

Groton Daily Independent

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Friday, May 8

Senior Menu: Chicken strips, tater tots, carrots, fruit.
School Breakfast: Breakfast pizza.
School Lunch: Chicken ala king, biscuit.
Track Meet at Gene Brownell Complex in Aberdeen, 3 p.m.
JVT Practice, 6 p.m., Arena
High School Baseball: SBW JV DH at Groton, 5:30 p.m.

Groton Daily Independent

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Saturday, May 9

Pickleball, 9:30 a.m., Elementary Gym
High School Baseball at Milroy, Minn., vs. Madison/
Chester DH at noon.

Sunday, May 10

Mother's Day
Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion, 9 a.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's, 9 a.m.; at Zion, 11 a.m. (Grad recognition at St. John's).
United Methodist: Worship at Conde, 8:15 a.m.; at Groton, 9:30 a.m.; at Britton, 11:15 a.m.; Groton Sunday School, 9:30 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 10:30 a.m.
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m.; SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.
First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.
Groton CM&A: Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.; worship 10:30 a.m.

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1440

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

Hantavirus Update

Health officials are tracking roughly 30 people from at least 12 countries who left the hantavirus-infected MV Hondius cruise ship before the outbreak was identified on May 2.

At least three passengers have died, including a Dutch couple believed to have contracted the virus on a bird-watching trip in Argentina. The country this week reported 101 infections of the rare rodent-borne disease since June 2025, roughly twice the number recorded during the same period a year earlier. Scientists say warming temperatures may be helping rodent populations proliferate, and many have been working for over three decades to develop a vaccine.

The World Health Organization has identified at least eight cases—five confirmed and three suspected—across the ship and four countries, but says the risk to the public is low.

Evacuations of the roughly 150 people aboard the MV Hondius are expected to begin Monday.

Fishheads

Fish given psilocybin—the active ingredient in magic mushrooms—behave less aggressively than their undosed counterparts, a study published yesterday reveals. The paper is the first of its kind to document the role psilocybin may play in aggression in animals.

Researchers studied the mangrove rivulus fish (*Kryptolebias marmoratus*), a species that reproduces by self-fertilization, removing genetic variation between specimens. One fish was given a low dose psilocybin dose for 20 minutes before being placed in a tank opposite an undosed fish. The two were separated by a fiberglass mesh barrier, allowing them to see and smell each other without engaging in physical contact. The fish dosed with psilocybin moved more slowly and darted at the undosed counterpart less frequently, indicating reduced incidences of aggression. The research comes as the Trump administration expedites review of the psychedelic for treatment of mental health conditions, including depression and anxiety.

Attenborough at 100

Sir David Attenborough, the British broadcaster and natural historian whose nature documentaries transformed how audiences see the natural world, turns 100 today.

Born in 1926, Attenborough was interested in nature from a young age, collecting fossils and bird eggs, before studying natural sciences at the University of Cambridge. He joined the BBC and rose to prominence with 1954's "Zoo Quest," which introduced viewers to rare wildlife, and then helped shape BBC Two. His 1979 series "Life on Earth" documented more than 600 species across 40 countries and drew an estimated 500 million viewers; later productions, including "Planet Earth," used advancing technology to showcase wildlife and warn of threats—wildlife populations have fallen 73% since 1970.

He has been knighted twice, won three Emmy Awards, and remains the only person to earn BAFTAs across black-and-white, color, HD, 3D, and 4K formats. More than 50 species have been named in his honor, including a newly identified wasp: *Attenboroughneculus tau*. Listen to a message from the naturalist.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

NCAA men's and women's basketball selection committees unanimously approve expanding March Madness from 68 to 76 teams.

Thirty ex-Ohio State football players join sex abuse lawsuit against the university.

"Saturday Night Live UK" renewed for a second season, with 12 episodes airing from fall 2026 through early 2027.

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Former Prince Andrew reportedly threatened by a masked man while walking his dog; a suspect has been arrested.

American Vogue editor Chloe Malle and actress-turned-talk-show-host Drew Barrymore are named in The Hollywood Reporter's 50 most powerful people in New York Media list.

Science & Technology

OpenAI unveils three AI models that can reason, translate, and transcribe as people speak.

Spotify allows users to create personal podcasts based on existing documents, saved articles, and more.

Brain under anesthesia understands language, neural activity shows, suggesting the unconscious brain is far more active than previously thought.

Fossils of long-lost ancestor of centipedes and millipedes that lived underwater already had many legs, challenging the long-held assumption legs developed as an adaptation for land.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close down (S&P 500 -0.4%, Dow -0.6%, Nasdaq -0.1%) as investors eye developments in US-Iran deal.

Elon Musk summoned to France to face preliminary criminal charges, including over child sex abuse images, deepfakes, and disinformation on his social media platform, X.

Shake Shack shares drop 28% after reporting an operating loss of \$2.6M.

Planet Fitness shares fall 31% after pausing planned price hikes, slashing full-year outlook.

Politics & World Affairs

US State Department will reportedly begin revoking passports today of Americans who owe \$100K or more in child support, impacting 2,700 people.

Iran and the US exchange fire as Iran considers the US' one-page proposal to end war, including reopening the Strait of Hormuz and 30-day ceasefire.

Tennessee passes redistricted map that would split the state's only Black-majority district in Memphis.

Groton Area Middle School Girls Claim Seventh Grade Title at Hamlin Meet

The Groton Area middle school girls turned in a dominant performance Thursday at the Hamlin Track and Field Meet, capturing the seventh-grade team championship with 115.25 points while the eighth-grade boys also delivered a strong runner-up finish with 85 points.

Groton's seventh-grade girls used balanced scoring throughout the meet, highlighted by several individual championships and relay victories. In the boys division, the Tigers' eighth graders piled up points in the sprints and relays to finish second behind Milbank.

The meet also featured a record-breaking performance from Groton's eighth-grade boys 4x400-meter relay team. Kyson Kucker, Keegan Kucker, Liam Lord and Trey Tietz raced to a winning time of 3:53.5, breaking the previous eighth-grade school record of 3:54.74 set in 2016 by Lee Williams, Johnny Doeden, Thomas Cranford and Austin Jones. The quartet's record-setting effort highlighted an outstanding day for the Tigers on the track.

The Groton seventh-grade girls were especially strong in the sprint events. Libby Johnson won the 100-meter dash in 14.0 seconds and later added a third-place finish in the 200 meters at 30.0. Kinley Sandness claimed the 200-meter title in 29.8 seconds.

Groton also swept the top two spots in the seventh-grade 400 meters as Avery Huber won in 1:10.9 and Taylor Fliehs followed closely in second at 1:11.5. Fliehs later added another championship in the 800 meters with a winning time of 2:56.3.

In the hurdles, Charli Jacobsen captured first place in the 100-meter hurdles at 18.6 seconds, while Addison Steffes finished fourth.

Groton's relay teams were equally impressive. The seventh-grade girls won the 4x200 relay as Shealee Gilchrist, Jacobsen, Mya Moody and Zoe Olson crossed the line in 2:05.1. The Tigers also won the 4x400 relay with Fliehs, Huber, Andi Iverson and Brynlee Dunker posting a time of 4:59.4.

The eighth-grade girls added two more relay victories. Groton's 4x100 relay team of Iverson, Sandness, Rowan Patterson and Huber finished first in 57.7, while the 4x200 relay squad of Johnson, Sandness, Patterson and Iverson also placed first in 1:59.9.

Other notable finishes for the girls included third place from Hallie Perkins in the 1600 meters and fourth place from Lillian Davis in the discus.

The Groton eighth-grade boys also had an outstanding day, finishing second in the team standings with



It was a record-breaking day today at the Middle School Track Meet in Hamlin! The eighth grade team of Kyson Kucker, Keegan Kucker, Liam Lord, and Trey Tietz clocked a time of 3:53.5 in the 4x400m Relay, breaking the eighth Grade School Record of 3:54.74. The record was previously held by Lee Williams, Johnny Doeden, Thomas Cranford, and Austin Jones in 2016. (Photo from Groton Area Facebook Page)

Area Facebook Page)

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85 points.

The Tigers dominated the 400 meters as Kyson Kucker won the race in 55.6 seconds and Keegan Kucker took second in 59.6. Lord added a fourth-place finish.

Groton nearly swept the top spots in the 100 meters with Tietz placing second in 12.6, Ivan Schwan third in 12.8, and Trayce Schelle and Lord both clocking 12.9 seconds.

Schwan later earned another runner-up finish in the 200 meters at 26.5 seconds.

Groton's relay teams continued the strong showing. The Tigers won the eighth-grade 4x100 relay as Keegan Kucker, Kyson Kucker, Schelle and Tietz posted a winning time of 50.0.

Schelle added another championship in the high jump by clearing 5-feet-0.

In the field events, Liam Johnson placed second in the shot put with a toss of 35-feet-6.5 and later added seventh in the discus.

The seventh-grade boys were led by Quinton Flores, who placed third in the 800 meters and sixth in the 100 meters. Groton's seventh-grade 4x100 relay team of Flores, Jack Schuelke, Micah Krause and Schwan added a third-place finish.

Boy's Division

Boy's Seventh Grade Team Points: 1. Milbank 166, 1. Sisseton 123, 2. Milbank 104, 3. Clark/Willow Lake 78, 4. Webster Area 57, 5. Hamlin 48, 6. Groton Area 13.

Boy's Eighth Grade Team Points: 1. Milbank 166, 2. Groton Area 85, 3. Webster Area 65, 4. Sisseton 49, 5. Clark/Willow Lake 45, 6. Hamlin 4.

100 Meters 7th Grade: 6. Quinton Flores, 13.6; 23. Jack Schuelke, 15.5; 26. Micah Krause, 15.9; 32. Hank Fliehs, 17.0; 33. Weston Kettner, 17.7.

100 Meters 8th Grade: 2. Trey Tietz, 12.6; 3. Ivan Schwan, 12.8; 6. Trayce Schelle, 12.9; 6. Liam Lord, 12.9; 12. Wyatt Morehouse, 15.2.

200 Meters 7th Grade: 13. Jack Schuelke, 33.2; 16. Micah Krause, 35.4; 17. Weston Kettner, 42.5; 18. Hayden Hubbard, 42.7.

200 Meters 8th Grade: 2. Ivan Schwan, 26.5; 8. Wyatt Morehouse, 31.6; 11. Gavin Hanten, 33.4.

400 Meters 8th Grade: 1. Kyson Kucker, 55.6; 2. Keegan Kucker, 59.6; 4. Liam Lord, 1:02.9.

800 Meters 7th Grade: 3. Quinton Flores, 2:40.2; 10. Hayden Hubbard, 3:30.4.

4x100 Relay 7th Grade:

3. Groton: (Quinton Flores, Jack Schuelke, Micah Krause, Ivan Schwan), 56.4.

4x100 Relay 8th Grade: 1. Groton: (Keegan Kucker, Kyson Kucker, Trayce Schelle, Trey Tietz), 50.0;

4. Groton: (Bentley Harms, Gavin Hanten, Liam Johnson, Wyatt Morehouse), 58.1.

4x400 Relay 8th Grade: 1. Groton: (Trey Tietz, Keegan Kucker, Liam Lord, Kyson Kucker), 3:53.5.

Shot Put - 8lb 7th Grade: 14. Hank Fliehs, 21' 5.5"; 16. Grayson Warrington, 19' 7".

Shot Put - 8lb 8th Grade:

2. Liam Johnson, 35' 6.5"; 12. Bentley Harms, 25' 1"; 13. Gavin Hanten, 24' 4".

Discus - 1kg 7th Grade: 14. Grayson Warrington, 49' 10"; 16. Hank Fliehs, 40' 3".

Discus - 1kg 8th Grade: 7. Liam Johnson, 83' 8"; 8. Bentley Harms, 71' 9"; 11. Gavin Hanten, 69' 4".

High Jump 8th Grade: 1. Trayce Schelle, 5' 0".

Long Jump 7th Grade: 14. Jack Schuelke, 10' 10.5"; 18. Weston Kettner, 9' 0.5".

Girl's Division

Girl's Seventh Grade Team Points: 1. Groton Area 115.25, 2. Milbank 93.5, 3. Hamlin 82, 4. Webster Area 70.25, 5. Sisseton 56, 6. Clark/Willow Lake 28.

Girl's Eighth Grade Team Points: 1. Sisseton 145, 2. Milbank 107, 3. Webster Area 59, 4. Hamlin 37, 5. Clark/Willow Lake 36, 6. Groton Area 30.

100 Meters 7th Grade: 1. Libby Johnson, 14.0; 3. Mya Moody, 14.5; 5. Shealee Gilchrist, 15.0; 5. Zoe Olson, 15.0; 5. Addison Steffes, 15.0; 16. Hadley Heilman, 16.1SB; 16. Gracie Borg, 16.1; 20. Harley Fur-

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man, 16.2; 24. Lennox Locke, 17.0; 26. Hallie Perkins, 17.6.

200 Meters 7th Grade: 1. Kinley Sandness, 29.8; 3. Libby Johnson, 30.0; 5. Addison Steffes, 31.7; 6. Zoe Olson, 32.0; 9. Shealee Gilchrist, 32.4; 13. Lillian Davis, 33.6; 14. Harley Furman, 33.8; 15. Gracie Borg, 34.1; 15. Rowan Hanson, 34.1; 17. Hadley Heilman, 34.4; 19. Lennox Locke, 35.3.

400 Meters 7th Grade: 1. Avery Huber, 1:10.9; 2. Taylor Fliehs, 1:11.5; 8. Rowan Hanson, 1:16.3.

400 Meters 8th Grade: 4. Rowan Patterson, 1:11.7.

800 Meters 7th Grade: 1. Taylor Fliehs, 2:56.3.

1600 Meters 7th Grade: 3. Hallie Perkins, 7:43.2.

100m Hurdles - 30" / 0.762m 7th Grade: 1. Charli Jacobsen, 18.6; 4. Addison Steffes, 20.7; 12. Hallie Perkins, 23.6.

4x100 Relay 7th Grade: 2. Groton: (Mya Moody, Zoe Olson, Charli Jacobsen, Shealee Gilchrist), 59.3.

4x100 Relay 8th Grade: 1. Groton: (Andi Iverson, Kinley Sandness, Rowan Patterson, Avery Huber), 57.7.

4x200 Relay 7th Grade: 1. Groton: (Shealee Gilchrist, Charli Jacobsen, Mya Moody, Zoe Olson), 2:05.1.

4x200 Relay 8th Grade: 1. Groton: Libby Johnson, Kinley Sandness, Rowan Patterson, Andi Iverson), 1:59.9.

4x400 Relay 7th Grade: 1. Groton: (Taylor Fliehs, Avery Huber, Andi Iverson, Brynlee Dunker), 4:59.4.

SMR 800m - [100-100-200-400] 8th Grade: 3. Groton: (Rowan Patterson, Kinley Sandness, Avery Huber, Andi Iverson), 2:12.7.

Shot Put - 6lb 7th Grade: 7. Lillian Davis, 24' 2.5"; 10. Hadley Heilman, 20' 6".

Shot Put - 6lb 8th Grade: 9. Andi Gauer, 22' 0.5".

Discus - 1kg 7th Grade: 4. Lillian Davis, 47' 8".

Discus - 1kg 8th Grade: 13. Andi Gauer, 43' 5".

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Groton Girls Place Third at Roncalli Invitational

The Groton Area Tigers placed third Thursday at the Aberdeen Roncalli Invitational held at Lee Park Golf Course in Aberdeen, finishing with a team score of 404 in the four-team field.

The Aberdeen Roncalli Cavaliers claimed the team title with a 315. Sisseton Redmen finished second at 371, followed by the Tigers at 404 and Milbank Bulldogs at 442.

Groton was led by Rylie Rose, who carded a 23-over-par 94 to place ninth individually in the tournament standings. Claire Schuelke and Carlee Johnson each shot 99 to tie for 12th place overall, giving the Tigers three golfers inside the top 13.

Halee Harder rounded out the Groton scoring with a 112, good for 19th place.

