military campaign against its neighbor. Moscow's invasion of Ukraine itself is widely regarded as an illegal act of aggression.

So, are attacks on energy installations allowed during war?

What international law says

Combatants can legally target a power grid if the attack "directly affects a valid military target" — but they cannot cause excessive civilian casualties, said David Crane, former chief prosecutor at the United Nations Special Court for Sierra Leone.

In the case of Russia's attacks on Ukraine, "the indiscriminate and widespread targeting does not come close to what is legal," he said in an emailed response to questions from The Associated Press.

The International Committee of the Red Cross says that parts of energy systems providing essential services to civilians "are in principle civilian objects, and as such are protected against direct attack and reprisals as well as incidental harm."

Pretrial judges from the International Criminal Court, in fact, issued arrest warrants in 2024 for top Russian military brass and the country's former defense minister for their alleged involvement in missile strikes targeting electricity infrastructure.

In announcing warrants for former Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Russia's chief military officer, Gen. Valery Gerasimov, the court said that judges found "reasonable grounds to believe that the alleged strikes were directed against civilian objects, and for those installations that may have qualified as military objectives at the relevant time, the expected incidental civilian harm and damage would have been clearly excessive to the anticipated military advantage."

Russia is not a member of the court, rejects its jurisdiction, and refuses to extradite suspects to face justice in the ICC's courtrooms in The Hague, Netherlands.

What Russia says

The Russian military has repeatedly said that it has targeted energy facilities and other infrastructure that support Ukrainian military industries and armed forces. It has denied targeting residential areas despite daily evidence to the contrary.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov insisted Wednesday that "our military is striking the targets that they believe are associated with the military complex of the Kyiv regime, the operation is continuing."

What Ukraine says

Kyiv accuses Russia of seeking to wear down Ukrainians' appetite for the fight by inflicting grinding hardship on civilians forced to live in dark, freezing homes.

Authorities say Russia has tried to cripple Ukraine's electricity network by targeting substations, transformers, turbines and generators at power plants. Ukraine's largest private power company, DTEK, said that this week's overnight attack was the ninth major assault on the company's thermal power plants since October.

Ukraine's energy sector has suffered more than \$20 billion in direct war damage, according to a joint estimate by the World Bank, the European Commission and the United Nations.

Judge appears skeptical of Trump's latest bid to nix his hush money conviction

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A federal judge appeared poised to again reject President Donald Trump's bid to erase his hush money conviction, slamming his lawyers Wednesday for legal maneuvers he said amounted to taking "two bites at the apple."

Directed by an appeals court to take a fresh look at the matter, Judge Alvin K. Hellerstein was at turns inquisitive and incredulous during nearly three hours of arguments as Trump seeks to move his case from the state court where it was tried to federal court, where he can ask to have it thrown out on presidential immunity grounds.

Hellerstein sparred with Trump lawyer Jeffrey Wall throughout the proceeding in Manhattan federal court and suggested the whole exercise was moot because the president's legal team had waited too long after the historic May 2024 verdict to seek federal court relief. He said he would rule at a later date.

The judge acknowledged that the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling about a month after the verdict that presidents and former presidents cannot be prosecuted for official acts had raised novel legal questions that had not previously been considered in the courts.

But, he said, the high court's decision made clear that a president is not above the law.

The 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in November ordered Judge Hellerstein to reconsider his earlier decision that kept the New York case in state court. A three-judge panel found that the judge, in his September 2025 ruling, had failing to consider "important issues relevant" to Trump's request to move the case. They expressed no view on how he should rule.

Trump, a Republican, did not attend Wednesday's arguments.

Afterward, Hellerstein thanked Wall and Steven Wu, a lawyer from the Manhattan district attorney's office for "very provocative arguments." The district attorney's office prosecuted the case and wants it to stay in state court.

Trump was convicted in state court

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Trump was convicted in May 2024 of 34 felony counts of falsifying business records to conceal a hush money payment to adult film actor Stormy Daniels, whose allegations of an affair with Trump threatened to upend his 2016 presidential campaign. He was sentenced to an unconditional discharge, leaving his conviction intact but sparing him any punishment.

Trump denies Daniels' claim and said he did nothing wrong. He has asked a state appellate court to overturn the conviction.

Hellerstein interrupted Wall almost as soon as Wednesday's arguments began, injecting his thoughts and questions and telling the lawyer "I think I have to quarrel with you a bit" about the sequence of events that followed Trump's conviction in May 2024.

The judge took issue with the Trump legal team's decision making after the Supreme Court ruling.

Instead of immediately seeking to move the case to federal court, Trump's lawyers first asked the trial judge, Juan Merchan, to throw out the verdict on immunity grounds.

Wall argued that Trump's lawyers were in a time crunch after the Supreme Court's July 1, 2024, ruling because Trump's sentencing was scheduled for just 10 days later. Had Trump's lawyers sought to bring the case to federal court at that point, the district attorney's office, which prosecuted the case, may have criticized that as premature, Wall said.

Trump's lawyers did not ask Hellerstein to intervene until nearly two months later. The judge on Wednesday called that a "strategic decision" and suggested that by going to the state court first, Trump's lawyers cost him the right to pursue remedies in federal court.