Aberdeen Roncalli's Claire Crawford earned medalist honors after shooting a one-over-par 72. Sisseton's Kenzley Heath was runner-up with a 74, while Roncalli's Mackenzie Wegehaupt placed third at 78.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Out	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	In	Total
Strokes																					
Orange - Ladies Tee / SLOPE®: 113 / Course Rating™: 65.4 / Lee Park Golf Course																					
Yardage	270	371	363	230	85	294	320	155	335	2423	273	286	91	230	284	120	308	265	236	2093	4516
Par	4	5	5	4	3	4	4	3	4	36	4	4	3	4	4	3	5	4	4	35	71
Rylie Rose	12	5	6	5	3	5	5	3	4	48	5	5	3	5	6	5	5	6	6	46	94
<div><div></div> Starting Hole <div></div> Eagle or Better <div></div> Birdie <div></div> Par <div></div> Bogey <div></div> Double Bogey or Worse</div>																					

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Out	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	In	Total
Strokes																					
Orange - Ladies Tee / SLOPE®: 113 / Course Rating™: 65.4 / Lee Park Golf Course																					
Yardage	270	371	363	230	85	294	320	155	335	2423	273	286	91	230	284	120	308	265	236	2093	4516
Par	4	5	5	4	3	4	4	3	4	36	4	4	3	4	4	3	5	4	4	35	71
Carlee Johnson	4	5	7	5	3	6	5	5	4	44	5	6	3	4	6	14	6	5	6	55	99
<div><div></div> Starting Hole <div></div> Eagle or Better <div></div> Birdie <div></div> Par <div></div> Bogey <div></div> Double Bogey or Worse</div>																					

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Out	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	In	Total
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Yardage	270	371	363	230	85	294	320	155	335	2423	273	286	91	230	284	120	308	265	236	2093	4516
Par	4	5	5	4	3	4	4	3	4	36	4	4	3	4	4	3	5	4	4	35	71
Claire Schuelke	12	8	3	4	4	5	6	4	6	52	6	5	4	4	6	6	5	5	6	47	99
<div><div></div> Starting Hole <div></div> Eagle or Better <div></div> Birdie <div></div> Par <div></div> Bogey <div></div> Double Bogey or Worse</div>																					

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Out	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	In	Total
Strokes																					
Orange - Ladies Tee / SLOPE®: 113 / Course Rating™: 65.4 / Lee Park Golf Course																					
Yardage	270	371	363	230	85	294	320	155	335	2423	273	286	91	230	284	120	308	265	236	2093	4516
Par	4	5	5	4	3	4	4	3	4	36	4	4	3	4	4	3	5	4	4	35	71
Halee Harder	5	8	7	6	5	5	7	4	5	52	10	6	5	4	8	5	6	6	10	60	112
<div><div></div> Starting Hole <div></div> Eagle or Better <div></div> Birdie <div></div> Par <div></div> Bogey <div></div> Double Bogey or Worse</div>																					

Tigers Show Growth and Fight in Doubleheader Against Florence/Henry

The Groton Area Tigers may have come up short on the scoreboard Thursday night at Nelson Field, but head coach Anna Bisbee walked away proud of the progress her young squad showed in a varsity doubleheader against the Florence/Henry Falcons.

"It was a beautiful night for softball," Bisbee said following the games. "Not just beautiful weather, but beautiful playing. I'm so proud of these girls. They looked like a softball team tonight. They played hard. Things came together tonight."

Groton battled throughout both contests, dropping the opener 5-1 before falling 11-4 in the nightcap. Despite the losses, Bisbee said the Tigers showed how much they have improved throughout the season.

"We still had those mental errors, but we didn't let it beat us this time," Bisbee said. "We came out of our mental error, got the outs and got out of the innings."

In the opener, Florence/Henry broke a scoreless tie in the third inning before Groton answered right back in the bottom half. Jaedyn Penning delivered an RBI single down the left field line to tie the game at 1-1.

The Falcons responded with a four-run fourth inning to pull away for the win. Penning paced the Tigers offensively by going 2-for-3 with an RBI, while Rylen Ekern also collected two hits. Jerica Locke added two walks as Groton showed patience at the plate.

Neely Althoff worked five innings in the circle for Groton, striking out four.

The second game featured much more offense from both teams. Florence/Henry built a 2-0 lead before the Tigers erupted in the bottom of the second inning to briefly move in front 4-2.

Groton's rally included an RBI hit-by-pitch from Talli Wright, an RBI walk from Kinsley Rowen, and a two-run single by Locke.

The Falcons answered with a seven-run third inning to regain control and eventually secured the 11-4 victory.

Penning, Hannah Sandness, Rylie Rose, and Locke each recorded hits for the Tigers in the second game. Wright, Rowen, and Locke each drove in runs. Rowen pitched all five innings for Groton.

Bisbee said the night was another sign the Tigers are beginning to understand how to compete consistently.

"They've learned to pick their level up on these tougher teams," Bisbee said. "If they play the rest of the season like they played tonight, I think we're going to have some good games."

The atmosphere around Nelson Field also stood out to the Tigers' coach, especially with young fans lining the fence and cheering throughout the evening.

"Look at the crowd here tonight. Look at these little kids, future Little Tiger softball and baseball players," Bisbee said. "I'm having a blast. I think everybody else is, too."

Groton Area returns to action Monday when the Tigers host Sioux Valley Cossacks.

The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Dacotah Bank.



The Groton Softball Team held fan appreciation night Thursday. The following were recognized for their hard work to the organization and support of the first year of Groton Softball: Alexa Sperry, Jackie Iverson, Jordan Kampa and Shelby Edwards. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Groton Legion Auxiliary May Meeting

The Groton Legion Auxiliary met on Monday, May 4, 2026. President Tami Zimney presided.

A number of the winners for the Americanism Essay and Poem Contest read their work: Freddy Cole, Aryanne Cutler, Amara Freeland, Ryan Hanson, Cora Kotzer, Laken Kurth, Nolan Rose, Katerina Simunek, and Asher Warrington. We appreciate the students, parents, and grandparents who attended. Jerrie Vedvei introduced the students and thanked them for participating.

Jan Siebel reported on the Teacher Appreciation project. Meat and cheese, and veggie trays were taken to the high school and the elementary school.

The state convention will be held in Aberdeen on June 18-20. The Groton unit will help with table decorations. We will have four voting delegates at the convention: Jan Siebel, Deb McKiver, Tami Zimney, and Lori Giedt.

Samantha Oswald reported that Poppy Day will be May 22.

Wendy Cooper mentioned that the Salad Buffet will be on Wednesday, July 8, from 11am-1 pm. The cost will be \$10.00 per person.

Tami Zimney reported that flags and flowers will be placed at Groton Union Cemetery on Monday, May 18, at 5:00 pm. Wendy and Tami will get in touch with Commander Doug Hamilton about the Memorial Day lunch. The meal will be served after the ceremony at the Groton cemetery on Monday, May 25.

Grocery receipts were turned in to Wendy. They will be added and given to the school.

The election of officers was as follows: President Jan Siebel; Treasurer Lori Giedt; 1st Vice President Samantha Oswald, one year remaining; and Secretary Protem Wendy Cooper. Committee assignments were agreed upon for the year.

A prayer for peace was said, and the meeting adjourned.

The next meeting will be on Tuesday, September 8, at 6 pm. Deb and Tami will serve lunch.

HELP
Doris Strom
CELEBRATE HER
101st
BIRTHDAY

ON MAY 13.

COME GROTON
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for cake at 2pm

OR SEND HER
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Doris Strom, Avantara
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GROTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT #06-6

School Board Meeting

May 12, 2026 – 7:00 AM – GHS Conference Room

AGENDA:

1. Call to Order with members present. Approve agenda as proposed or amended.

POTENTIAL CONFLICTS DISCLOSURE PURSUANT SDCL 23-3

CONSENT AGENDA:

1. Approve of minutes of April 13, 2026 school board meeting as drafted.
2. Approve of April 2026 Financial Report, Custodial Accounts, and Investments.
3. Approve of April 2026 District bills for payment.
4. Approve of April 2026 School Lunch Report.
5. Approve of April 2026 School Transportation Report.
6. Authorize the Business Manager to pay district bills up to \$75,000 in advance, using the custodial advance payment account to be approved by the board for reimbursement at the following regular board meeting.
7. Approve Open Enrollments #27-02, #27-03, #27-04, #27-05, #27-06, #27-07, #27-08, #27-09,

OLD/CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. Open Forum for Public Participation...in accordance with Board Policy & Guidelines.
2. Discussion regarding ongoing Facilities Master Planning process.
3. Administrative Reports: (a) Superintendent's Report; (b) Principal's Reports; (c) Business Manager Report

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Review Preliminary FY2027 District Budget
2. Approve Summer Employment Agreements:
 - a. Connect 4Ed Summer School
 - b. Special Education Extended School Year (ESY)
 - c. Summer Maintenance
3. Cast SDHSAA Ballots
 - a. Amendment No. 1
 - b. Amendment No. 2
 - c. Amendment No. 3
 - d. Division IV Representative
4. Approve resignation of Eric Swenson, MS Math Teacher, effective at the end of the 2025-2026 school year.
5. Approve retirement of Barb Hoops, Paraprofessional, effective at the end of the 2025-2026 school year.
6. Approve retirement of Scott Thorson, HS Social Studies Teacher, effective at the end of the 2025-2026 school year.
7. Approve hiring Eric Swenson, HS Industrial Technology Teacher, for the 2026-2027 school year.
8. Approve hiring Shane Macomber, Maintenance Team Member, effective April 29, 2026.
9. Approve hiring Jordan Carson, Head Football Coach, for the 2026-2027 school year.

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Military panelists say lack of 'disqualifying' evidence justifies Wounded Knee Massacre medals

Findings in previously unreleased report stand in contrast to historical sources describing questionable soldier conduct

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

Three military members of a panel that reviewed Medals of Honor awarded to soldiers who were at the 1890 Wounded Knee Massacre concluded there was no evidence of disqualifying conduct by the honorees, despite scholarly research to the contrary.

Those and other details are in a previously unreleased report from the panel obtained by South Dakota Searchlight.

"While the actions of leadership were suspect, circumstances chaotic, and non-combatants tragically killed," wrote the panel's chairman, a retired Army lieutenant general, "three of the five panel members believe that individual soldiers distinguished themselves in action and found no disqualifying information."

The massacre occurred on Dec. 29, 1890, near Wounded Knee Creek in southwestern South Dakota, where a large group of Lakota people camped while traveling to the Pine Ridge Agency. They were surrounded by hundreds of Army soldiers. A shot rang out while the soldiers were attempting to disarm the camp — some sources say it was the result of a struggle with an armed Lakota man — and the soldiers opened fire.

Fewer than 40 soldiers were killed (some by friendly fire, according to historians), while estimates of Lakota deaths ran from 200 to 300 or more, including men, women and children. After some of the bodies froze on the ground for several days, a military-led burial party placed them in a mass grave.

One hundred years later in 1990, Congress passed a resolution expressing "deep regret" for the massacre. But the medals awarded to soldiers have never been rescinded.

Panel's views slow to emerge

The Department of Defense created a panel to review the medals during the Biden administration in 2024, but never announced or published the panel's findings or recommendations. At the time, the department said about 20 soldiers had received a Medal of Honor for their actions during the massacre. Historians have said the records associated with some of the medals are incomplete or unclear.

President Donald Trump's defense secretary, Pete Hegseth, announced in a September social media video that the medals will not be rescinded. He called the massacre a "battle" and said the soldiers "deserve those medals." He cited the panel's work as justification and held a copy of the panel's report in the video,



Plastic flowers and American flags are placed atop graves at the Wounded Knee Memorial and cemetery June 30, 2024, on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. (Photo by Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)

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but the department did not immediately release the report.

The five-member panel included two retired Army veterans and one Army Medal of Honor recipient. Their names were redacted in most references in the report, but retired Lt. Gen. Thomas James' name does appear in one portion of the document.

The panel also included two Department of the Interior officials: Robert T. Anderson and Wizipan Little Elk Garriott, whose names are not redacted in the report. Garriott, a member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe in South Dakota, told Searchlight he was not asked if his name should be redacted, "and we all operated under the assumption that our names wouldn't be redacted." Garriott left the department when the Biden administration ended.

'The totality of the circumstances'

The report aligns with what Garriott previously told Searchlight shortly after Hegseth announced the medals will not be rescinded. Garriott said then that the panel's majority military members focused narrowly on whether individual soldiers could be tied by evidence to specific misdeeds, rather than the broader question of whether any medals should be awarded for a massacre.

Interior Department panelist Robert Anderson's written assessment in the report argued that "actions do not occur in a context separate from the actions of the whole." He wrote that the Army's actions at Wounded Knee were not honorable and that awarding medals to any soldier who took part in the massacre was unmerited, regardless of any individual soldier's role.

Garriott wrote in the report that the massacre was "one of the most shameful moments in the nation's history" and recommended rescinding the medals, apologizing to the Lakota nation and descendants, and creating another panel to work with Lakota people on healing.

"People living under the banner of peace — infants, children, women, and elders — were killed indiscriminately," he wrote.

Garriott said this week in an interview with Searchlight that the panel was "not given nearly enough time" to complete a thorough review. The panel was created in July 2024 and was given a deadline in October of that year to file a report.

"Only three of the five individuals took the time to go and do a thorough review of the site and to meet with descendants and survivors," he said.

Garriott said that when the panel was created, "we were directed to look at the totality of the circumstances and the treaties," but the review itself "did not."

Report findings

The report says 19 soldiers received the Medal of Honor. The panel's retired military chairperson wrote in the report's introduction that the review's scope was limited to each "awardee's individual actions during the specific engagement," and that the panel answered two questions: whether each soldier distinguished himself, and whether each performed individual actions violating the "law of war." The report says the panel was directed to conduct its review through the lens of standards, laws and regulations in effect when the medals were awarded.

The three military panelists concluded that all 19 soldiers distinguished themselves in action and that none performed individual actions that violated the rules under the law of war.

Anderson and Garriott concluded that none of the 19 soldiers distinguished themselves, and there was inadequate information to determine whether 18 of the 19 had committed individual law-of-war violations.

One of the military panelists wrote in the report that the panel had "discovered no evidence" that any of the 19 recipients were involved in the deliberate wounding or killing of noncombatants or other disqualifying conduct.

"I do not minimize the non-combatant loss of life," the military panelist wrote. "This loss is a tragedy and rightfully outrages us. After years of service in combat zones, I know firsthand that there are often very bad actions (Law of War violations, loss of life, loss of non-combatant lives) and very positive actions (bravery, humanitarian action, acts of kindness and empathy) that occur on the same battlefield."

The same panelist wrote that an artificial intelligence-assisted review of more than 3,000 pages of docu-

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ments "did not reveal any evidence of disqualifying behavior either."

Historical references to soldier conduct

A 2024 law review article by Dwight S. Mears was listed among the materials reviewed by the panel. Mears is an Army veteran with a doctorate in history.

In that article, Mears identified potential grounds for rescinding medals awarded to individual soldiers, including Paul H. Weinert and Harry L. Hawthorne, who were among the 19 ultimately reviewed by the panel.

"Weinert later attested that he continued firing his M1875 Hotchkiss mountain gun into the ravine full of commingled combatants and noncombatants even after being directed by an officer 'to come back' and that he 'expected a court-martial' for disobedience," Mears wrote. He added that Weinert "continued firing into the ravine until 'everything was quiet at the other end of the line.'"

Similarly, Mears wrote that Hawthorne was an artilleryman and platoon leader at Wounded Knee who earned a Medal of Honor in part for the "effect with which he handled and served his [artillery] guns in action against hostile Sioux Indians."

Mears wrote that Hawthorne took offense to an editorial criticizing the firing of the M1875 Hotchkiss mountain guns after resistance had ceased.

"In his rebuttal," Mears wrote of Hawthorne, "he admitted that the mountain guns continued firing at Natives" and the firing continued "well after 'cease firing' had sounded, but he claimed that this was necessary because 'resistance had not ceased.'"

Mears' article did not argue that every Wounded Knee medal should automatically be rescinded. He warned against blanket revocation without review of individual conduct and wrote that some medals might survive a case-by-case review.

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

Steel beams headed underground in SD for 'largest science experiment ever attempted on U.S. soil'

BY: MEGHAN O'BRIEN

Dignitaries and scientists celebrated the next step Thursday toward what one official called the "largest science experiment ever attempted on U.S. soil."

Over the coming months, 6,000 steel beams will be moved nearly a mile underground to build infrastructure for the Deep Underground Neutrino Experiment within a former gold mine at Lead, in the Black Hills of western South Dakota. The steel beams come from the European Organization for Nuclear Research, known as CERN.

Neutrinos are elusive subatomic particles. Studying neutrinos could help scientists learn why matter exists, how black holes form, and if neutrinos are connected to dark matter or other undiscovered particles.

Better understanding of neutrinos could lead to innovations in fields like communication and healthcare.

"It will open the door to exploring new physics in domains previously out of reach, with a capacity to fundamentally reshape our understanding of the laws of nature," said Darío Gil, U.S. Department of Energy undersecretary for science.

What's learned in the experiment "will ripple far beyond the laboratory, strengthening industries and improving lives in ways we're only beginning to envision," Gil said.

The Sanford Underground Research Facility in Lead, which houses the equipment headed underground, and the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory in Batavia, Illinois, are collaborating in the experiment.

The plan is to shoot a beam of neutrinos through the earth from Fermilab to the detectors in South Dakota — an 800-mile trip. That will allow scientists to study how neutrinos change as they travel long

distances. The deep underground location protects the experiment from cosmic radiation.

Five-story-tall detectors will be built underground at Lead in what will be called the Long-Baseline Neutrino Facility. The detectors will use 17,000 tons of liquid argon to catch the neutrinos. The liquid argon needs to be kept cold, so the detectors will be housed inside an insulating container, called a cryostat.

The Sanford facility is in the former Homestake Mine, which was once the largest and deepest gold mine in North America. It closed in 2001, and in the years that followed, then-Gov. Mike Rounds supported the conversion of a portion of the mine into the Sanford Underground Research Facility.

Rounds, now a U.S. senator, spoke at Thursday's ceremony.

"Science and research, healthcare, quantum physics all go together," Rounds said. "But it all starts someplace with people having an idea, and having a place to see whether or not their idea holds fruit."

Crews at the facility finalized cavern excavations in 2024, which allowed for the team to start building infrastructure.

The U.S. Department of Energy, which includes Fermilab, has estimated the total cost of the experiment to be more than \$3 billion. Dozens of countries and more than 1,400 scientists are involved in the project.

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.



A crew positions a steel beam for the Deep Underground Neutrino Experiment at the Sanford Underground Research Facility in Lead, South Dakota. (Courtesy of Matt Kapust/Sanford Underground Research Facility)

Western North Dakota readies for historic Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library opening

BY: MICHAEL ACHTERLING

MEDORA, N.D. – Increased law enforcement, national park staff and 1,776 drones will arrive in Medora over the next two months to ensure the opening of the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library is a historic Fourth of July.

During a news conference Wednesday outside the library, Gov. Kelly Armstrong said the opening is expected to be part of one of the most important celebrations honoring the history of the United States.

"North Dakota will be playing a meaningful role in marking the 250th anniversary of America's independence," Armstrong said.

Robbie Lauf, executive director of the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library, said the Fourth of July will celebrate the American West along with the story of Theodore Roosevelt's life and how it was changed in the Badlands of North Dakota following the death of his wife and his mother in 1884.

"They'll experience what we've been building for years, the story of a man who arrived in the Badlands a broken man and left transformed," Lauf said. "It's the story of how our region shaped one of the most consequential lives this country has ever had."

Lauf said tickets for the July 4 grand opening are sold out, but tickets are available for the following weeks. Hotel rooms in Medora are also sold out, but rooms may be available in neighboring communities. Available hotel rooms in Dickinson are priced at \$400 to \$500 a night July 3-5, according to travel web-

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Robbie Lauf, executive director of the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library, speaks during a news conference outside the library in Medora on May 6, 2026. (Photo by Michael Achterling/North Dakota Monitor)

sites. Campground space is still available, Lauf said.

Members of Theodore Roosevelt's family are planning on camping in the park over the Fourth of July, Lauf said. Historian Doris Kearns Goodwin, a member of the library foundation's board, and Interior Secretary Doug Burgum are among those expected to attend the grand opening, he added.

When asked about a visit to the library by President Donald Trump, Lauf said he's received "positive inclinations on a potential visit from the president."

Lauf said 1,776 drones will lift off the library grounds on opening night and illustrate the life story of Roosevelt from rancher to conservationist to how he shaped America's second century.

"The show will be broadcast across the country as part of the nation's 250th anniversary coverage," he said. "You can imagine the world's eyes will be on the

Badlands."

Construction on the exterior structure is expected to wrap up in early June with exhibits and other interior finishes expected to be completed throughout June in the lead-up to opening week, Lauf said.

The library is preparing for 2,600 ticketed visitors per day during the first weeks the library is open to the public.

The North Dakota Department of Transportation is finishing an expansion and resurfacing project on Pacific Avenue and other intersections in downtown Medora ahead of the library opening.

Former Medora Mayor Doug Ellison, owner of Western Edge Books, Artwork and Music, said the community is excited for the library with hopes that it will turn the summer tourist town into a more year-round attraction. However, he added the additional road projects in town may have been a little over the top and unnecessary.

"Medora is changing, and a lot of comments that I'm hearing from visitors are, 'We like the old Medora,'" Ellison said.

The national park will have free admission on July 3-5 to add to the area's festivities, said Rachel Daniels, superintendent of Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

Extra park rangers, portable toilets and other staff will be on park grounds to better care for the influx of visitors, she said.

This will be the first tourist season that the South Unit's 36-mile loop is fully open after being under construction for more than two years. In addition, the park is going to open a new trail that weekend that connects Chimney Park with the national park, Daniels said.

Armstrong said he activated the state's emergency operations plan to allow state agencies to better coordinate and respond to local authorities for their emerging needs over what is expected to be a busy summer in Medora and across the state.

Lt. Jenna Clawson Huibregtse, public information officer for the North Dakota Highway Patrol, said additional Highway Patrol officers will be stationed in western North Dakota before and after the grand opening to handle the anticipated increased traffic in the area.

"We'll have troopers out on the interstate, out in rural areas, helping the sheriff's office and helping with what parking will look like," Clawson Huibregtse said. "We know Medora will fill up quickly and we are

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working on finalizing some plans on where off-site parking and shuttling can be.”

Sara Otte Coleman, director of the tourism and marketing division for the Department of Commerce, said the presidential library is expected to have a long-term impact on tourism.

“This will be a national, cultural attraction that will attract people from throughout the world to deepen their understanding of Theodore Roosevelt’s legacy, his connection to North Dakota, and help spur year-round visitation to North Dakota,” Otte Coleman said.

North Dakota Monitor reporter Michael Achterling can be reached at machterling@northdakotamonitor.com.

This story was originally produced by North Dakota Monitor, which is part of States Newsroom, a nonprofit news network which includes South Dakota Searchlight, and is supported by grants and a coalition of donors as a 501c(3) public charity.

Michael Achterling is a reporter based in Bismarck. He recently worked as digital editor and city government reporter for the Detroit Lakes Tribune in Minnesota and as news director for KDLM/KRCQ/KBOT, a part of Leighton Broadcasting. You can reach him at machterling@northdakotamonitor.com.

Another court ruling blocks Trump’s wide-ranging tariffs

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump’s trade agenda faced another major setback Thursday when the U.S. Court of International Trade handed a win to two small businesses and the state of Washington after they challenged the president’s 10% global tariffs, imposed after the U.S. Supreme Court struck down his previous emergency tariff regime.

In a 2-1 decision, the court granted a permanent injunction to a Florida-based toy manufacturer and a New York-based spice importer that sued the Trump administration in March, alleging the new tariffs would harm their businesses.

The court also granted relief to Washington state, which was among nearly two dozen states that sued over the tariffs.

Tariff ‘bazooka’

Jay Foreman, CEO of toy company Basic Fun!, said he was “extremely excited” upon learning the decision.

“It takes a lot of guts and chutzpah for small companies like us and Burlap and Barrel to put ourselves out on the line to fight what we feel is injustice and unfair,” he said during a virtual press conference, referring to the other company named in the lawsuit, an online spice retailer.

“Certainly, there’s a place for tariffs on strategic products that make sense to protect in this country ... but in cases across the board, to approach this situation with a bazooka instead of a fine-tooth comb makes no sense, and it hurts companies like ours, hurts companies like Burlap and Barrel, hurts the consumer,” Foreman said Thursday evening.

Basic Fun! is behind popular toys, including Tonka Trucks and Care Bears.



Shipping cranes stand above container ships loaded with shipping containers at the Port of Los Angeles on Feb. 20, 2026 in Los Angeles, California. The U.S. Court of International Trade on May 7, 2026, handed a win to small businesses that challenged the president’s blanket Section 122 tariffs. (Photo by Mario Tama/Getty Images)

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Foreman said he expects imports that were subject to the tariffs to arrive as soon as tomorrow.

"I'm already emailing my customs broker to make sure they're on it," he said.

The ruling only applies to the plaintiffs Basic Fun! and the online spice retailer Burlap and Barrel, and does not give universal relief to all businesses that must pay the blanket 10% tax on imports.

Jeffrey Schwab, who argued the case on behalf of the clients for the Liberty Justice Center, said the nonprofit advocacy law firm has been "wrestling" with what the decision means for other businesses that are paying the import tax.

"It's not entirely clear, and probably will depend on what happens now if the government appeals. If the government seeks a stay that could have an effect. Certainly, I think companies will probably want to file (legal challenges), being concerned about making sure that the tariffs stop for them, and possibly ensuring that they get a refund too," Schwab said.

Win for Washington state

The ruling also applies to Washington state as an importer subject to the tariffs, according to the ruling. Washington Attorney General Nick Brown called the ruling "a win for both affordability and the rule of law."

"It's American consumers and businesses that have ultimately paid for the president's illegal tariff campaign," he said in a statement. "The court's order will encourage more parties to challenge this illegal executive overreach."

The judges ruled other states that sued did not have standing because they were "non-importers." Among them were Arizona, Colorado, Kentucky, Maine, Michigan, New Jersey, Minnesota, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Virginia and Wisconsin.

Trump ordered the fresh round of tariffs on Feb. 20, the same day the U.S. Supreme Court ruled, in a 6-3 opinion, that his initial global tariffs under the 1977 International Economic Emergency Powers Act, or IEEPA, exceeded his presidential authority.

Following the Supreme Court loss, Trump's alternative tariffs, imposed under Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974, went into effect on Feb. 24.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection is now in the legally mandated process of refunding businesses and importers who paid a collective \$166 billion in IEEPA tariffs.

The White House did not immediately respond to a message seeking comment.

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

Trump-appointed FEMA panel urges states should take the lead in disaster recovery

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — State governments should shoulder more of the cost and responsibility for natural disaster recovery, according to a report released Thursday by the Federal Emergency Management Agency review council.

The board, created by President Donald Trump last year, called on Congress and the administration to make several major changes, including offloading the National Flood Insurance Program to the private insurance market.

Robert Fenton, regional administrator for FEMA Region 9 and a member of the review council, said the flood insurance program is "financially unstable" and in considerable debt.

"We came away with a number of recommendations that we want to put forward — primarily that focuses on a shift from a federally managed flood insurance program back to the private sector and allowing the private sector to take on a bigger role within the market," he said. "And I think that's going to help because it puts the states, who are statutorily responsible for regulating insurance, back into a critical role."

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Fenton said the review council recommended lawmakers create a program to transfer NFIP policies, which he noted are a requirement for many homeowners, to the private sector.

But there will be some extra work to do on the 5% of NFIP policies he said are categorized as "repetitive loss" and are "responsible for 30% to 40% of the payouts that we do through our flood insurance program."

"So leveraging our other programs, like our mitigation program," Fenton said. "How do we buy out those homes and move them out of those risk areas? Or how do we build the infrastructure around them to better protect them and have those not be areas that have repetitive damage?"

White House spokeswoman Abigail Jackson wrote in a statement that Trump "looks forward to reviewing the recommendations put forth by the FEMA Review Council."

"The President remains committed to getting resources to communities in need while also working with states to ensure they invest in their own resilience before disaster strikes, making response less urgent and recovery less prolonged," Jackson added.

Trump has said throughout his second term that he wants to change how the federal government approaches natural disaster management and recovery.

"We want to wean off of FEMA and we want to bring it down to the state level," Trump said in June. "We're moving it back to the states so the governors can handle it. That's why they're governors. Now, if they can't handle it, they shouldn't be governor."



The Federal Emergency Management Agency, on Feb. 20, 2026. (Photo by Shauneen Miranda/States Newsroom)

Feds should be in 'supporting role'

Kevin Guthrie, executive director of the Florida Division of Emergency Management, said one of the review council's main recommendations is "to equip state, local, tribal, territories to lead disaster response with the federal government in a supporting role, not a supplanting role."

"We want FEMA to set the standard and then encourage creation of standards and then adoption of standards at the state, local, tribal, territorial level," he said.

Guthrie said during the public meeting where review council members outlined the recommendations in their 75-page report that "federal assistance should only be reserved for truly significant events that exceed state, local, tribal, territorial capacity and capability."

The federal government, he said, needs to update the methodology it uses to determine when a natural disaster or other major event has overwhelmed a community's ability to recover.

"Many, many states are going to say, 'I hit a million dollars, I can request the threshold,' regardless if it's actually broken the back of that local or state government," Guthrie said. "They're going to do it because they can. And again, that's what we're talking about. We need to realign that."

'Empowering the states'

Former Mississippi Gov. Phil Bryant said "nothing can be more important than empowering the states to take on this responsibility," though he added that individuals need to prepare for natural disasters as well.

"I remember as a child when people had their own fallout shelters in their backyards," he said. "If they didn't, they knew where the closest fallout shelter was. We took responsibility for food and water and to be able to respond to those disasters."

Fenton said the review council believes FEMA's post-disaster mitigation program should be turned over to state governments.

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"Let the state manage this program by providing them the resources and an architecture that will ensure that priorities are naturally aligned and that some of the complexities of environmental review and some of the other reviews are done locally," he said.

Guthrie said FEMA should also look for ways to speed up federal assistance by making it less complex for people whose homes are deemed uninhabitable following a disaster. The federal government should also allow state, local, territorial, or tribal governments to have more of a say on emergency housing.

"Let's get back to some common-sense, state-managed solutions," he said.

Another suggestion from the board calls on the administration and lawmakers to better integrate private sector, faith-based and nonprofit organizations that regularly play a role in natural disaster response and recovery.

"(The) private sector is responsible for so much in disasters, and they own so much of the infrastructure or key capabilities that we depend on," Fenton said. "And so we need to be able to leverage those retailers, those small businesses and we need to give them a way to integrate with these events."

Congressional action

Many of the recommendations from the review council will need to run through Congress, where work overhauling FEMA began last year.

The House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee voted 57-3 in September to approve a bill that would make several changes to the FEMA, including removing it from the Department of Homeland Security and making the agency its own Cabinet-level department.

The legislation would create one application for federal natural disaster assistance from FEMA, the Department of Agriculture, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Small Business Administration.

It would also give local and state governments more flexibility in deciding which types of emergency housing best meet the needs of their residents following different natural disasters.

House Republican leaders have yet to bring the bipartisan bill to the floor for a vote.

Disaster survivors

On a call organized by disaster relief advocacy group Organizing Resilience, disaster survivors said the council did well at identifying problems with the current infrastructure, but that the recommendations appeared to come up short.

"Our concern for disaster survivors is that some of the recommended changes may not reflect what the council heard from survivors about what they need," Maddie Sloan, the director of disaster recovery at the social justice nonprofit Texas Appleseed, said on the call shortly after the report was published.

FEMA would be unable to act on many of the recommendations on its own without congressional approval, Sloan said, while many of the "transformative actions" the agency has taken over the past 18 months have significantly weakened disaster response.

The changes shifted responsibility from the federal agency to states, tribes, local government and individuals, she said. Thursday's recommendations would only worsen that problem.

"Survivors absolutely want a more streamlined system, and they need help to get to them faster," Sloan said. "But these recommendations, particularly around individual assistance, in fact slash the help that's available to individual survivors."

One such change, allowing only relief for survivors whose homes are uninhabitable, means that costs related to auto repair or replacement, medical care or funerals cannot be covered, Sloan said.

Shifting responsibility to state and local governments, without any federal guarantee of repayment, would leave more survivors without access to critical funds, Sloan and other panelists said.

Michael McLemore, an organizer in St. Louis and a survivor of the tornado there last year, said the federal response was marked by "abdication responsibility, playing political games and shifting the burdens of states and ... cities."

It took the agency nearly eight months to even start obligating funds, leaving the city to shoulder the cost in the meantime, McLemore said.

The panel called for passage of the bipartisan FEMA bill, sponsored by Missouri Republican Sam Graves and Washington Democrat Rick Larsen, along with 68 other cosponsors, that would take FEMA out of DHS management and reestablish it as an independent agency.

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.

Report details wide disparity between Native American and white health in South Dakota

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER

The health disparity between Native American and white South Dakotans is among the largest racial or ethnic health gaps in the nation, according to a new report from a foundation that advocates for equitable healthcare.

Native Americans in South Dakota die prematurely from avoidable causes at a rate of 1,089 deaths per 100,000 people, which is the highest rate of any racial or ethnic group in the nation, according to the 2026 State Health Disparities Report from the Commonwealth Fund.

That's five times the rate of white South Dakotans. Preventable causes include infectious diseases, treatable conditions and accidents such as vehicle crashes and drug overdoses.

State data shows half of Native Americans in South Dakota die before age 58. The median age of death for white South Dakotans is 80.

Health disparities in SD are 'completely addressable,' organization leader says

The report analyzes 2023–2024 data on health care access, quality, use of services and outcomes across racial and ethnic groups in all 50 states and Washington D.C. South Dakota ranked last for Native American health among 21 states with sufficient Native American population data.