"No, your honor," Wall said. "It is what any sensible litigant would do" in that situation.

"Not so," Hellerstein replied.

"That is a decision on your part," the judge added. "You didn't have to do that. You could have come right to the federal court. Just by filing a notice of removal, there would be no sentencing."

Trump's lawyers "made a choice," Hellerstein said, "and you sought two bites at the apple."

Normally, such a request must be made within 30 days of an arraignment, but a federal appeals court in Washington, D.C. has ruled that exceptions can be made if "good cause" is shown.

Wu concurred that Wall's argument "confirms this was a strategic choice by the defendants."

He also said Trump's lawyers knew they could have simultaneously submitted arguments or a letter to Merchan and still sought to transfer the case to federal court. Past rulings have made clear that "you cannot go to state court and when you're unhappy, then go to federal court," Wu said.

Previous requests to move the case were denied

Hellerstein, who was nominated by Democratic President Bill Clinton, has twice denied Trump's requests to move the case. The first was after Trump's March 2023 indictment; the second was the post-verdict ruling at issue at Wednesday's hearing.

In that ruling, Hellerstein said Trump's lawyers had failed to meet the high burden of proof for changing jurisdiction and that Trump's conviction for falsifying business records involved his personal life, not official actions that the Supreme Court ruled are immune from prosecution.

The 2nd Circuit panel said Hellerstein's ruling, which echoed his pretrial denial, "did not consider whether certain evidence admitted during the state court trial relates to immunized official acts or, if so, whether evidentiary immunity transformed" the hush money case into one that relates to official acts.

The three judges said Hellerstein should closely review evidence Trump claims relate to official acts.

If Hellerstein finds the prosecution relied on evidence of official acts, the judges said, he should weigh whether Trump can argue those actions were taken as part of his White House duties, whether Trump "diligently sought" to have the case moved to federal court and whether the case can even be moved to federal court now that Trump has been convicted and sentenced in state court.

Supreme Court allows new California congressional districts that favor Democrats

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Wednesday allowed California to use a new voter-approved congressional map that is favorable to Democrats in this year's elections, rejecting a last-ditch plea from state Republicans and the Trump administration.

No justices dissented from the brief order denying the appeal without explanation, which is common on the court's emergency docket.

The justices had previously allowed Texas' Republican-friendly map to be used in 2026, despite a lower-court ruling that it likely discriminates on the basis of race.

Conservative Justice Samuel Alito wrote in December that it appeared both states had adopted new maps for political advantage, which the high court has previously ruled cannot be a basis for a federal lawsuit.

Republicans, joined by the Trump administration, claimed the California map improperly relied on race as well. But a lower court disagreed by a 2-1 vote. The Justice Department and White House did not immediately respond to messages seeking comment.

The justices' unsigned order keeps in place districts that are designed to flip up to five seats now held by Republicans, part of a tit-for-tat nationwide redistricting battle spurred by President Donald Trump, with control of Congress on the line in midterm elections.

Last year, at Trump's behest, Texas Republicans redid the state's congressional districts with an eye on gaining five seats.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom, a Democrat who is eyeing a 2028 presidential run, pledged to respond in kind, though he had to win over voters, not just lawmakers, to do so.

Newsom celebrated the court's decision, saying on social media that Trump had "started this redistricting war" and would end up losing out in the November midterms, when control of Congress is at stake.

California's attorney general, Democrat Rob Bonta, said the decision was "good news not only for Californians, but for our democracy."

The state Republican Party, which brought the case, vowed to keep fighting against the map's use in future elections.

"We will continue to vigorously argue for Equal Protection under the law for all of California's voters," Michael Columbo, counsel for the plaintiffs, said in a statement.

One longtime party strategist, Jon Fleishman, a former executive director of the California Republican Party, said in a post on X that the decision means "this year's elections will take place on the new lines shrinking the already very small Republican delegation from California."

Filing for congressional primaries in California begins on Monday.

More drops for technology stocks weigh on Wall Street

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — More drops for technology stocks weighed on Wall Street Wednesday.

The S&P 500 fell 0.5% for its fifth modest loss in the last six days. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 260 points, or 0.5%, and the Nasdaq composite sank 1.5%.

More than twice as many stocks rose within the S&P 500 than fell, but sinking technology stocks weighed on the index for a second straight day.

Advanced Micro Devices dropped 17.3% even though the chip company reported a stronger profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected. It also gave a forecast for revenue for the start of 2026 that topped analysts' expectations, but that may not have been enough for investors after its stock had doubled over the last 12 months.

Tech stocks are broadly feeling pressure, even when they deliver stronger-than-expected profits. Big Tech stocks are facing criticism that their prices shot too high following their yearslong dominance of the

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market. Companies like software makers, meanwhile, are struggling with questions about whether they'll lose in the future to competitors powered by artificial-intelligence technology.

Uber Technologies also dragged on the market after falling 5.1%. The ride-hailing company reported results for the latest quarter that fell short of analysts' expectations. It also gave a forecast for profit in the current quarter that was below analysts' expectations, while naming a new chief financial officer.

Some tech stocks nevertheless climbed, including a 13.8% rise for Super Micro Computer. The company, which sells AI servers and other equipment, delivered a stronger profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected.