Even when income, insurance and access are similar, disparities persist, said Commonwealth Fund President Joseph Betancourt.

"As a primary care physician, I know what happens when care is out of reach: Conditions that are manageable become crises, and people have poor health outcomes and ultimately live shorter lives. This is unacceptable and completely addressable," Betancourt said.

Native American health system performance in South Dakota ranked in the lowest percentile nationally. White South Dakotans experienced the best care in the state, scoring in the 79th percentile among all population groups nationally.

The report found states with stronger health systems also have smaller disparities and said targeted policy changes could help, including:



The Indian Health Service office in Wagner, South Dakota. A new report says the health disparity between Native American and white South Dakotans is among the largest racial or ethnic health gaps in the nation. (Photo by John Hult/

South Dakota Searchlight)

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Funding housing, early childhood education and food access programs.

Ensuring affordable, accessible coverage.

Strengthening primary care in underserved communities.

Protecting preventative services.

Ensuring equitable use of digital health tools and artificial intelligence.

Tribal-managed Medicaid model and targeted programs could be 'quite effective'

About 38% of Native Americans in South Dakota are uninsured — a key driver of disparities.

"Coverage is not the only thing that matters, but it is really the first thing that matters," said Commonwealth Fund Senior Scholar Sara Collins, adding that states that expanded Medicaid have improved access. South Dakota voters approved expansion in 2022. Tribal members are exempt from federal Medicaid work requirements.

South Dakota officials, lawmakers and tribal leaders will launch an Indian Medicaid Managed Care Task Force later this year, which tribal officials hope will improve outcomes and efficiencies for tribal members.

In a managed care model, tribes could contract with the state of South Dakota to direct federal Medicaid dollars into a pool of funds for healthcare. An entity of the tribes' choosing could negotiate costs with off-reservation providers and coordinate care — including preventative care or incentives for healthy habits — for tribal members who seek care on or off tribal land.

"Focused actions like that can really improve disparities we see across the country," Collins said.

David Radley, senior scientist on the report, said efforts to address health outcomes and access among Native Americans in Oklahoma have "made a difference." Tribal governments there have invested heavily in clinics, hospitals and medical education.

Betancourt said progress in South Dakota will require high quality care and coverage to be "woven together."

Radley added that health systems in rural states must be "built around rural places" to address coverage gaps and workforce shortages, including expanding telemedicine, improving licensing, and training more community health workers.

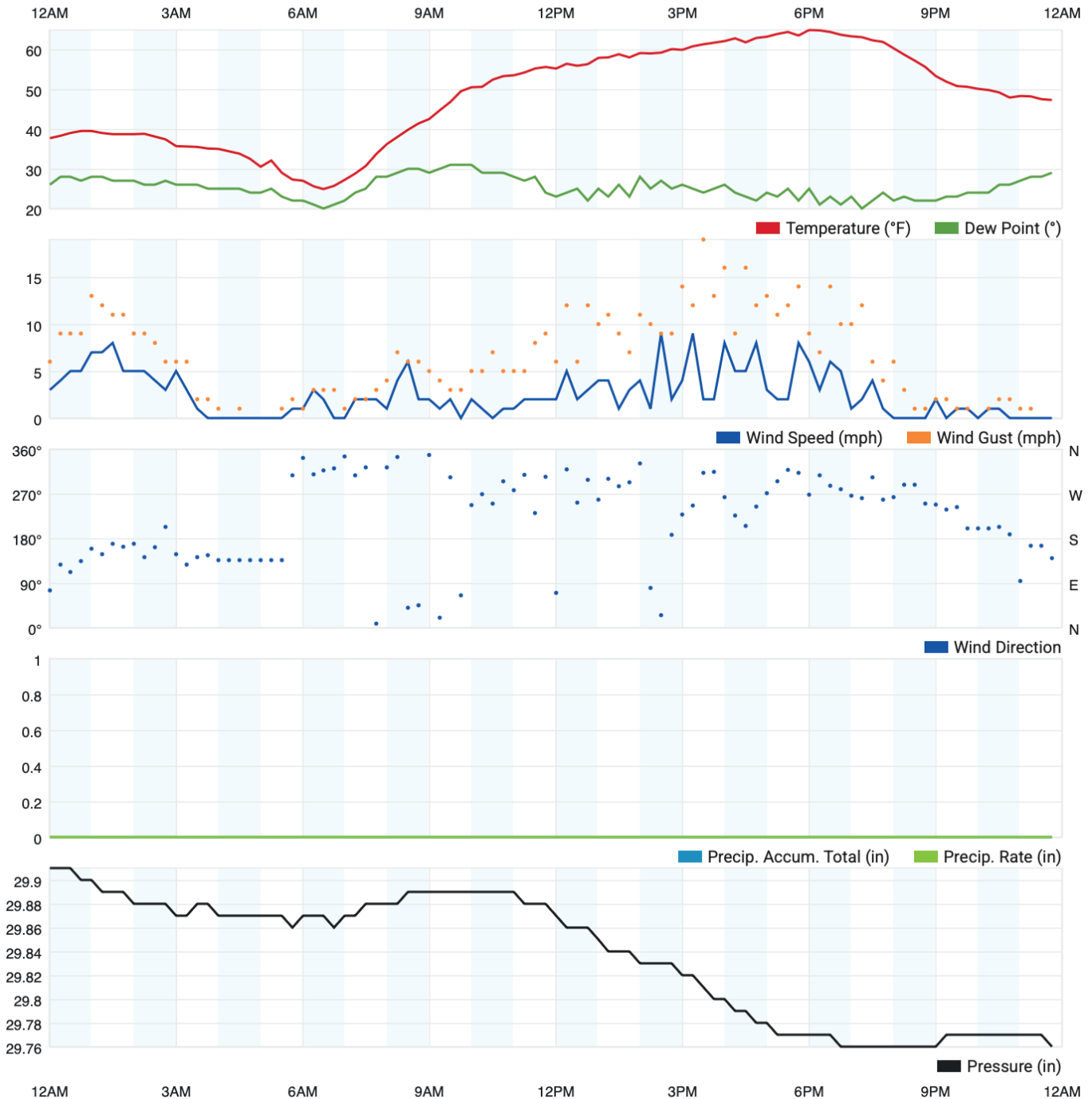
Makenzie Huber is a lifelong South Dakotan who regularly reports on the intersection of politics and policy with health, education, social services and Indigenous affairs. Her work with South Dakota Searchlight earned her the title of South Dakota's Outstanding Young Journalist in 2024, and she was a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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

May 7, 2026



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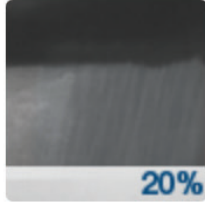
Today



High: 71 °F

Mostly Sunny
then Sunny
and Breezy

Tonight



Low: 40 °F

Slight Chance
Showers

Saturday



High: 61 °F

Mostly Sunny

Saturday Night



Low: 32 °F

Mostly Cloudy
then Frost

Sunday



High: 62 °F

Frost then
Sunny

2026 Growing Season Has Begun!

National Weather Service



Central and Northeast SD and West Central MN

The National Weather Service in Aberdeen, South Dakota will now begin issuing watches, warnings, and advisories for frost and freeze conditions.

Freeze watches and warnings are issued when temperatures are expected to drop below 32 degrees.

Frost advisories are issued when temperatures are forecast to fall between 33 and 36 degrees.

The local growing season typically runs from mid May through mid October.

May 8, 2026 3:42 AM CDT

weather.gov/aberdeen

The National Weather Service in Aberdeen, SD will begin issuing freeze warnings and frost advisories for the 2026 growing season which usually extends from the middle of May through the middle of October.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 65 °F at 5:58 PM

Low Temp: 25 °F at 6:30 AM

Wind: 19 mph at 3:22 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 105 in 1934

Record Low: 22 in 1945

Average High: 67

Average Low: 41

Average Precip in May.: .87

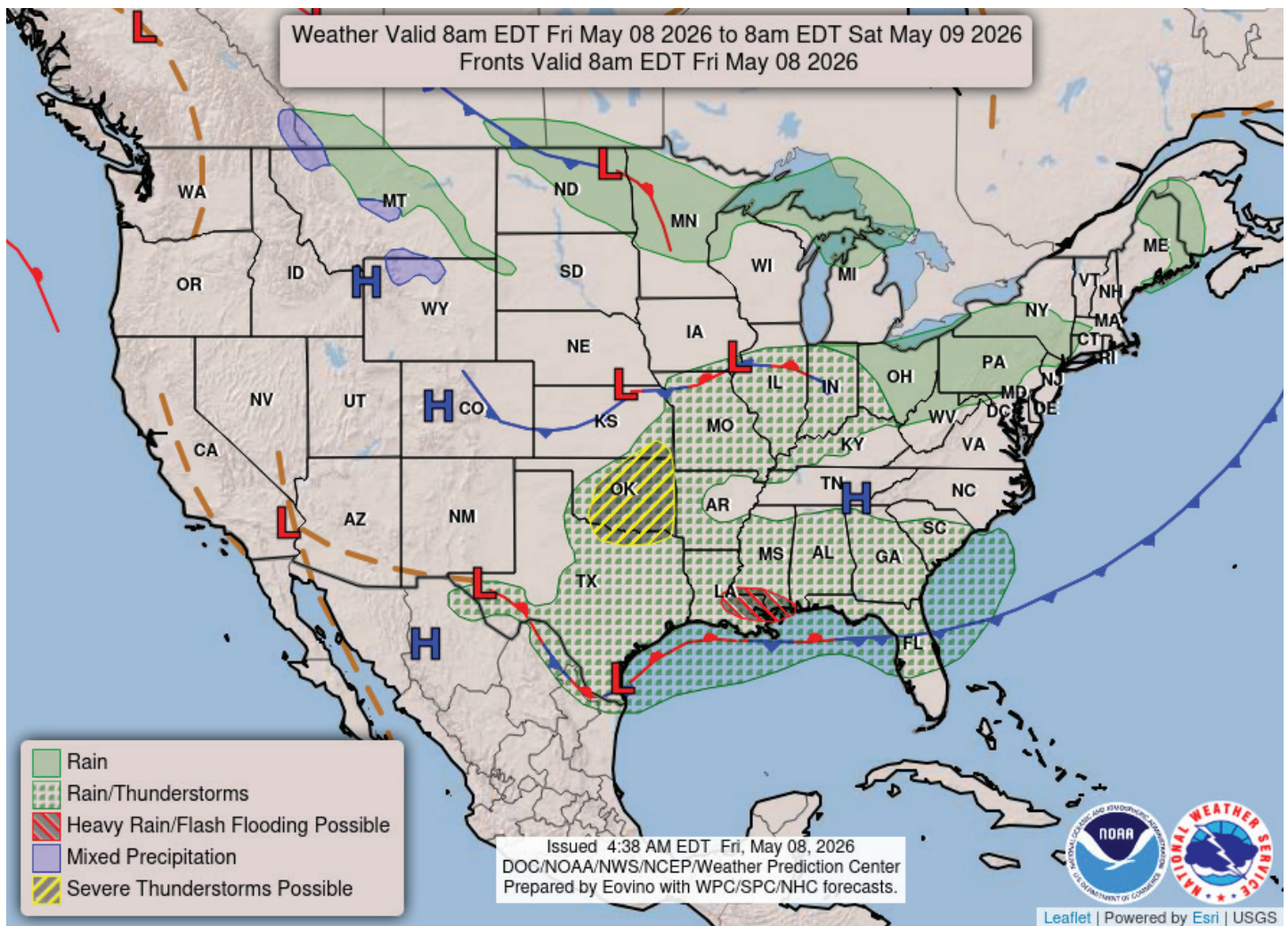
Precip to date in May.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 4.84

Precip Year to Date: 3.12

Sunset Tonight: 8:47 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:09 am



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Today in Weather History

May 8th, 1934: Pierre recorded its earliest 100 degrees when the high temperature reached 103 degrees. Mobridge also reached 103 degrees, the earliest yearly date for the city.

May 8th, 1965: The strongest tornado recorded in South Dakota tracked across eastern Tripp County. It was part of a more significant tornado outbreak in Nebraska and South Dakota during the afternoon through late evening hours.

May 8th, 1986: Thunderstorms produced two to four inches of torrential rainfall over much of central and eastern South Dakota. The heavy rains caused extensive flooding, with Walworth and Potter Counties reporting the most damage. In those counties, most roads were underwater. Several bridges and roads were also washed out in that area. The heavy rain washed out the dam at Lake Byre in Lyman County, which produced water waist-deep in Kennebec. The city of Kennebec lost its sole water source when the dam broke. Cow Creek in Lyman County also flooded and broke a part of a dam, causing minor property damage. The rain continued to fall into the morning hours on the 9th. Some two-day rainfall totals include 4.33 inches in Kennebec, 4.21 in Shelby, 3.91 at 4 miles west of Mellette, 3.30 in Gettysburg, 3.06 in Blunt, 2.99 in Eureka, 2.75 at 2 NNW of Mobridge; 2.70 inches 2 miles south of Ashton and in Britton.

May 8th, 1995: Flooding caused by snowmelt from two significant snowstorms in April continued throughout May. The flooding was aggravated by widespread torrential rains, especially from the early morning of the 8th through the early morning of the 9th. Rainfall amounts ranged from one to four inches. Some higher rainfall amounts include 5.50 inches at Wakpala, 4.50 at Chelsea and Leola, 4.20 at Ipswich, 4.10 inches 12 north of McLaughlin, and 3.91 inches at Aberdeen. A worker was injured near Claremont when the train derailed due to the weakening of the rail bed caused by high water. The extensive flooding continued to cause road damage and many road closures.

1784 — A deadly hailstorm in South Carolina hit the town of Winnsborough. The hailstones, measuring as much as nine inches in circumference, killed several persons, and a great number of sheep, lambs and birds. (David Ludlum)

1803 — A freak spring storm produced heavy snow from southern Indiana to New England. The storm made sleighing possible in Massachusetts, but also ruined shade trees in Philadelphia. (David Ludlum)

1981 — The Dallas/Fort Worth area experienced its worst hailstorm of record as baseball to grapefruit size hail, accompanied by 100 mph winds, caused nearly 200 million dollars damage. Hail accumulated eight inches deep at Cedar Hill TX. (The Weather Channel)

1987 — Twenty-eight cities in the northwestern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. The record high of 95 degrees at Redding CA was their fifth in a row, and the record high of 102 degrees at Hanover WA was just one degree shy of their record for May. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 — Thunderstorms in the Mississippi Valley spawned a total of 57 tornadoes, including 24 in Wisconsin, and a record 22 tornadoes in one day in Iowa. There were also more than 200 reports of large hail and damaging winds. Baseball size hail was reported at Terre Bonne Mo. At Rockford IL one person was temporarily trapped inside a portable toilet toppled by thunderstorm winds gusting to 80 mph. Fortunately, not a single person was killed in the "Mother's Day" tornado outbreak. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 — Twenty-one cities in the eastern U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date. Lows of 28 degrees at Asheville NC and 31 degrees at Greer SC were records for May. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 — Thunderstorms produced severe weather in northwestern and north central Kansas during the evening and night. Thunderstorms produced hail three inches in diameter at Brewster, and wind gusts to 92 mph south of Wakeeney. Thunderstorms over northwest Iowa deluged the town of Boone with five inches of rain flooding basements and leaving some areas under four feet of water. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)



The Character of Gossip

Speak words that honor God and strengthen the people He's placed in your path.

Romans 1:28-31: 28 And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,

29 being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips,

30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,

31 without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;

God wants our speech to be pleasing to Him. That leaves no room for idle talk or mean-spirited words, which are far from pleasant; we are to "put aside" such talk (Colossians 3:8).

In Romans 1, the apostle Paul is reminding believers that God has revealed Himself to all mankind and called us to be saints. In today's passage, gossip is one of a number of actions we should turn away from. Take a moment to read Paul's list in its entirety. Nothing there is appealing, of course, and every action named does great harm to us and our witness. Yet we are all guilty of committing them at times, aren't we? We choose to envy what others have, to lie, to be unloving, or to spread gossip.

In Ephesians 4:29, the apostle Paul describes how we should speak: "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear." Before you speak, ask yourself, Does this glorify God? Does this uplift and encourage others? And pray, requesting that the Lord guide your tongue so your words will point others to Him.

Gossip achieves no good in anyone's life, which is why the Lord warns against it. Instead, our words should build up, comfort, and encourage others.