Eli Lilly rallied 10.3% after topping analysts' expectations for profit in the latest quarter. It's been riding big growth created by its Mounjaro and Zepbound products for diabetes and weight loss.

Match Group climbed 5.9% after reporting better results than analysts expected and increasing its dividend. The company credited early signs of success from efforts to improve outcomes for users. It said a new facial verification feature for its Tinder service, for example, led to a sharp drop in interactions with "bad actors" where it's been rolled out.

Walmart edged up by 0.2%, a day after its total market value topped \$1 trillion for the first time. The retailer has broken into a small club dominated by Big Tech companies like Nvidia and Apple, which are each worth more than \$4 trillion.

All told, the S&P 500 fell 35.09 points to 6,882.72. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 260.31 to 49,501.30, and the Nasdaq composite fell 350.61 to 22,904.58.

Gold and silver prices rose after paring bigger, early gains. Gold added 0.3% to settle at \$4,950.80 per ounce after earlier climbing back above the \$5,000 mark. It's been swinging sharply after roughly doubling in price over 12 months. It neared \$5,600 last week and then fell below \$4,500 on Monday.

Silver's price, which has been on an even wilder ride, rose 1.3%.

Their prices had surged as investors looked for safer places to keep their money amid worries about everything from tariffs to a weaker U.S. dollar to heavy debt loads for governments worldwide. But critics said their prices rose too far, too fast and were due for a pullback.

In the bond market, Treasury yields held relatively steady following a couple mixed reports on the U.S. economy.

One from ADP Research suggested that U.S. employers outside of the government hired fewer workers last month than economists expected. A second from the Institute for Supply Management said that growth for health care, construction and other U.S. services businesses continued in January at the same pace that economists expected.

That second report, though, also indicated that prices paid by U.S. services businesses rose at a faster rate in January, which could be a discouraging signal for inflation.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury edged down to 4.27% from 4.28% late Tuesday.

In stock markets abroad, indexes were mixed across Europe and Asia.

Japan's Nikkei 225 fell 0.8% from its all-time high. Nintendo sank 11%, even as the video game company reported strong profits. Investors and analysts are concerned about whether sales momentum can be maintained for the Switch 2 game console that was rolled out last year.

South Korea's Kospi, meanwhile, climbed 1.6% to another record.

Man who tried to shoot Trump at a Florida golf course gets life in prison

By DAVID FISCHER Associated Press

FORT PIERCE, Fla. (AP) — A man convicted of trying to assassinate President Donald Trump on a Florida golf course in 2024 was sentenced Wednesday to life in prison after a federal prosecutor said his crime was unacceptable "in this country or anywhere."

U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon pronounced Ryan Routh's fate in the same Fort Pierce courtroom that erupted into chaos in September when he tried to stab himself shortly after jurors found him guilty on

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all counts.

"American democracy does not work when individuals take it into their own hands to eliminate candidates. That's what this individual tried to do" Assistant U.S. Attorney John Shipley told the judge.

Defense attorney Martin L. Roth argued that "at the moment of truth, he chose not to pull the trigger."

The judge pushed back, noting Routh's history of arrests, to which Roth said, "He's a complex person, I'll give the court that, but he has a very good core."

Routh then read from a rambling, 20-page statement. Cannon broke in, said none of what he was saying was relevant and gave him five more minutes to talk.

"I did everything I could and lived a good life," Routh said, before the judge cut him off.

"Your plot to kill was deliberate and evil," she said. "You are not a peaceful man. You are not a good man."

She then issued his sentence: Life without parole, plus seven years on a gun charge. His sentences for his other three crimes will run concurrently.

In a statement on the social platform X, U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi thanked prosecutors for ensuring that Routh "will never walk free again."

"Ryan Routh's heinous attempted assassination of President Trump was not only an attack on our President — it was a direct assault against our entire democratic system," Bondi said.

Routh's sentencing was initially scheduled for December. But Cannon agreed to move it back after Routh decided to use an attorney during the sentencing phase, instead of representing himself as he did for most of the trial.

Routh was convicted of trying to assassinate a major presidential candidate, using a firearm in furtherance of a crime, assaulting a federal officer, possessing a firearm as a felon and using a gun with a defaced serial number.

"Routh remains unrepentant for his crimes, never apologized for the lives he put at risk, and his life demonstrates near-total disregard for law," prosecutors said in their sentencing memo.

His defense attorney had asked for 20 years plus the mandatory seven for the gun conviction.

"The defendant is two weeks short of being sixty years old," Roth wrote in a filing. "A just punishment would provide a sentence long enough to impose sufficient but not excessive punishment, and to allow defendant to experience freedom again as opposed to dying in prison."

Prosecutors said Routh spent weeks plotting to kill Trump before aiming a rifle through shrubbery as the Republican presidential candidate played golf on Sept. 15, 2024, at his West Palm Beach country club.

At trial a Secret Service agent helping protect Trump on the golf course testified that he spotted Routh before Trump came into view. Routh aimed his rifle at the agent, who opened fire, causing Routh to drop his weapon and run away without firing a shot.

In the motion requesting an attorney, Routh offered to trade his life in a prisoner swap with people unjustly held in other countries and said an offer still stood for Trump to "take out his frustrations on my face."

"Just a quarter of an inch further back and we all would not have to deal with all of this mess," Routh wrote. He added, "but I always fail at everything (par for the course)."

In her decision granting Routh an attorney, Cannon chastised the "disrespectful charade" of Routh's motion, saying it made a mockery of the proceedings. But the judge, nominated by Trump in 2020, said she wanted to err on the side of legal representation.

Cannon signed off last summer on Routh's request to represent himself. The Supreme Court has held that defendants have the right to represent themselves in court proceedings as long as they can show a judge they are competent to waive their right to an attorney.

Routh's former federal public defenders served as standby counsel and were present during the trial.

Routh had multiple previous felony convictions, including possession of stolen goods, and a large online footprint demonstrating disdain for Trump. In a self-published book, he encouraged Iran to assassinate him and at one point wrote that as a Trump voter, he must take part of the blame for electing him.

Trump's border czar is pulling 700 immigration officers out of Minnesota immediately

By STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The Trump administration is reducing the number of immigration officers in Minnesota but will continue its enforcement operation that has sparked weeks of tensions and deadly confrontations, border czar Tom Homan said Wednesday.

About 700 federal officers — roughly a quarter of the total deployed to Minnesota — will be withdrawn immediately after state and local officials agreed over the past week to cooperate by turning over arrested immigrants, Homan said.

But he did not provide a timeline for when the administration might end the operation that has become a flashpoint in the debate over President Donald Trump's mass deportation efforts since the fatal shootings of U.S. citizens Renee Good and Alex Pretti in Minneapolis.

About 2,000 officers will remain in the state after this week's drawdown, Homan said. That's roughly the same number sent to Minnesota in early January when the surge ramped up, kicking off what the Department of Homeland Security called its "largest immigration enforcement operation ever."

Since then, masked, heavily armed officers have been met by resistance from residents who are upset with their aggressive tactics.

A widespread pullout, Homan said, will occur only after there's more cooperation and protesters stop interfering with federal agents carrying out arrests.

Trump told NBC News that he ordered the reduction and added that one lesson coming out of the turmoil in Minnesota is "maybe we can use a little bit of a softer touch. But you still have to be tough."

Gov. Tim Walz and Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey, both Democrats who have heavily criticized the surge, said pulling back 700 officers was a good first step but that the entire operation should end quickly.

"We need a faster and larger drawdown of forces, state-led investigations into the killings of Alex Pretti and Renee Good, and an end to this campaign of retribution," Walz posted on social media.

Vice President JD Vance said the officers being sent home were mainly in Minneapolis to protect those carrying out arrests. "We're not drawing down the immigration enforcement," Vance said in an interview on "The Megyn Kelly Show."

Trump administration has pushed for cooperation in Minnesota

Trump's border czar took over the Minnesota operation in late January after the second fatal shooting by federal officers and amid growing political backlash and questions about how the operation was being run.

Homan said right away that federal officials could reduce the number of agents in Minnesota, but only with the cooperation of state and local officials. He pushed for jails to alert Immigration and Customs Enforcement about inmates who could be deported, saying transferring those inmates to ICE is safer because it means fewer officers have to be out looking for people in the country illegally.

Homan said during a news conference Wednesday that there has been an "increase in unprecedented collaboration" resulting in the need for fewer public safety officers in Minnesota and a safer environment, allowing for the withdrawal of the 700 officers.

He didn't say which jurisdictions have been cooperating with DHS. White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said in a statement that the administration will monitor local officials to make sure they keep their commitments.

The Trump administration has long complained that places known as sanctuary jurisdictions — a term applied to local governments that limit law enforcement cooperation with the department — hinder the arrest of criminal immigrants.

Minnesota officials say its state prisons and nearly all of the county sheriffs already cooperate with immigration authorities.

But the two county jails that serve Minneapolis and St. Paul and take in the most inmates had not previously met ICE's standard of full cooperation, although they both hand over inmates to federal authorities when an arrest warrant is signed by a judge.

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The Hennepin County Sheriff's Office, which serves Minneapolis and several suburbs, said its policies have not changed. County Attorney Mary Moriarty said the jail gives ICE legally required information, adding that handing over someone before they're convicted "strips our community of the accountability it deserves and harms victims by robbing them of a court process."

The Ramsey County Sheriff's Office in neighboring St. Paul did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Border czar calls Minnesota operation a success

Homan said he thinks the ICE operation in Minnesota has been a success, checking off a list of people wanted for violent crimes who were taken off the streets.

"I think it's very effective as far as public safety goes," he said Wednesday. "Was it a perfect operation? No."

He also made clear that pulling some federal officers out of Minnesota isn't a sign that the administration is backing down. "We are not surrendering the president's mission on a mass deportation operation," Homan said.

"You're not going to stop ICE. You're not going to stop Border Patrol," Homan said of the ongoing protests. "The only thing you're doing is irritating your community."

Schools ask court to block immigration operations

Two Minnesota school districts and a teachers union filed a lawsuit Wednesday to block federal authorities from conducting immigration enforcement at or around schools, saying their actions have disrupted classes, endangered students and caused attendance drops.