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

Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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WINNING NUMBERS

MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

05.07.26

5 8 21 44 48 1

TOP PRIZE:

\$1,000,000/year

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 17 Mins 5 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

05.05.26

12 22 50 51 55 10

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$215,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 2 Mins 5 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

05.06.26

3 6 7 18 49 10

All Star Bonus: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$25,070,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 17 Mins 5 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

05.06.26

5 6 21 25 27

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$82,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 32 Mins 5 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

05.06.26

4 21 36 48 69 5

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 1 Mins 5 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

05.06.26

18 27 51 65 68 5

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$47,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 1 Mins 5 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

World shares fall and oil prices dip after attacks imperil the ceasefire with Iran

By CHAN HO-HIM AP Business Writer

HONG KONG (AP) — World shares retreated and oil prices fell back Friday as the fragile ceasefire with Iran was strained by missile and drone attacks that prompted U.S. retaliatory strikes on Iranian military facilities.

U.S. futures rose despite the latest flare up in the conflict. The future for the S&P 500 gained 0.5%, while that for the Dow Jones Industrial Average was up 0.3%.

Investors are closely watching the war situation as negotiations between the U.S. and Iran to end the war make limited progress. Tehran said Thursday that it was still examining the latest proposals from the U.S. for ending the war.

In early European trading, Britain's FTSE 100 fell 0.7% to 10,206.38. Germany's DAX shed 1% to 24,417.08, while France's CAC 40 dropped 0.8% to 8,134.92.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 fell 0.2% to 62,713.65 after closing the day before at an all-time high. Energy and technology giant SoftBank Group lost 4.6% after soaring 18% on Thursday.

Elsewhere in Asia, South Korea's Kospi edged 0.1% higher to 7,498.00, a record closing high, as gains for some tech shares offset wider losses.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng dropped 0.9% to 26,393.71 and the Shanghai Composite index was unchanged at 4,179.95.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 lost 1.5% to 8,744.40. Taiwan's Taixex fell 0.8%, while India's Sensex declined 0.5%.

Oil prices traded lower Friday after rising earlier in the day. Brent crude, the international standard, dipped 0.2% to \$99.84 per barrel. Brent crude was roughly \$70 a barrel before the Iran war began in late February.

Benchmark U.S. crude fell 0.5% to \$94.34 a barrel.

The U.S. Central Command said Thursday that it intercepted "unprovoked" Iranian attacks on Navy ships in the Strait of Hormuz, although no vessels were struck. But U.S. President Donald Trump told reporters the ceasefire with Iran was still intact.

The United Arab Emirates, a U.S. ally, said early Friday that its air defenses were "actively engaging" with a missile and drone attack.

Oil and fuel prices are expected to remain elevated for as long as the Strait of Hormuz, a key waterway for oil and gas transit, remains largely closed and a U.S. sea blockade on Iranian ports continues.

On Thursday, U.S. stocks pulled back from records. The benchmark S&P 500 fell 0.4% and the Dow industrials slipped 0.6%. The technology-heavy Nasdaq composite dropped 0.1% to 25,806.20.

Shares of Whirlpool sank 11.9% following weaker-than-expected results, and Shack Shack tumbled 28.3% likewise. McDonald's fell 0.1% after recording latest quarterly revenue that was better than what analysts had expected.

The U.S. dollar fell to 156.65 Japanese yen from 156.93 yen. The euro was trading at \$1.1772, up from \$1.1726.

Spain readies for evacuations as a hantavirus-hit cruise ship heads for the Canary Islands

By SUMAN NAISHADHAM Associated Press

MADRID (AP) — Spanish authorities on Friday were preparing to receive more than 140 passengers and crew members on board a hantavirus-stricken cruise ship headed for the Canary Islands, where health officials have said they will perform careful evacuations.

The vessel is expected to reach the Spanish island of Tenerife, off the coast of West Africa, on Saturday or Sunday.

"They will arrive at a completely isolated, cordoned-off area," said Virginia Barcones, Spain's head of emergency services, on Thursday.

The MV Hondius is a Dutch-flagged vessel and Dutch officials said Friday they were also in close contact with the ship's owner and authorities of countries whose citizens are on board.

The United States has agreed to send a plane to the Canary Islands to repatriate its 17 citizens from the cruise ship, Barcones said. The British government also said it will charter a plane to evacuate the nearly two dozen British citizens onboard.

At least three passengers have died, and several other people are sick. The World Health Organization considers the risk to the wider public from the outbreak as low, and on Friday, confirmed that a flight attendant on a plane briefly boarded by an infected cruise passenger had tested negative for hantavirus.

Her possible infection had raised concerns about the virus's potential transmissibility.

Hantavirus is usually spread by the inhalation of contaminated rodent droppings and isn't easily transmitted between people. Symptoms usually show between one and eight weeks after exposure.

None of the remaining passengers or crew on the ship is currently symptomatic, the Netherlands-based Oceanwide Expeditions cruise ship company said Thursday.

Countries scramble to track passengers who disembarked

Health authorities across four continents were continuing to track down and monitor passengers who disembarked the ship before the deadly outbreak was detected. They are also trying to trace others who may have come into contact with them since then.

On April 24, nearly two weeks after the first passenger had died on board, more than two dozen people from at least 12 different countries left the ship without contact tracing, the ship's operator and Dutch officials said Thursday.

It wasn't until May 2 that health authorities first confirmed hantavirus in a ship passenger, the World Health Organization said.

The KLM flight attendant who tested negative for the virus was working on a flight headed from Johannesburg to Amsterdam on April 25, and had later fallen ill. She was taken to an isolation ward at an Amsterdam hospital on Thursday.

The cruise passenger briefly aboard that flight — a Dutch woman whose husband died on the ship — was too ill to stay on the international flight to Europe and was taken off the plane in Johannesburg, where she died.

The Dutch public health service is currently undertaking contact tracing on passengers from the flight who had contact with the ill woman before she left the plane.

On Friday, U.K. health authorities said a third British national is suspected to have the hantavirus.

The U.K. Health Security Agency said the suspected case is on Tristan da Cunha, a remote British overseas territory in the south Atlantic where the ship stopped in April.

There was no word on the person's condition.

Two other Britons who were on the ship have been confirmed to have the virus. One is hospitalized in the Netherlands and the other in South Africa.

Authorities in South Africa are working to trace contacts of any passengers who previously got off the ship. They have focused mainly on an April 25 flight from the remote island of St. Helena in the South Atlantic to Johannesburg, the day after some passengers disembarked on the island.

Rubio set to meet Italy's Meloni as both sides seek to ease frictions over Iran war

By GIADA ZAMPANO Associated Press

ROME (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio opened his second day of fence-mending meetings Friday with talks scheduled with Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni in a bid to ease tensions over the war with Iran.

President Donald Trump's tariffs, his complaints about Europe's unwillingness to help the U.S. with the war and his attacks against Pope Leo XIV have fueled weeks of sharp disagreements over trade and defense cooperation between the two traditionally strong allies.

Rubio also met Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani for talks on the war in Iran and the wider Middle East, Ukraine, the transition in Venezuela and Cuba and Europe-U.S. relations, including the issue of critical minerals, Italy's Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

The trip began Thursday with Rubio's meeting Leo as part his broader effort to defuse trans-Atlantic tensions. Meloni and Tajani are expected to use the meetings to try to preserve Italy's strategic partnership with the U.S. while pushing back against Washington's pressure over the Iran conflict.

Trump has criticized both the pope and Italy's government for opposing the war. Meloni has called the conflict "illegal" and rebuked Trump's remarks about the pontiff as "unacceptable."

Trump responded by accusing Meloni of lacking courage and being "negative" on helping the U.S. with the war. Meloni had long been seen as one of Trump's top allies in Europe, but Trump has openly said their relationship has cooled.

Italy remains firmly opposed to Iran war

The U.S. has announced a decision to pull 5,000 military personnel from Germany and Trump has threatened to withdraw more troops from Italy and Spain over their stance on the war.

Italy, a key logistics hub for U.S. and allied operations in the Mediterranean, the Middle East and North Africa, could see its role affected if troop levels are reduced, raising concerns about NATO's posture in southern Europe.

Defense cooperation was already tested in late March, when Italy declined to allow U.S. bombers bound for the Middle East to land at Sigonella base in Sicily without parliamentary approval.

Italy's Constitution and treaties lay out the precise ways in which the bases can be used: They allow logistics and training operations within a NATO framework, but generally exclude direct offensive operations, such as bombing, unless specifically authorized.

Meloni and Tajani have repeatedly said Italy doesn't want to participate in the Iran conflict, and that if the U.S. seeks permission to use Italian bases for offensive purposes, any decision must be approved by Parliament, where opposition to the war is strong.

At stake for Rome are both its security partnership with Washington and the economic impact of the war. Meloni has warned the closure of the Strait of Hormuz is driving up energy costs and squeezing household purchasing power, while potential U.S. tariff threats have raised concerns for Italy's export-driven economy.

Meloni is reeling from a referendum defeat in March and facing domestic opposition to the war, complicating her position.

Since taking office in 2022, Meloni has sought to cast herself as a reliable U.S. ally and a bridge between Washington and Europe, but disputes over Iran and trade — and her recent political setback — have exposed the limits of the role.

An attempt to de-escalate at the Vatican

At the Vatican, Rubio held a 2½-hour visit Thursday that included meetings with Leo and Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin, discussing "efforts to achieve a durable peace in the Middle East" and other issues of mutual interest, according to the U.S. State Department.

Both sides stressed that Rubio's meetings with Leo and the Vatican's top diplomat underscored strong bilateral ties.

U.S. officials said the discussions highlighted "the strong relationship between the United States and the Holy See" and a shared commitment to promoting peace and human dignity.

Partial results show losses for Starmer's Labour and wins for Reform UK in local elections

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Partial results Friday from local elections in England showed big losses for Prime Minister Keir Starmer's governing Labour Party and gains for the hard-right party Reform U.K.

The votes are being widely seen as an unofficial referendum on Starmer, whose popularity has plummeted since he was elected less than two years ago as voters grew impatient for economic growth and dramatic change after 14 years of Conservative government.

Starmer said he took responsibility for the "very tough" results but would not resign.

"The voters have sent a message about the pace of change, how they want their lives improved," he said. "I was elected to meet those challenges, and I'm not going to walk away from those challenges and plunge the country into chaos."

Reform UK, led by the veteran nationalist politician Nigel Farage, won hundreds of local council seats in working-class areas in England's north such as Hartlepool that once were solid Labour turf, and also made gains from the Conservatives in areas like Havering in east London.

Farage said the results marked "an historic change in British politics."

The picture will change throughout Friday as results come in from the majority of local councils, including Labour strongholds like London. Votes will also be counted in contests for semiautonomous parliaments in Scotland and Wales.

Results reflect fragmentation of UK politics

Reform UK, running on an anti-establishment, anti-immigration message, also is eyeing breakthroughs in Scotland and Wales, though pro-independence nationalists the Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru are more likely to form governments in Edinburgh and Cardiff.

A Labour rout could trigger moves by restive party lawmakers to oust a leader who led them to power in July 2024. Even if Starmer survives for now, many analysts doubt he will lead the party into the next national election, which must be held by 2029.

Deputy Prime Minister David Lammy cautioned the party not to topple the prime minister, saying "you don't change the pilot during the flight."

Labour is losing votes to Reform UK on its right, and also to the the Green Party, whose popularity has risen under self-described "eco populist" leader Zack Polanski. The Greens hoped to increase their vote share and win hundreds of council seats in urban centers and university towns.

The Conservative Party is also expected to lose ground, with the centrist Liberal Democrats making some gains.

The results reflect a fragmentation of British politics after decades of domination by Labour and the Conservatives, and make the outcome of the country's next national election hard to predict.

John Curtice, professor of politics at the University of Strathclyde, said Britain is entering a new political era where "none of the parties are very big."

"Even Reform are probably not quite at 30% of the vote, so the fracturing of British politics is underlined by these results," he told the BBC.

Starmer's future is under threat

Starmer's popularity has plunged after repeated missteps and U-turns on policies such as welfare reform. His government has struggled to deliver promised economic growth, repair tattered public services and ease the cost of living — tasks made harder by the U.S.-Israeli war with Iran, which has choked off oil shipments through the Strait of Hormuz.

The prime minister has been further hurt by his disastrous decision to appoint Peter Mandelson, a scandal-tarnished friend of Jeffrey Epstein, as Britain's ambassador to Washington.

Poor election results could trigger a challenge from a high-profile rival such as Health Secretary Wes Streeting, former Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner or Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham. Alternately, Starmer could face pressure from the party to set a timetable for his departure after an orderly

leadership contest.

"I don't think Keir Starmer should survive these results," said Labour lawmaker Jonathan Brash, who represents Hartlepool in Parliament. "We have to be bolder, and we have to go further. And quite frankly, we need new leadership in order to achieve that."

David Attenborough, the excited but hushed voice of nature programs, turns 100

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The BBC is hosting a party for David Attenborough at the Royal Albert Hall. Cinemas are playing his nature films. Friends have spent weeks lavishing praise on the man and his work.

But the world's most famous wildlife presenter is likely to be uncomfortable with all the attention as he celebrates his 100th birthday on Friday, said Alastair Fothergill, the producer of some of Attenborough's most well-known documentaries.

"He's always been very clear to all of us that work with him: 'Remember, the animals are the stars, I'm not,'" Fothergill told The Associated Press. "So, yes, surprisingly for one of the most famous men on the planet, he doesn't like being famous at all."

Glorious gorillas

But Attenborough has had to accept the accolades this week as scientists, politicians and conservationists celebrated the man who has brought frolicking gorillas, breaching whales and tiny poisonous frogs into living rooms around the world for more than 70 years.

Through BBC programs such as Life on Earth, The Private Life of Plants and The Blue Planet, Attenborough has illuminated the beauty, ferocity and sometimes downright weirdness of nature in a hushed melodic voice that conveys his own awe at what he is witnessing.

Viewers who might never leave their hometowns were transported to the Himalayas, the Amazon and the unexplored forests of Papua New Guinea. But behind the stunning images was an attention to scientific accuracy that helped teach people about complex subjects like evolution, animal behavior and biodiversity.

And as the evidence mounted, he began to sound the alarm about climate change, ocean plastic and other human-caused threats to the planet.

That helped people understand not only how life evolved but, more importantly, why we have to protect it, said Professor Ben Garrod, an evolutionary biologist at the University of East Anglia and himself a broadcaster who has worked alongside Attenborough.

Attenborough, Garrod believes, initially saw himself as a neutral observer but was compelled to speak out when he saw that politicians, business leaders and the public weren't taking the emergency seriously.

"He is showing you the majesty, the ferocity, the fragility of the natural world. He shouldn't have ever had to have turned to policymaking and advocacy," Garrod said.

"I think it's very easy for a lot of people to say, 'He should have done it sooner. Why didn't he act 20 years, 30 years, 40 years ago?'" Garrod then asked: "Why didn't we?"

Fond of fossils from the start

Born in London on May 8, 1926, the same year as the late Queen Elizabeth II, Attenborough was raised on the grounds of what is now the University of Leicester, where his father was a senior leader.

His fascination with nature developed when he was a young boy, riding his bicycle into the surrounding countryside where he collected treasures such as abandoned birds' nests, the shed skin of a snake and, most importantly, fossils.

"I'd find a fossil and show it to my father and he'd say 'Good, good, tell me all about it.' So I responded and became my own expert," Attenborough told Smithsonian Magazine in 1981.

He went on to study geology and zoology at the University of Cambridge.

In 1952, Attenborough joined the BBC, working behind the scenes on "everything from ballet to short stories." After he'd been there about two months, the capture of a "living fossil" off the coast of East Africa

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caused an international stir, and he was asked to produce a short piece about the coelacanth.

That story was told in the studio by Professor Julian Huxley, an evolutionary biologist, who used pickled wildlife specimens and a photograph of a coelacanth to explain the fish's significance.

But Attenborough thought television could do more.

"I'd always wanted to do films on animals around the world," he recalled in a 1985 interview with The Associated Press. "But the attitude was, 'We've got TV cameras in the studio. What's this about spending money abroad?'"

In 1954, he finally persuaded the BBC to let him accompany a London Zoo team that traveled to West Africa to collect specimens. That began a decade as host and producer of "Zoo Quest," kick-starting his career in the field.

The privilege of his life

One of the most famous moments of that long career came during the 1979 series "Life on Earth," when Attenborough encountered a family of mountain gorillas in a forest on the border of Rwanda and what was then Zaire (now Congo).

During that scene, voted one of Britain's top TV moments of all time, a young gorilla lies across his body while several babies try to remove his shoes. Attenborough grins, laughs and is speechless with delight.

"I honestly don't know how long it was," Attenborough later told the BBC. "I suspect it was about 10 minutes, or even a quarter of an hour. I was simply transported."

"Extraordinary, really," he reflected. "It was one of the most privileged moments of my life."

A character everyone could understand

Attenborough has combined his knowledge of television, an understanding of his audience and his commitment to science to create a character who could deliver complicated issues surrounding wildlife, conservation and natural history to a mass audience, said Jean-Baptiste Gouyon, a professor of science communication at University College London.