The lawsuit also argues that Operation Metro Surge has marked a shift in policy that removed long-standing limits on enforcement in "sensitive locations," including schools.

Homeland Security spokesperson Tricia McLaughlin said "ICE is not going to schools to arrest children — we are protecting children."

Curling opens competition at 2026 Winter Olympics as brief power outage pauses play, luge training

By JENNIFER McDERMOTT Associated Press

CORTINA D'AMPEZZO, Italy (AP) — The 2026 Winter Olympics opened competition Wednesday night with the first curling matches on the schedule in Cortina only for the action to come to a brief halt because of a power outage.

Officials paused the matches at the historic curling stadium when the lights dimmed and flickered and the main lights and heat in a nearby media center went out. Curlers kept sliding on the ice to stay ready and fans cheered when the bright lights came back soon after and play resumed.

Olympic organizers acknowledged the "brief interruption to competition due to an energy-related issue" and noted it lasted approximately three minutes. It snowed steadily all day in Cortina, with more than 8 inches (20.32 centimeters) in some places. The start of the opening luge training session for men's singles was also delayed a half-hour due to the outage.

The eight teams playing mixed doubles opened the long curling tournament two full days before the opening ceremony for the 2026 Milan Cortina Games. American curler Korey Dropkin said he has been waiting a long time for this moment.

"Being amongst the best, it's a very cool atmosphere to be part of," said Dropkin, a first-time Olympian who will begin competition Thursday. "We're looking forward to being ready to compete and pour our hearts out on the ice."

Opening night in this mountain resort was just the first of the round robin matches in mixed doubles curling, where teams with one woman and one man face off against one another.

Cortina, which is 400 kilometers (250 miles) from Milan in these far-flung Olympics, is seeing more fans and many were in the curling center. They clapped, rang bells and chanted for their countries and favorite curlers when their teams scored or there was a break in the action. Some in the crowd held large flags

for the Czech Republic, whose team was competing against Canada. Canadian fans wearing red waved handheld flags.

Bernard Benoit traveled from Ontario, Canada, to root for his home team before going on to meet his daughter in Milan. While he's a longtime curling fan, it's his first time at the Olympics. He said he came a long way to see the best in the world because he loves how curling is a "mix of athleticism and intellect" and a strategy game.

Benoit is cheering for Canadian couple Jocelyn Peterman and Brett Gallant, who are competing in mixed doubles. Three of the teams are married couples and one is a sibling team. Marie Kaldvee and Harri Lill are the first ever to compete for Estonia in curling.

Italian duo Stefania Constantini, who is from Cortina, and Amos Mosaner are the defending world and Olympic champions in mixed doubles.

Stephanie Kahn is a volunteer at the curling center, who is eager to learn what curling is all about and how hard it is. Kahn is from the United States and moved to Spain when she retired. She aspired to compete in swimming in the Olympics when she was younger.

"That, for me, is what makes it so special. Being an athlete and knowing that to be at the top, top of your sport, regardless of what that sport is, it's just such a commitment," she said. "So I'm just excited to be in the presence of these athletes."

Russia and Ukraine envoys meet in Abu Dhabi for 2 days of US-brokered talks

By KAMILA HRABCHUK Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Envoys from Moscow and Kyiv met in Abu Dhabi on Wednesday for another round of U.S.-brokered talks on ending the almost four-year war, as a Russian attack using cluster munitions killed seven people at a market in Ukraine.

The delegations from Moscow and Kyiv were joined in the capital of the United Arab Emirates by U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff and U.S. President Donald Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, according to Rustem Umerov, Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council chief who attended the meeting.

"The discussions were substantive and productive, focusing on concrete steps and practical solutions," Umerov said on social media as the first of two days of talks wrapped up.

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said that a breakthrough in the talks may not come for a while but the Trump administration has made great progress on negotiations over the past year.

"That's the good news," Rubio told reporters Wednesday. "The bad news is that the items that remain are the most difficult ones. And meanwhile the war continues."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov wouldn't offer any details on the talks and said that Moscow wasn't planning to comment on their results.

He said that "the doors for a peaceful settlement are open," but that Moscow will proceed with its military campaign until Kyiv meets its demands.

Last month's discussions in Abu Dhabi, part of a U.S. push to end the fighting, yielded some progress but no breakthrough on key issues, officials said.

The current talks also coincide with the expiry of the last remaining nuclear arms pact between Russia and the United States on Thursday. Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin could extend the terms of the treaty or renegotiate its conditions in an effort to prevent a new nuclear arms race.

Energy networks targeted

The Abu Dhabi talks were held as Ukrainians were outraged over major Russian attacks on their energy system, which have occurred each winter since Russia launched its all-out invasion of its neighbor on Feb. 24, 2022.

A huge Russian bombardment overnight from Monday to Tuesday included hundreds of drones and a record 32 ballistic missiles, wounding at least 10 people. This came despite Ukraine's understanding that Putin had told Trump that he would temporarily halt strikes on Ukraine's power grid.

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Ukrainian civilians are struggling with one of the coldest winters in years, which saw temperatures dip to around minus 20 degrees Celsius (minus 4 degrees Fahrenheit).

About 60 foreign ambassadors took part in an organized visit Wednesday to a Kyiv thermal power plant that was almost completely destroyed by missiles and drones in the Monday night attack. The plant provided heating to about 500,000 people.

Russia is hitting Ukraine's energy facilities because its armed forces believe the targets are associated with Kyiv's military effort, Peskov said.

There has been a lack of clarity about how long Putin had promised to observe a pause on power grid attacks.

Trump said Tuesday at the White House that Putin had agreed to halt strikes for a week, through Feb. 1, and that the Russian leader had kept his word. But Zelenskyy said Tuesday that "barely four days have passed of the week Russia was asked to hold off," before Ukraine was hit with new attacks, suggesting that the Ukrainian leader wasn't fully aware of the terms of the Trump-Putin agreement.

Meanwhile, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said that Trump was "unfortunately unsurprised" by Moscow's resumption of attacks.

On Wednesday, more than 200 repair crews were at work in Kyiv to restore power, according to the Ukrainian Energy Ministry, which said that staff were exhausted and would be rotated. More than 1,100 apartment buildings in the capital were still without heating, Zelenskyy said.

The Institute for the Study of War, a Washington think tank, said that the developments were part of Moscow's negotiating strategy.

"The Kremlin will likely attempt to portray its adherence to this short-term energy strikes moratorium as a significant concession to gain leverage in the upcoming peace talks, even though the Kremlin used these few days to stockpile missiles for a larger strike package," it said late Tuesday.

New attacks

Russia used cluster munitions Wednesday in an attack on a busy market in eastern Ukraine that killed seven and wounded 15 others, officials said.

The attack on the town of Druzhkivka darkened prospects for progress in the UAE, with Donetsk regional military administration chief Vadym Filashkin describing Russian talk of a ceasefire as "worthless."

Russia also launched 105 drones against Ukraine overnight, and air defenses shot down 88 of them, the Ukrainian air force said Wednesday. Strikes by 17 drones were recorded at 14 locations, as well as falling debris at five sites, it said.

In the central Dnipropetrovsk region, a Russian strike on a residential area killed a 68-year-old woman and a 38-year-old man, regional military administration head Oleksandr Hancha said.

The southern city of Odesa also came under a large-scale attack, regional military administration head Oleh Kiper said. About 20 residential buildings were damaged, with four people rescued from under the rubble, he said.

The last US-Russian nuclear pact is about to expire, ending a half-century of arms control

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV and HARRIET MORRIS Associated Press

The last remaining nuclear arms pact between Russia and the United States is set to expire Thursday, removing any caps on the two largest atomic arsenals for the first time in more than a half-century.

The termination of the New START Treaty would set the stage for what many fear could be an unconstrained nuclear arms race.

Russian President Vladimir Putin declared readiness to stick to the treaty's limits for another year if Washington follows suit, but President Donald Trump has been noncommittal about extending it.

Trump has repeatedly indicated he would like to keep limits on nuclear weapons and involve China in arms control talks, a White House official who was not authorized to talk publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity said Monday. Trump will make a decision on nuclear arms control "on his own timeline," the

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official said.

Beijing has balked at any restrictions on its smaller but growing nuclear arsenal.

Putin discussed the pact's expiration with Chinese leader Xi Jinping, Kremlin adviser Yuri Ushakov said, noting Washington hasn't responded to his proposed extension.

Russia "will act in a balanced and responsible manner based on thorough analysis of the security situation," Ushakov said.

Arms control advocates long have voiced concern about the expiration, warning it could lead to a new arms race, foment global instability and increase the risk of nuclear conflict.

Pope Leo XIV on Wednesday called for the treaty "not to be abandoned without seeking to ensure its concrete and effective continuation."

Failure to agree on keeping the pact's limits will likely encourage a bigger deployment, said Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association in Washington.

"We're at the point now where the two sides could, with the expiration of this treaty, for the first time in about 35 years, increase the number of nuclear weapons that are deployed on each side," Kimball told The Associated Press. "And this would open up the possibility of an unconstrained, dangerous three-way arms race, not just between the U.S. and Russia, but also involving China, which is also increasing its smaller but still deadly nuclear arsenal."

Kingston Reif of the RAND Corporation, a former U.S. deputy assistant secretary of defense, also warned during an online discussion that "in the absence of the predictability of the treaty, each side could be incentivized to plan for the worst or to increase their deployed arsenals to show toughness and resolve, or to search for negotiating leverage."

Putin repeatedly has brandished Russia's nuclear might since sending troops into Ukraine in 2022, warning Moscow was prepared to use "all means" to protect its security interests. He signed a revised nuclear doctrine in 2024, lowering the threshold for nuclear weapons use.

Signed in 2010

New START, signed in 2010 by President Barack Obama and his Russian counterpart, Dmitry Medvedev, restricted each side to no more than 1,550 nuclear warheads on no more than 700 missiles and bombers — deployed and ready for use. It was originally supposed to expire in 2021 but was extended for five more years.

The pact envisioned sweeping on-site inspections to verify compliance, although they stopped in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic and never resumed.

In February 2023, Putin suspended Moscow's participation, saying Russia couldn't allow U.S. inspections of its nuclear sites at a time when Washington and its NATO allies have openly declared Moscow's defeat in Ukraine as their goal. At the same time, the Kremlin emphasized it wasn't withdrawing from the pact altogether, pledging to respect its caps on nuclear weapons.