"Basically he gave wildlife television a figure, a front of the house person ... which has come to embody television discourse about nature," Gouyon said.

And on this, his centenary, his fans made a point of finding him. In a recorded audio message he said he thought he would mark the day quietly. As if.

"I've been completely overwhelmed by birthday greetings from preschool groups to care home residents and countless individuals and families of all ages," he said. "I simply can't reply to each of you all separately, but I would like to thank you all most sincerely for your kind messages."

And he isn't planning to stop now, Fothergill said.

"He said to me recently he feels unbelievably privileged that a man in his late 90s is still being asked to work. And, you know, he will go on forever. He will die in his safari shorts."

The death toll from an explosion at a fireworks plant in China rises to 37

BEIJING (AP) — The death toll from an explosion at a fireworks plant this week in central China has risen to 37, state media reported Friday.

Local authorities said one person remains missing, according to China's official news agency Xinhua.

The blast occurred Monday at a fireworks plant in the city of Changsha in Hunan province. Authorities have said they are still investigating the cause and have ordered the halt of all fireworks manufacturing in the surrounding area.

Initial reports also said that more than 60 people were injured.

State media China Daily said that the plant was operated by the Huasheng Fireworks Manufacturing and Display Co. in the Changsha-administered, county-level city of Liuyang, a prominent fireworks powerhouse in the country.

Liuyang has a long history of fireworks production. The Guinness World Records organization said that the first accurately documented firework, the Chinese firecracker, was attributed to Li Tian, a monk who

lived near Liuyang during China's Tang dynasty dating to around 618 to 907 C.E.

In February, China reported two deadly explosions at fireworks shops around the Lunar New Year period.

UAE reports drone and missile attack as Iran war ceasefire is challenged

By ADAM SCHRECK and AUDREY McAVOY Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The Iran war's shaky ceasefire was further strained on Friday as the United Arab Emirates responded to a missile and drone attack hours after the U.S. said it thwarted attacks on three Navy ships in the Strait of Hormuz and retaliated against Iranian military facilities.

There were no immediate reports of damage in the UAE.

Iran and the U.S. are trading blows as their negotiators are seeking a deal to end the fighting, but so far they've avoided a return to all-out fighting. It's not clear how close the two sides are to deal on issues like Iran's nuclear program, which the U.S. and Israel vowed to halt when they launched the war on Feb. 28, or the Strait of Hormuz, a vital waterway that Iran has all but closed in a bid to pressure the global economy.

On Thursday, Tehran said it was examining the latest U.S. proposals for ending the war delivered to it via Pakistan, which is serving as a mediator.

Trump played down the exchange of fire between Iran and the U.S. Navy on Thursday. In a phone call with a reporter for ABC, Trump called the retaliatory strikes against Iran "just a love tap." He insisted the ceasefire is holding and a deal could come "any day," but reiterated threats of bombing if Tehran does not accept a deal that allows for resumption of oil and natural gas shipments disrupted by the conflict.

"They have to understand: If it doesn't get signed, they're going to have a lot of pain," he told reporters in Washington.

Iranian state media said the country's forces exchanged fire with "the enemy" on Qeshm Island in Strait of Hormuz. It also reported loud noises and continuous defensive fire in western Tehran late Thursday night.

The ceasefire between the U.S. and Iran has largely held since April 8. In-person talks between the two countries, hosted by Pakistan last month, failed to reach an agreement to end the war that began Feb. 28 when the U.S. and Israel launched strikes against Iran.

US military says it's not seeking escalation

The UAE's defense ministry advised residents not to approach, photograph or touch "any debris or fragments that have fallen as a result of successful air interceptions."

Hours earlier, the U.S. military said it had intercepted Iranian attacks on three Navy ships in the Strait of Hormuz Thursday night and "targeted Iranian military facilities responsible for attacking U.S. forces."

U.S. Central Command said in a social media post that U.S. forces intercepted "unprovoked Iranian attacks" and responded with self-defense strikes.

The U.S. military said no ships were hit. It said it doesn't seek escalation but "remains positioned and ready to protect American forces."

President Donald Trump told reporters that the ceasefire was holding despite the violence.

Pakistani Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar spoke by phone Thursday with his Iranian counterpart, Abbas Araghchi, the Pakistani Foreign Ministry said.

"We expect an agreement sooner rather than later," Pakistani Foreign Ministry spokesperson Tahir Andrabi said. "We hope the parties will reach a peaceful and sustainable solution that will contribute not only to peace in our region but to international peace as well."

He declined to give a timeline.

Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, speaking in televised remarks, said Islamabad remained in "continuous contact with Iran and the United States, day and night, to stop the war and extend the ceasefire."

Meanwhile, direct talks between Israel and Lebanon were scheduled to resume next week in Washington, according to a U.S. official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss plans for the closed-door meetings. The official said talks will be held May 14 and 15.

Iran creates agency to control passage at Hormuz

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Earlier on Thursday, a shipping data company reported that Iran has created a government agency to vet and tax vessels seeking passage through the crucial strait.

The Iranian effort to formalize control over the channel raised new concerns about international shipping, with hundreds of commercial vessels bottled up in the Persian Gulf and unable to reach the open sea. Still, hope that the two-month conflict could soon be over buoyed international markets.

The report by shipping data firm Lloyd's List Intelligence that Iran has established a new government agency to approve transit and collect tolls from shipping in the strait raised concerns over the freedom of navigation on which global trade depends.

The agency, called the Persian Gulf Strait Authority, is "positioning itself as the only valid authority to grant permission to ships transiting the strait," Lloyd's reported in an online briefing Thursday. Lloyd's said the authority had emailed it an application form for ships seeking passage.

On Friday, an oil tanker that passed through the Strait of Hormuz in mid-April arrived off South Korea's coast for its 1 million barrels of crude to be unloaded at the HD Hyundai Oilbank refinery. South Korea, which last year imported more than 60% of its crude through the strait, has capped prices of gasoline and other petroleum products as the war raises fears of an energy crisis.

Iran has effectively closed the strait, a vital waterway for the shipment of oil, gas, fertilizer and other petroleum products, while the U.S. is blockading Iranian ports. The disruptions have sent fuel prices skyrocketing and rattled the global economy.

The new Iranian agency formalizes a system Iran has used to let ships through the strait and charge tolls during the war. Iran aims to control which ships pass and, for at least some vessels, impose a tax on their cargo.

Maritime law experts say Iran's demands to vet or tax vessels violate international law. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea calls for countries to permit peaceful passage through their territorial waters. The U.S. has threatened to impose sanctions on companies that pay tolls to Iran.

The U.S. and its Gulf allies are pushing for the U.N. Security Council to support a resolution that condemns Iran's chokehold on the strait and threatens sanctions. A prior resolution calling for reopening the strait was vetoed by Iran's allies Russia and China.

Pope Leo XIV sought a pastoral role in his first year, but verbal sparring with Trump intervened

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Leo XIV had tried during his first year as pontiff to insist that his essential role was that of a pastor accompanying his flock. President Donald Trump's continuing criticisms — and Leo's increasingly bold retorts — complicated the effort and overshadowed Friday's anniversary of Leo's election.

Leo spent the eve of the 1-year mark meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who had come to the Vatican on a fence-mending visit. Trump's repeated broadsides against history's first U.S. pope created an unprecedented back-and-forth on issues of the Iran war and peace that strained U.S.-Holy See relations.

By the end of the visit, both the Vatican and the State Department stressed their strong bilateral ties. But the episode nevertheless pushed Leo out of his comfort zone and onto the global stage to make zingers like the one this week, after Trump's latest misrepresentation of his views. "If someone wants to criticize me for announcing the Gospel, let him do it with the truth," Leo said.

It's all a bit out of character for Leo who — the world has come to learn in this first year — is at heart a mild-mannered, 70-year-old Midwestern missionary priest, and a reserved one at that. He likes to play the solitary game of tennis, quotes the 5th century philosopher St. Augustine from memory and insists he is merely quoting the Bible when he calls for peace.

The Trump-Leo feud aside, the former Robert Prevost seems driven not by the dramatic gesture or headline-grabbing tensions that often fueled his predecessor, Pope Francis. Rather, Leo seems inspired by the calm, persistent zeal to preach the Gospel and — thanks to his Augustinian spirituality — emphasize community and harmony.

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A year of learning and unifying

Leo began his improbable papacy promising to work for unity in a polarized world and church, and at the one-year mark, he seems to be delivering.

After Francis' revolutionary and sometimes divisive 12-year papacy, Leo has brought a calming balm to the Vatican and church at large. He seems intent on healing divisions, even as new threats of schism emerge.

That has certainly been the case as he navigates some of the thorniest challenges facing the Catholic Church: tensions between traditionalists and progressives, financial problems facing the Holy See and the geopolitical crises at the heart of the Trump vs. Leo dissonance.

"I think the challenge that the Holy Father has is to strengthen the unity of the church," said Cardinal Wilton Gregory, a Chicago native like Leo and the retired archbishop of Washington. While there have always been divisions, Gregory said social media had amplified them, and that Leo seems intent on tamping them down.

"Social communication makes it possible for people to take sides, and sometimes taking sides adds to the divisiveness that we have to deal with and that the Holy Father, as the Bishop of Rome, has to respond to," Gregory said in an interview.

"He has to call us to our better angels," he added.

That seemed to be Leo's modus operandi when, days into his recent Africa trip, he temporarily quelled the Trump broadsides by essentially declaring he was above the president's social media rants. While insisting he would continue preaching the Gospel message of peace, Leo said it "is not in my interest at all," to debate Trump.

"I primarily come to Africa as a pastor, as the head of the Catholic Church to be with, to celebrate with, to encourage and accompany all the Catholics throughout Africa," he said.

He repeated that message at the trip's conclusion, saying the political role that comes with being pope, a head of state and global moral authority, was simply not his priority.

An English-speaking American pope

For many, the shock of an American pope, who defied the taboo precluding a Rome-based moral counterweight to the White House, still hasn't worn off.

"It's been the first year of an American pope who has been critical of what America is doing for the most part," said Anthea Butler, senior fellow at the Koch Institute, Oxford University.

She stressed that Leo is doing so "not coming full-on like Francis would," but approaching issues from the side. He's not naming names, he's merely preaching the Gospel.

That approach has certainly helped some U.S. Catholic institutions, after the American church developed an almost comically bad relationship with Francis. His criticism of American-style capitalism was amplified by U.S.-based conservative Catholic media during his papacy.

For many Vatican watchers, the Argentine pope simply didn't "get" the U.S., and vice versa. Some U.S. Catholics eventually soured on donating to the Holy See under Francis, following years of unrelenting stories of mismanagement, corruption and scandal.

But with a Chicago math major now pope, "he can't be dismissed as being ignorant of the realities in the United States," said Kerry Alys Robinson, chief executive of Catholic Charities USA, a national network of Catholic agencies.

Robinson said she had never seen U.S. Catholic bishops so united as now, particularly in speaking about the dignity of migrants and poor people. She credits that to many factors, including the Trump administration's immigration crackdown and funding cuts that have created a common purpose. But she doesn't discount the unifying message from Leo, in English.

"It's very different when you are hearing the message without it being mediated through translation," she said.

Repairing US relationships

Ward Fitzgerald, president of The Papal Foundation, which funds the pope's charity projects in the developing world, said an English-speaking pope has been a boon especially in the U.S. and Europe, where

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there is anecdotal evidence of a "Leo effect" spurring new converts.

"I think there's lots of reasons for it, but I certainly think that having a pope who speaks English helps young people understand the messages of the Holy Father," Fitzgerald said in an interview. That also translates to donors to the church, especially from the U.S.

"When you tell a donor, 'I really appreciate what you do' in English — and they're English — I think it resonates," Fitzgerald said. "And so they give a little more."

The Papal Foundation recently announced 25 new families had joined its ranks since Leo's election, a not-insignificant number given membership requires a minimum \$1.25 million pledge.

Fitzgerald and members of the foundation met with Leo last week and gathered in St. Peter's Basilica for a Mass celebrated by Cardinal Timothy Dolan, the towering figure of the U.S. Catholic hierarchy and a kingmaker in the 2025 conclave that elected Leo.

Dolan is also chummy with Trump, and is a member of his Religious Liberty Commission.

In his homily, Dolan extolled the attributes of St. Joseph, the father of Christ and a figure so beloved in the church he is the patron saint of more causes than any other saint. Dolan also revealed his feelings about Leo, whom he had watched in the Sistine Chapel become the 267th pope a year ago Friday.

St. Joseph was a man of silence, Dolan said, calm and secure in his place.

"A man who exuded a sense of depth and substance. A man who is shy, all right, a man who is focused on his mission," he added. "A man, always attentive to God's plan."

Dolan then asked the Americans seated in the pews if they could think of anyone else who fit St. Joseph's description.

"I can," Dolan said. "Pope Leo reminds me of Joseph."

Hungary's incoming prime minister plans a 'regime-change celebration' to mark Orbán's departure

By JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

BUDAPEST, Hungary (AP) — As incoming prime minister Péter Magyar takes his oath of office within the halls of Hungary's sprawling neo-Gothic parliament on Saturday, thousands are expected to gather on a square just outside to celebrate the final moments of Viktor Orbán's 16-year rule.

Magyar's center-right Tisza party defeated Orbán's nationalist-populist Fidesz in a landslide victory last month, gaining more votes and seats in parliament than any other party in Hungary's post-Communist history.

It was an earthquake mandate that will allow Tisza to roll back many of the policies that gave Orbán a reputation among many of his critics as a far-right authoritarian, and to dig into the economic system which led to the spectacular enrichment of many his allies and family members.

But before his work of governing begins, Magyar has called on Hungarians to an all-day "regime-change" celebration on Saturday to mark his inauguration — and the end of the Orbán era.

"We will step through the gateway of regime change with a huge party. Come along, and invite your family and friends!" Magyar wrote in a social media post Sunday.

Magyar's priorities

Magyar, a 45-year-old lawyer who formed Tisza in 2024 after spending years as an insider within Orbán's party, has vowed to do away with official corruption which he argues has robbed Hungarians of economic opportunity.

One of his top priorities is unlocking about 17 billion euros (\$20 billion) of European Union funds for Hungary that were frozen during Orbán's time in office over rule-of-law and corruption concerns. That money is sorely needed to help jump-start Hungary's struggling economy, which has stagnated for the last four years.

Magyar has also promised to repair his country's ties with its EU partners that Orbán had pushed to the breaking point, and to restore Hungary's place among Western democracies that had come under question as Orbán drifted ever closer to Russia.

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In a sign of that commitment, Tisza officials say they will once again fly the EU flag on the parliament building's facade, beginning on Saturday, after Orbán's government removed it in 2014.

Despite wide jubilation over the end of Orbán's reign, many of the nearly 3.4 million Hungarians that voted for Tisza expect Magyar to hold Fidesz officials and their business allies accountable for the perceived misconduct of the outgoing administration.

Magyar plans to form the National Asset Recovery and Protection Office, an authority tasked with investigating and seeking to recover public funds misused during Orbán's tenure. He's also vowed to suspend the news services of Hungary's public broadcaster — widely seen as a mouthpiece of Orbán's party — until objectivity can be restored.

Tisza is also expected to conduct a major overhaul of much of Hungary's governmental structure, and to create separate ministries for health, environmental protection and education that did not exist under Orbán.

Magyar has said he will restore competence to Hungary's government, and has nominated numerous officials to cabinet positions who are internationally recognized in their fields.

The incoming leader has tipped diplomat and foreign policy expert Anita Orbán, who is not related to the outgoing prime minister, for minister of foreign affairs, former Shell executive István Kapitány for minister of economy and energy, and economist András Kármán for minister of finance.

'Farewell to the system'

Magyar is set to take his oath of office around 3 p.m. local time on Saturday, after which he will address the crowd outside. In an invitation to the event, he promised artistic performances and surprise guests.

The liberal mayor of Hungary's capital Budapest, Gergely Karácsony, has also announced a "system-closing" party along the Danube River, an event he said is meant to show gratitude to Hungarians who have spent years speaking out against Orbán's system.

"Teachers fired, civilians and journalists humiliated, small churches torn apart," Karácsony wrote in a social media post. "We can finally leave this era behind us — but first, let us remember the everyday heroes and express our gratitude with a farewell to the system."

US lifts hold on immigration applications for doctors, but leaves others waiting

By SAFIYAH RIDDLE and AMY TAXIN Associated Press

Libyan Dr. Faysal Alghoula must renew his green card to continue caring for roughly 1,000 patients in southwestern Indiana, but hasn't been able to since the Trump administration stopped reviewing applications for people from several dozen countries it deemed high-risk.

Alghoula's current visa will expire in September if his application is denied.