In offering in September to abide by New START's limits for a year to buy time for both sides to negotiate a successor agreement, Putin said the pact's expiration would be destabilizing and could fuel nuclear proliferation.

Rose Gottemoeller, chief U.S. negotiator for pact and a former NATO deputy secretary-general, said extending it would have served U.S. interests. "A one-year extension of New START limits would not prejudice any of the vital steps that the United States is taking to respond to the Chinese nuclear buildup," she told an online discussion last month.

Previous pacts

New START followed a long succession of U.S.-Russian nuclear arms reduction pacts, starting with SALT I in 1972 signed by U.S. President Richard Nixon and Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev — the first attempt to limit their arsenals.

The 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty restricted the countries' missile defense systems until President George W. Bush took the U.S. out of the pact in 2001 despite Moscow's warnings. The Kremlin has described Washington's efforts to build a missile shield as a major threat, arguing it would erode Russia's

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nuclear deterrent by giving the U.S. the capability to shoot down its intercontinental ballistic missiles.

In response, Putin ordered the development of the Burevestnik nuclear-tipped and nuclear-powered cruise missile and the Poseidon nuclear-armed and nuclear-powered underwater drone. Russia said last year it successfully tested the Poseidon and the Burevestnik and preparing their deployment.

Also terminated in 2019 was the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty, which was signed in 1987 and banned land-based missiles with a range between 500-5,500 kilometers (310-3,400 miles). Those missiles were seen as particularly destabilizing because of their short flight time to their targets, leaving only minutes to decide on a retaliatory strike and increasing the threat of a nuclear war on a false warning.

In November 2024 and again last month, Russia attacked Ukraine with a conventional version of its new Oreshnik intermediate-range ballistic missile. Moscow says it has a range of up to 5,000 kilometers (3,100 miles), capable of reaching any European target, with either nuclear or conventional warheads.

Trump's 'Golden Dome'

Without agreements limiting nuclear arsenals, Russia "will promptly and firmly fend off any new threats to our security," said Medvedev, who had signed the New START treaty and is now deputy head of Putin's Security Council.

"If we are not heard, we act proportionately seeking to restore parity," he said in recent remarks.

Medvedev specifically mentioned Trump's proposed Golden Dome missile defense system among potentially destabilizing moves, emphasizing a close link between offensive and defensive strategic weapons.

Trump's plan has worried Russia and China, Kimball said.

"They're likely going to respond to Golden Dome by building up the number of offensive weapons they have to overwhelm the system and make sure that they have the potential to retaliate with nuclear weapons," he said, adding that offensive capabilities can be built faster and cheaper than defensive ones.

Trump's October statement about U.S. intentions to resume nuclear tests for the first time since 1992 also troubled the Kremlin, which last conducted a test in 1990 when the USSR still existed. Putin said Russia will respond in kind if the U.S. resumes tests, which are banned by a global treaty that Moscow and Washington signed.

U.S. Energy Secretary Chris Wright said in November that such tests would not include nuclear explosions.

Kimball said a U.S. resumption of tests "would blow a massive hole in the global system to reduce nuclear risk," prompting Russia to respond in kind and tempting others, including China and India, to follow suit.

The world was heading toward accelerated strategic competition, he said, with more spending and increasingly unstable relations involving the U.S., Russia, and China on nuclear matters.

"This marks a potential turning point into a much more dangerous period of global nuclear competition, the likes of which we've not seen in our lifetimes," Kimball added.

Penny the Doberman pinscher wins the 150th Westminster dog show

By JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The dog was Penny. The win was priceless.

A Doberman pinscher named Penny won best in show Tuesday night at the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show, netting U.S. show dogs' most coveted prize — and giving veteran handler Andy Linton another win after nearly four decades. Linton got best in show in 1989 with another Doberman, named Indy.

Penny "is as great a Doberman as I have ever seen," Linton told a supportive crowd. Despite health problems, he guided the 4-year-old dog through an impeccably crisp performance.

"I had some goals, and this was one of them," Linton said, adding later in a conversation with reporters that as he's winding down his career, winning at the milestone 150th annual Westminster show is "extra-special."

Runner-up — and cheers just as loud — went to a Chesapeake Bay retriever named Cota. While Dobermans have won five times including Tuesday, no retriever has ever won, and their fans applaud every

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encouraging sign.

Cota also seemed to enjoy the moment, particularly when his handler, Devon Kipp Levy, let him play with the ribbon.

Other finalists included an Afghan hound named Zaida, a Lhasa apso called JJ, a Maltese named Cookie, an old English sheepdog dubbed Graham and a smooth fox terrier called Wager. The judge, two-time Westminster-winning handler David Fitzpatrick, called the lineup one "that will go down in history."

Each dog is assessed according to how closely it matches the ideal for its breed. The winner gets a trophy, ribbons and bragging rights.

A crowd favorite at the 2025 Westminster show, Penny has rocked show rings since. A throng of handlers and other dog folk cheered for the seemingly undistractable dog and for Linton in early-round action Tuesday afternoon.

Ringside afterward, Penny politely but pointedly nudged her nose into a visitor's leg, looking for something — pets, as it turned out. She's generally "very chill," Linton said later, "but she can get pretty pumped up for a bad guy. Or a squirrel."

Co-owner Greg Chan of Toronto said Penny is "very demanding and very smart," but she's also "a pleaser — she'll do anything for food." (Her favorite snack? "Everything.")

Penny came out on top after 2,500 dogs, spanning more than 200 breeds, strutted their stuff at the show.

Even if they didn't make the finals, there were plenty that scored meme-able moments or lightened up the crowd.

Over two nights of semifinals, spectators cheered extra-loud for a Xoloitzcuintli named Calaco, a hairless dog who went around the ring like he had nothing to prove. A vizsla named Beamer charmed the audience by hopping into a box set out for his handler's tools, and Storm the Newfoundland got laughs when he jumped up on his handler, standing as tall as she. Spectators cheered so loud for a golden retriever named Oliver that they drowned out the arena's announcer, and chants of "Lumpy! Lumpy!" resounded as Lumpy the Pekingese strolled before a judge.

One dog that made history in the semifinals was Millie, a Danish-Swedish farmdog. The small, spry breed just became eligible for the Westminster show this year, and Millie bested about 10 other farmdogs Tuesday afternoon to get to the evening round.

Westminster wins often go to pooches with professional handlers or owners with decades or even generations of experience behind them. But just reaching the elite, champions-only show is a major accomplishment in dogdom, especially for first-timers such as Joseph Carrero and his Neapolitan mastiff, Dezi.

After yearning for a Neo since his teenage years, Carrero finally got one when he was 35. A heavy equipment operator from Indian Springs, Nevada, he started showing the dog only because the breeder wanted him to. Now Carrero himself breeds and handles his Neos in the ring, while also working full-time and then some.

"It's really hard for us to do this, but we enjoy it, and he enjoys it," Carrero said as a visitors gathered around to greet the jowly, 190-pound dog.

Boerboels, which are formidable guard dogs originally from South Africa, played a major role in how Natalee Ridenhour met her late husband and why she eventually left metropolitan life for a farm in Royse City, Texas.

On Tuesday, Ridenhour and a Boerboel named Invictus did something else she once would never have pictured: compete at the Westminster show.

The dog didn't advance past the first round. But as a passer-by delightedly petted the 170-pound animal, Ridenhour said, "Honestly, the big win is: You're about the 50th person who's gotten down in his face and loved on him."

Today in History: February 5

Senate acquits Donald Trump in first impeachment

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, Feb. 5, the 36th day of 2026. There are 329 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Feb. 5, 2020, the Senate voted to acquit President Donald Trump in his first impeachment trial. Most senators expressed unease with Trump's pressure campaign on Ukraine that prompted the impeachment, but just one Republican, Mitt Romney of Utah, broke party ranks and voted to convict. In 2021, the Senate acquitted Trump in a second trial for allegedly inciting the violent Jan. 6 siege of the Capitol.

Also on this date:

In 1917, the U.S. Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1917 over President Woodrow Wilson's veto, an act that severely curtailed Asian immigration and mandated immigrant literacy testing.

In 1918, more than 200 people were killed during World War I when the Cunard liner SS Tuscania, which was transporting over 2,000 American troops to Europe, was torpedoed by a German U-boat off the coast of Ireland.

In 1971, Apollo 14 astronauts Alan Shepard and Edgar Mitchell stepped onto the moon's surface in the first of two lunar excursions.

In 1973, services were held at Arlington National Cemetery for U.S. Army Col. William B. Nolde, the last official American combat casualty in the Vietnam War before a ceasefire took effect.

In 1993, President Bill Clinton signed the Family and Medical Leave Act, granting workers up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave for family emergencies.

In 1994, white separatist Byron De La Beckwith was convicted in Jackson, Mississippi, of murdering civil rights leader Medgar Evers in 1963 and was sentenced to life in prison.

In 2008, an outbreak of 87 tornadoes fired up across nine states, killing 57 people in Arkansas, Tennessee, Kentucky and Alabama during a span of 12 hours. One Arkansas twister left a 122-mile path of damage along the ground.

In 2017, Tom Brady led one of the greatest comebacks in NFL history, highlighted by a spectacular Julian Edelman catch that helped lift New England from a 25-point deficit against the Atlanta Falcons to the Patriots' fifth Super Bowl victory, 34-28; it was the first Super Bowl to end in overtime.

In 2023, Beyoncé won her 32nd Grammy to become the most decorated artist in the history of the award.

Today's birthdays: Tony-winning playwright John Guare is 88. Football Hall of Famer Roger Staubach is 84. Film director Michael Mann is 83. Racing Hall of Famer Darrell Waltrip is 79. Actor Barbara Hershey is 78. Actor-comedian Tim Meadows is 65. Actor Jennifer Jason Leigh is 64. Rock musician Duff McKagan (Guns N' Roses) is 62. Golf Hall of Famer Jose Maria Olazabal is 60. Actor-comedian Chris Parnell is 59. Actor Michael Sheen is 57. Country singer Sara Evans is 55. Actor-singer Darren Criss is 39. Actor Henry Golding is 39. Soccer star Neymar is 34.