But last week, the administration quietly made an exemption for medical doctors with pending visa or green card applications, possibly allowing Alghoula's case to move forward. It's a move physicians organizations and immigration attorneys had sought for months, citing widespread shortages and a high proportion of foreign-trained doctors, who disproportionately work in underserved areas, according to the National Library of Medicine.

The lack of doctors is top of mind for Alghoula, a pulmonologist and Intensive Care Unit doctor who serves a mostly rural population spanning parts of Indiana, Illinois and Kentucky.

"It is about four to five months wait to get the pulmonologist here," he said.

Still, applicants and immigration attorneys say it's unclear how big a difference the exemption will make. The change means doctors can have their cases reviewed, but it doesn't guarantee their green cards or visas will be renewed. It is also unclear whether U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services will be able to process those applications in time to meet immigration deadlines like Alghoula's.

Alghoula said he doesn't trust the administration will approve him due to numerous stories about immigrants being detained at appointments to renew their paperwork like the one he has next month.

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"I'm still scared to go to my interview," said Alghoula, who has lived in the U.S. since 2016.

Meanwhile, the pause remains in affect for thousands of others including researchers and entrepreneurs from 39 countries including Iran, Afghanistan and Venezuela. While they're on hold, many can't legally work, get health insurance or a driver's license. If they leave the U.S., they won't be let back in.

Immigrants unable to work or see family

The Trump administration decided last year to stop reviewing green card and visa applications for people from a list of countries deemed high-risk and this year stopped reviewing visa applications for citizens of more than 75 countries over concerns they would seek public assistance. The moves came amid the U.S. government's broader crackdown on immigrants.

The pause followed the shooting of two National Guard troops by an Afghan citizen, which the administration said highlighted "what a lack of screening, vetting, and prioritizing expedient adjudications can do to the American people."

The Department of Homeland Security, which oversees immigration officials, didn't answer questions about the pause or recent changes to exempt physicians but said in an email it wants to ensure applicants are properly screened after determining the prior administration failed to do so.

"There are lots of bans and lots of pauses that are happening right now," said Greg Siskind, an immigration attorney based in Memphis, Tennessee. "It is all about making life miserable for people who are here legally so they will choose other countries."

It isn't clear how many doctors have been affected by the pause, according to a spokesperson for the American Academy of Family Physicians, who said several doctors have reached out to the organization asking for help.

Some doctors have already been denied

Before the exemption, many immigrants filed federal lawsuits demanding the government issue decisions on their cases.

One of them was Iranian Dr. Zahra Shokri Varniab, who came to the United States three years ago to conduct radiology research. She was waiting for a green card to attend a residency program but her application got stuck in the pause. She filed a lawsuit demanding an answer to her application and a federal judge ordered immigration officials to review her case.

They did — and denied her. The 33-year-old doctor said she believes it was in retaliation for her lawsuit.

"I feel completely confused," Shokri Varniab said.

In court filings, U.S. government lawyers wrote that Shokri Varniab's application contained inconsistencies about whether she plans to become a practicing doctor or researcher. She said she plans to do both.

She said the exemption doesn't appear to apply to her since her case was decided but is seeking relief in court.

Immigration policy compounding war abroad

Immigrants who hold prestigious jobs in science and technology said they currently can't work due to the pause because they're waiting on employment authorization documents. Some said they are running out of money for rent and groceries and worry their careers could be thwarted if they're forced to leave the country.

Those from Iran are especially worried about returning home during the ongoing war with U.S. and Israeli forces. They said they can't regularly reach family due to the Iranian government's Internet blackout or count on them for financial support.

Kaveh Javanshirjavid came to the United States from Iran seven years ago to study for his doctorate in agriculture. He was supposed to start a lab job in January but needs employment authorization and his application is on hold.

The 41-year-old said he's borrowing from friends to pay rent and relying on his wife's doctorate stipend for basic necessities. But he doesn't know how long that will last because she's also Iranian and will need work authorization to get a job after graduating this summer.

"The whole of my life is on hold," he said.

Alabama Republicans look to set new US House primaries if courts allow redistricting

By KIM CHANDLER, JEFFREY COLLINS and DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — Alabama lawmakers looking to take part in a national redistricting battle could vote Friday on a plan to alter state's congressional primaries if the courts allow Republican state officials to switch to more advantageous U.S. House maps ahead of the November midterm elections.

The Alabama legislation, which needs only a final Senate vote to go to Republican Gov. Kay Ivey, seeks to leverage a recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling in a Louisiana case that significantly weakened Voting Rights Act protections for minorities.

Republicans in Southern states have moved quickly to try to capitalize on the case. Tennessee enacted new congressional districts Thursday that carve up a Democratic-held, Black-majority district in Memphis. Louisiana postponed its U.S. House primaries as lawmakers work to enact new districts. And Republicans in the South Carolina House also have proposed a new U.S. House map.

Even before the high court ruling, Republicans and Democrats already were engaged in a fierce redistricting battle, each seeking an edge in the midterm elections that will determine control of the closely divided House.

Since President Donald Trump prodded Texas to redraw its congressional districts last summer, a total of nine states have adopted new House districts. From that, Republicans think they could gain as many as 14 seats while Democrats think they could gain up to 10. But the parties may not get everything they sought, because the gerrymandering could backfire in some highly competitive districts.

Alabama primaries could be in flux

Alabama has asked federal judges to lift a court order requiring the state to have a second district where Black voters are the majority or close to it. That district gave rise in 2024 to the election of Democratic Rep. Shomari Figures, who is Black.

Republicans instead want to put in place a map lawmakers drew in 2023 — which was rejected by a federal court — that could allow them to reclaim Figures' district. Black residents currently make up about 48% of the district's voting-age population. That would drop to about 39% under the 2023 map.

Republicans hope the federal courts will see the case differently in the wake of the Supreme Court's Louisiana decision. If a court grants Alabama's request, the legislation under consideration would ignore the May 19 primary for some congressional seats and direct the governor to schedule a new primary under the revised districts.

"It is an if, and only if, the courts take action," Republican state Sen. Chris Elliott said.

The House passed the legislation on a party-line vote Wednesday, and a Senate committee on Thursday advanced it to the full chamber.

Black representation at issue in Alabama

Addressing the Senate committee, Figures said his concern isn't for himself but for the people who fought for decades "to have a voice in what government looks like."

"I ran into a gentleman last night, and he said, 'Hey man, I hear your job is on the line.' And I told him, 'No, Shomari Figures is going to be OK. Your voice is on the line,'" Figures said.

Some Democrats noted that the state's segregationist past isn't that long ago, and it was districts created under the Voting Rights Act that gave rise to Black representation after centuries of disenfranchisement.

"How long are we going to have to repeat history before we realize that all people deserve to be respected and deserve to have the feeling that they are valued?" asked Democratic state Sen. Linda Coleman-Madison, who is Black.

South Carolina Republicans unveil proposal for new House map

Republicans in the South Carolina House distributed a proposed new U.S. House map Thursday. It would give the GOP an improved chance at winning the only seat currently held by a Democrat.

The proposal would take Democratic U.S. Rep. Jim Clyburn out of the 6th District he has represented since 1992 while splitting the district into four different ones. Clyburn's current district is made up of nearly

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50% Black voters and in the 2024 presidential election, greater than 60% of residents voted for Democrat Kamala Harris.

The proposed map also would split the Democratic stronghold of Columbia and its redder suburbs into four different districts.

The state House on Wednesday approved a resolution giving lawmakers permission to return after the May 14 end of their regular work to continue consideration of a redistricting plan. But the Senate on Thursday delayed a decision on the resolution, because members wanted some idea of what the new districts could look like, Republican Senate Majority Leader Shane Massey said.

After the House plan was released, Massey cited continued concerns. He said as many as four districts could become competitive, requiring substantial support for Republican candidates and hurting down-ballot races for the party.

"If we get too cute with this, we could end up losing seats," Massey said.

The state's primary elections are June 9.

U.S. employers likely added a solid 65,000 jobs last month despite uncertainty arising from Iran war

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Iran war has caused the biggest disruption of global oil supplies in history and sent average U.S. gasoline prices surging past \$4.50 a gallon this week.

But the conflict hasn't done much damage to the American job market — at least not yet.

When the Labor Department's report on April hiring and unemployment comes out Friday, it's expected to show that U.S. companies, nonprofits and government agencies together added 65,000 jobs last month, according to a survey of forecasters by the data firm FactSet. That would be down from a surprisingly strong 178,000 in March.

Ordinarily, 65,000 net new jobs a month would be unimpressive. But these are not ordinary times. Baby Boomer retirements and President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown mean that fewer people are competing for work and that the economy doesn't need to generate as many jobs as it used to.

Matthew Martin of Oxford Economics says the so-called break-even point — the number of new jobs required each month to keep the unemployment rate from rising — is now near zero. The jobless rate is expected, in fact, to have remained at a low 4.3% in April, according to FactSet.

After the U.S. and Israel launched their attacks Feb. 28, Iran shut down the Strait of Hormuz, through which about a fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas passes. The disruption has caused a painful increase in the price of energy and led many economists to downgrade their estimates for global and U.S. economic growth.

But the fallout isn't showing up yet in the U.S. job market.

Payroll processor ADP reported Wednesday that private employers added a solid 109,000 jobs in April. The ADP figure isn't a reliable guide to what the Labor Department will report Friday — but the pace of hiring it showed was the fastest since January 2025. And on Tuesday the Labor Department reported that a measure of gross hiring — before subtracting those who left or lost their jobs — was stronger in March than it had been in more than two years.

The economy is getting a boost from big tax refund checks this spring, arising from Trump's tax cut legislation last year; the refunds allow consumers to spend more freely, giving companies an incentive to add workers in response to rising sales.

The job market is showing intermittent signs of recovery after a bleak 2025. Employers last year created just 9,700 jobs a month, fewest outside a recession year since 2002. High interest rates and uncertainty over Trump's economic policies held back hiring.

There's been progress this year, but it's been uneven — two strong months of job growth (160,000 new jobs in January and 178,000 in March) and one bad one (employers cut 133,000 jobs in February).

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U.S. hiring, though, has been dominated by one industry: Healthcare companies, catering to an aging American population, have added 360,000 jobs over the past year; other employers have combined to cut 120,000 over the 12 months that ended in March.

Diane Swonk, chief economist at the KPMG accounting and consulting firm, warns that the healthcare hiring boom may not last.

The Republican Congress last year allowed subsidies for health insurance under the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) to expire. Trump's tax bill slashed Medicaid spending for the poor, and his administration has imposed a \$100,000 fee on H-1B visas. "Rural and poor urban hospitals rely most on H-1B doctors and nurses to fill open positions," Swonk wrote in a commentary Monday. "They cannot afford the new \$100,000 fee for visas. Many rural hospitals have already closed."

Going forward, Oxford's Martin wrote in a commentary Wednesday, "the question is whether the war will reverse (hiring) momentum. Heightened uncertainty impacts the labor market with a lag, and the fiscal stimulus from higher refunds will eventually wane, particularly as gas prices remain elevated."

Fueled by beer ads, March Madness tournaments will expand to 76 teams each starting next season

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

The magical March Madness cocktail will now include eight more teams, eight more games and more of one other ingredient, too: beer. Maybe wine, too.

The NCAA on Thursday announced a long-expected expansion of its men's and women's basketball tournaments to 76 teams each starting next season, explaining that it made the money part work by opening sponsorship opportunities to a long-restricted alcohol category.

"I would say that expansion would not have happened without that agreement," said Dan Gavitt, the NCAA's senior vice president of basketball.

The new, 76-team brackets will jam eight extra games — for a total of 12 involving 24 teams — into the front half of the first week of each tournament. It will turn what's now known as the First Four into a bigger affair that will now be called the March Madness Opening Round.

The 12 winners will move into the main 64-team bracket that will begin, as usual, on Thursday for the men and Friday for the women. In all, there will now be 120 games across the two tournaments over seven days to set the table for the Sweet 16s.

"Things will look a little different, but feel very, very similar," said Amanda Braun, the women's tournament committee chair.

Because the added games were unlikely to sell themselves, the first expansion of the men's tournament in 15 years — when it was bumped to 68 teams, followed by the women in 2022 — will be bankrolled by around \$300 million in extra funding courtesy of new sponsorship opportunities for beer, wine, spirits and hard seltzer that includes more advertising space on CBS, TNT and other partners whose \$8.8 billion deal runs through 2032.

The NCAA said it will distribute more than \$131 million of the new revenue to schools that make the tournament.

A 'money grab' for big conferences and an opportunity for Cinderellas, as well

The number of at-large selections will increase from 37 to 44, ESPN reported, most of which are expected to go to teams from the power conferences that were already commanding the lion's share of entries in the bracket. Two years ago, the Southeastern Conference placed a record 14 teams in the men's bracket. Last season, the Big Ten had nine.

In an interview earlier this week, UConn women's coach Geno Auriemma spelled out the bottom line.

"This is strictly a money grab for the Power Four conferences to get teams that finished 6-10 in their conference to get into the tournament," he said.

He also questioned the need to expand the women's bracket. Only seven of 32 round-of-64 games this year were decided by single digits compared to 11 for the men.

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The move is a sign of the times, which includes massive expansion — the Atlantic Coast Conference, for instance, has grown from nine to 17 teams since 1996 — and the reality that mid-major schools with talented players will often see them plucked away by programs with bigger budgets and the ability to pay them through revenue sharing. The rich get richer.

Cinderella? There will still be room for those stirring runs in the tournaments, though not a single mid-major advanced past the first weekend of either tournament the last two seasons.

"As someone who has been both David, and won some, and Goliath, and lost some, that's what makes this tournament special," Arkansas coach John Calipari said earlier in the week. "We can't afford to lose that special piece of our sport."

This is not a huge concern of the decision-makers anymore, who will point to TV ratings that traditionally spell out fans' preference for watching the likes of Duke and North Carolina over St. Peter's and San Diego State, especially once the Sweet 16 starts.

"The impact on everyone was considered," said Keith Gill, the men's tournament chairman. "We actually think it's, overall, going to be positive. And we think that's for folks at the autonomy level (Power Four) and folks that are non-autonomy."

All conferences agreed, but big conferences pushed hardest

Gavitt said none of the 32 conferences in the NCAA objected to the proposal, though it's no secret the power leagues have been pushing this the hardest.

Those schools don't want to see promising teams left out of what remains the best postseason in college sports, especially in favor of lesser conference champions who earn automatic bids.

"You've got some really, really good teams who are going to end up in that 9, 10, 11 (seed) category that I think should be moved" into the 64-team bracket, SEC commissioner Greg Sankey said last year in discussing how he favored expansion.

The new beer and wine money will add to what the NCAA can distribute in "units" that are earned for placing teams in the bracket and then for every round those teams advance. Last year, that amounted to about \$350,000 per unit for the men's tournament.

Some of that extra money will go to the small guys, too. This gives all the 16 seeds (and some 15s) a chance to play an evenly matched game in the play-in round, then maybe win that game and the extra "unit" that comes with it.

"Also, as we continue to grow our basketball profile, additional at-large spots positions" are possible, Big Sky Conference commissioner Tom Wistrick said.

Leaders in the SEC, Big Ten, Big 12 and ACC have all acknowledged that smaller programs help make March Madness what it is, all the while steadily expanding their own power in NCAA decision-making. That brings with it the tacit threat that they could split off and fracture the single thing the NCAA does best — the basketball tournament.

This move might forestall that. What it isn't expected to do is drastically change the TV element, at least not beyond the advertising component.

Gavitt said the new games will likely be part of tripleheaders on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. The NCAA will find a site to join the traditional First Four host, Dayton, Ohio, for some of the games. Then, come Thursday, there will be 64 teams in a bracket and a tournament that looks comfortingly familiar: three weeks of hoops capped off by the Final Four.

Gavitt said it was impossible to predict what might come after the current TV deal expires but that 76 teams is "maxing out the opportunity here."

"Anything's possible, I guess, in 2032 or beyond," he said. "But I can say with confidence that this is the format that will be in place through 2032, and, we think, for a long time after that."

How public health officials are tracing people who came in contact with hantavirus victims

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Hantaviruses do not spread easily between people, which makes health officials confident the recent outbreak on a cruise ship that has killed three people will not turn into an epidemic.

But, still, they need to make sure. So health officials in several countries are contact tracing: trying to identify and follow people who may have come in contact with passengers who got sick or died.

Hantaviruses usually spread when people inhale contaminated residue of rodent droppings. While human cases are rare, small outbreaks have been documented around the world. But the Andes virus implicated in the cruise ship outbreak may be able to spread between people in rare cases. And viruses can change.

Scientists are trying to learn more about the virus as fast as they can, including whether it has mutated and how exactly it spreads.

What is contact tracing?

The goal of contact tracing is to alert people who might have been exposed, keep tabs on them in case they come down with symptoms, and prevent them from spreading it to others.

The process isn't easy because people are social and mobile creatures who spend time with others, visit crowded places and travel.

In the cruise ship outbreak, fewer than a dozen people are thought to have shown any symptoms, and there have been only five confirmed cases, but many more may have been exposed.

Dozens of potentially exposed passengers have already left the ship

About 140 people remain on the cruise ship headed for the Canary Islands, where they will disembark, and none has been reported to be sick.

But authorities are trying to reach the dozens of people who left the ship about two weeks after a passenger died, but before authorities knew a hantavirus was the culprit. They were from at least 12 different countries, including from several states in the U.S. — including Arizona, California, Georgia and Texas, according to infectious disease experts and state public health officials.

Different countries take different approaches

Authorities in St. Helena — the remote, volcanic British territory in the South Atlantic where passengers got off — said they were monitoring a small number of people considered "higher-risk contacts." They were being told to isolate for 45 days, the St. Helena government said.

British health officials say two people who were passengers aboard the ship but flew home midway through the journey are self-isolating but do not have symptoms. The U.K. Health Security Agency said "a small number" of contacts of the two are also self-isolating but not showing symptoms.

Singaporean health authorities said they were monitoring two men who disembarked at St. Helena and flew to South Africa and then home. The two men, who arrived in Singapore at different times, were being tested for hantavirus and were isolated at the country's National Center for Infectious Diseases, officials said.

The U.S. government has released few details about its work on any contact tracing.

Texas officials on Thursday said public health workers there have reached the two people who left the ship April 24, who say they are not experiencing symptoms and did not have contact with a sick person while aboard. They promised to monitor themselves with daily temperature checks and contact public health officials at any sign of possible illness, officials said.

Arizona officials said they too are following a person who disembarked. They said they don't know exactly when the person arrived in Arizona. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notified the state health agency on May 5, state officials said. That's when monitoring began and it will continue for 42 days.

Two Canadians who disembarked are in Ontario and have been advised to self-isolate since they returned home, the province's health minister says.

Scientists are trying to understand the Andes virus better

Apart from tracking people, scientists are also trying to understand the germ. The Andes virus, a member of the hantavirus family found in South America, may be one of the rare hantaviruses that can spread

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between people. Officials in Argentina believe the first cases may have been contracted on a birdwatching trip in the southern city of Ushuaia.

Argentina's Health Ministry has yet to dispatch the team, but scientists from the state-funded Malbrán Institute planned to travel to Ushuaia "in the coming days," the ministry told The Associated Press.

Scientists are analyzing the virus's genetics to see whether it has changed in a way to make it more transmissible.

They are also trying to learn exactly how it spreads, said Dr. Jeanne Marrazzo, chief executive officer of the Infectious Diseases Society of America. They believe people are mainly infectious when they have symptoms, and, if the virus spreads, it may be transmitted through small liquid particles that blow out of an infected person when they talk, cough or sneeze. ____

AP journalists Isabel Debre in Buenos Aires, Argentina; Gerald Imray in Cape Town, South Africa; Rob Gillies in Toronto; Jill Lawless in London; Suman Naishadham in Madrid; Susan Montoya Bryan in Albuquerque, New Mexico; and Jamie Stengle in Dallas contributed.

US military says it intercepted Iranian attacks on 3 Navy ships in Strait of Hormuz

By ADAM SCHRECK, DAVID MCHUGH and RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The U.S. military said it intercepted Iranian attacks Thursday on three Navy ships in the Strait of Hormuz and "targeted Iranian military facilities responsible for attacking U.S. forces," highlighting the fragility of the month-old ceasefire between the two countries.

U.S. Central Command said in a social media post that U.S. forces intercepted "unprovoked Iranian attacks" and responded with self-defense strikes.

The U.S. military said no ships were hit. It said it doesn't seek escalation but "remains positioned and ready to protect American forces."

President Donald Trump told reporters in Washington that the ceasefire was holding despite the violence. "They trifled with us today. We blew them away," Trump said.

Meanwhile, Iranian state media said the country's armed forces exchanged fire with "the enemy" on Qeshm Island in the strait. It is the largest Iranian island in the Persian Gulf, home to about 150,000 people. It also houses a water desalination plant.

Iranian state media also reported loud noises and defensive fire in western Tehran. In southern Iran, explosions were heard near Bandar Abbas, semiofficial Iranian news agencies Fars and Tasnim said. The reports did not identify the source of the blasts.

Earlier in the day, a shipping data company reported that Iran has created a government agency to vet and tax vessels seeking passage through the crucial Strait of Hormuz.

The Iranian effort to formalize control over the channel raised new concerns about international shipping, with hundreds of commercial vessels bottled up in the Persian Gulf and unable to reach the open sea. Still, hope that the two-month conflict could soon be over buoyed international markets.

U.S. administration has sent mixed messages

The ceasefire between the U.S. and Iran has largely held since April 8. In-person talks between the two countries, hosted by Pakistan last month, failed to reach an agreement to end the war that began Feb. 28 when the U.S. and Israel launched strikes against Iran.

Earlier Thursday, Tehran said it was examining the latest U.S. proposals for ending the war.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei said the Islamic Republic was reviewing messages from Pakistan, which is mediating peace negotiations, but Iran "has not yet reached a conclusion, and no response has been given to the U.S. side," Iranian state TV reported.

At the Vatican, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio discussed Middle East peace efforts with Pope Leo XIV, whose opposition to the Iran war has led to open sparring with Trump.

The Trump administration has sent mixed messages on its strategy to end the war. The tenuous ceasefire and previous declarations that military operations were over have given way to new threats of bombing

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if Tehran does not accept a deal that allows for resumption of oil and natural gas shipments disrupted by the conflict.

Trump reiterated those after Thursday's exchange of fire.

"They have to understand: If it doesn't get signed, they're going to have a lot of pain," he told reporters.

Asked how close the U.S. was to a deal with Iran, Trump said: "It could happen any day," but quickly added, "And it might not happen."

Pakistan says it expects a deal soon

Pakistani Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar spoke by phone Thursday with his Iranian counterpart, Abbas Araghchi, the Pakistani Foreign Ministry said.

"We expect an agreement sooner rather than later," Pakistani Foreign Ministry spokesperson Tahir Andrabi said. "We hope the parties will reach a peaceful and sustainable solution that will contribute not only to peace in our region but to international peace as well."

He declined to give a timeline.

Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, speaking in televised remarks, said Islamabad remained in "continuous contact with Iran and the United States, day and night, to stop the war and extend the ceasefire."

Meanwhile, direct talks between Israel and Lebanon were scheduled to resume next week in Washington, according to a U.S. official speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss plans for the closed-door meetings. The official said talks will be held May 14 and 15.

Iran creates agency to control passage at Hormuz

The report by shipping data firm Lloyd's List Intelligence that Iran has established a new government agency to approve transit and collect tolls from shipping in the strait raised concerns over the freedom of navigation on which global trade depends.

The agency, called the Persian Gulf Strait Authority, is "positioning itself as the only valid authority to grant permission to ships transiting the strait," Lloyd's reported in an online briefing Thursday. Lloyd's said the authority had emailed it an application form for ships seeking passage.

Iran has effectively closed the strait, a vital waterway for the shipment of oil, gas, fertilizer and other petroleum products, while the U.S. is blockading Iranian ports. The disruptions have sent fuel prices skyrocketing and rattled the global economy.

The new Iranian agency formalizes an existing vetting lane that takes vessels through the strait's northern waters near the Iranian coastline. Iran controls which ships pass and, for at least some vessels, imposes a tax on their cargo.

Maritime law experts say Iran's demands to vet or tax vessels violate international law. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea calls for countries to permit peaceful passage through their territorial waters.

The U.S. and its Gulf allies are pushing for the U.N. Security Council to support a resolution that condemns Iran's chokehold on the strait and threatens sanctions. A prior resolution calling for reopening the strait was vetoed by Iran allies Russia and China.

Iran's president reports lengthy meeting with new supreme leader

Top Iranian officials have said Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei is playing a key role in overseeing negotiations with the U.S. But he has not appeared in public since he was wounded early in the war.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said he met recently for more than two hours with Khamenei. In remarks aired Thursday on Iranian state television, Pezeshkian praised the supreme leader's "sincere" behavior in what he said was a long in-person meeting.

Khamenei has only released a series of written statements since being named supreme leader in March, replacing his father, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who was killed during the war's initial strikes.

Saudi official says kingdom did not support U.S. effort to reopen strait

Trump did not consult with U.S. ally Saudi Arabia before launching a short-lived effort this week to force open a shipping passage through the strait, according to a Saudi official who was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

"We told them that we are not part of this and that they can't use our territories and bases for this,"

the official said Thursday.

The official said Saudi Arabia sent a message to Iran that the kingdom would not be involved in U.S. attacks related to Trump's attempt to reopen the strait.

Trump suspended the effort, dubbed Project Freedom, during its second day Tuesday, saying pausing it would allow more time to reach a peace agreement. Only two American-flagged merchant ships are known to have passed through the U.S.-guarded route. The U.S. military said it sank six Iranian small boats threatening civilian ships.

Survivors of Mississippi tornadoes crawled under furniture and held onto their kids

By JACK BROOK, R.J. RICO and KATHY McCORMACK Associated Press

BOGUE CHITTO, Miss. (AP) — Anunciata Schwebel could only watch in horror on FaceTime while her friend and tenant slunk into a bathtub to take cover from one of several tornadoes that slammed into Mississippi just after sunset Wednesday.

Her friend screamed that the windows were breaking. Schwebel could see on her screen the devastation to the cluster of cottages she owned in the town of Purvis — walls and roofs ripped away, her tenants huddled in their bathrooms.

"We could see a line of people sitting in their tubs," Schwebel said Thursday. "We thought people were dead."

Yet, for a second time in less than a month, a big burst of tornadoes caused no deaths. Authorities estimated that 500 homes were damaged across five counties Wednesday and said at least 17 people were injured. The powerful storms spawned at least three tornadoes across the bottom half of Mississippi that could be seen on weather radar, meteorologists said, possibly more.

Tornado flipped home and 'scattered everybody'

Survivors told stories of crawling under furniture while winds tore off the roof and of hiding in a closet, holding on to a child. At Coaltown Baptist Church in Purvis, members hunkered down in a hallway, singing and praying until the storm passed.

A dozen people were hurt at a trailer park in the small community of Bogue Chitto, in rural Lincoln County, said Scott Simmons, a spokesperson for the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency.

Most of the two dozen homes were flattened into heaps of splintered boards and twisted metal. People picked through the debris Thursday morning under cloudy skies as a chain saw buzzed in the background.

Krystal Miller and six others — including babies as young as 4 weeks old — grabbed a Bible and sheltered in their hallway when the tornado sent their home cartwheeling through the air.

"We just flipped, and it threw us all out," she said. "It scattered everybody out. ... I can't find the Bible."

Her young son was in the hospital for monitoring and another child was injured in the face, she said.

"The trailer is in pieces but we made it out," Miller said. "I'm feeling grateful."

Max Mahaffey was with his 59-year-old grandmother and watching TikTok videos on his phone when they realized the tornado was bearing down. They ran to the bathroom, but when the roof was torn off, they crawled to the living room and hid under a couch, he said.

"You heard screaming, glass breaking, horns honking — everything," said the 15-year-old.

Survivors grateful to be alive

Dmell Burnes didn't realize his home was in the tornado's path until seconds before it struck. The house shook as he covered his 11-year-old daughter in his arms, but the frame inside the closet where they protected themselves held even as the home's walls and roof came apart.

"It was one of the most scariest moments of my life. Me and my daughter were praying," Burnes said while standing on what was left from his trailer. "We're just grateful to be alive."

Residents dug out jackets, school backpacks, Bibles and a watch — whatever was salvageable.

A storm chaser walking through the debris early Thursday heard a meow but feared the worst when

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the cries stopped after a few minutes of searching. But after picking through insulation, Ashton Lemley found a tiny kitten, hiding between two wooden posts.

"I've been in these situations so many times," he said. "I don't try to get overly emotional. But it is very heartbreaking to see any type of animal or human go through something like that."

Debris closed interstate in southern Mississippi

National Weather Service meteorologist Daniel Lamb said at least three tornadoes caused significant damage. Investigators plan to survey other areas to determine if more touched down.

"Pray for Mississippi," Gov. Tate Reeves posted online, saying the state Emergency Management Agency was coordinating response efforts.

Debris from the storms closed Interstate 55 and many other roads in Lincoln County. The governor said a volunteer rescue group was providing a 50-person shelter and supplies to the county, which reported at least 200 damaged homes.

Lamar County to the southeast reported about 275 homes damaged, according to the Emergency Management Agency.

Alisha Marbury was teary eyed as she surveyed the wreckage in Bogue Chitto. Still, she counted her community blessed since it appeared no one had died. Many of the people she knew at the trailer park had been away at work, she said.

"God spared us," Marbury added. "Houses and homes and cars and stuff are replaceable, but your life ain't."

Both engines shut off and cockpit struggle came before 2022 China plane crash, NTSB data suggests

By JOSH FUNK AP Transportation Writer

Both engines were shut off and there was a cockpit struggle before a China Eastern Airlines jet slammed into a mountain in 2022 and killed all 132 people aboard, newly released data released by American investigators suggests.

In response to a public records request, the National Transportation Safety Board released a report recently on what the Boeing 737-800's flight data recorder revealed. The NTSB became involved in the Chinese investigation because the plane and engines were made by American companies and the U.S. investigators are regarded as the world's leading experts on analyzing black boxes after a crash.

The report offers the best explanation yet about what caused the crash and confirms news stories at the time suggesting the crew may have played a role after Chinese investigators said they did not immediately find a problem with the plane.

Aviation safety experts agree that the data shows the fuel to both engines was cut off and someone sent the plane into a nosedive and a 360-degree roll, but it does not conclusively show exactly what happened because the Civil Aviation Administration of China has yet to release its final report than four years later. International standards call for investigators to strive to release their report by roughly a year after a crash.

The NTSB report was released May 1.

Likely intentional fuel cut

By design the fuel levers in a 737 cannot be easily bumped or shut off inadvertently — someone has to pull them out to release them before they will move. John Cox, CEO of Safety Operating Systems, said the levers lock into place, so it's likely that someone deliberately moved them both to the cutoff position.

The data ended while the plane was still at 26,000 feet (7,900 meters) of altitude after the flight recorder and all the plane's hydraulic systems lost power, but the report of the 12 minutes before that suggests what happened.

The cockpit voice recorder, which continued working because it had a battery backup, could also help shed light, but the NTSB did not release a transcript of what it found on those recordings. It is up to Chinese authorities to release those details.

Jeff Guzzetti, who formerly investigated crashes for the NTSB and the Federal Aviation Administration,

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said the flight data suggests a struggle and the crash could have been a pilot suicide. There have been a number of previous instances of that, including a Germanwings flight that crashed into the French alps in 2015, killing everyone aboard.

"Typically when you want to roll an airplane, it's a smooth movement of the control wheel in one direction. But here you have it moving back and forth, back and forth, as if someone is trying to counter the initial movement of the roll," Guzzetti said. "So it's not conclusive, but it sure has the earmarks of a struggle in the cockpit."

Pilots' mental health

The details about this crash will renew longstanding industry concerns about how to ensure pilots' mental health.

Many are reluctant to come forward and seek help for fear they could lose their medical certification and be grounded. Getting recertified can take months or longer during which a grounded pilot is not getting paid. Meanwhile some countries prohibit pilots from taking common psychiatric medicines such as antidepressants.

"Clearly pilots — and very understandably so — are oftentimes reluctant to come forward, knowing that to get recertified after having gone through a mental health evaluation, it can be very arduous and very lengthy," Cox said.

Guzzetti said the co-pilot of an Egypt Air plane that crashed in 1999 is believed to have deliberately sent it into the ocean off New York. In 2023, in an incident that did not end in a crash, an off-duty pilot who took psychedelic mushrooms days beforehand tried to cut the engines of a Horizon Air flight while riding off-duty in the cockpit.

Plane plowed into a mountainside

The jet was flying from Kunming in the southwest to Guangzhou, near Hong Kong, when it went into a nosedive at about 8,800 meters (29,000 feet), appeared to recover but then slammed into the mountain. The crash left a 65-foot (20-meter) crater and set the forest on fire.

The crew reported no problems before losing contact with air traffic control. Chinese investigators said no abnormalities were found among the plane or crew or with outside elements such as bad weather.

Cox also said the new report from the NTSB does not indicate any problem with the plane.

The March 21, 2022, crash was a rare failure for the Chinese airline industry, which dramatically improved safety following deadly crashes in the 1990s. China Eastern is one of four major state-owned airlines in the country.

DeSantis says 'Alligator Alcatraz' immigration detention center always was meant to be temporary

OCHOPEE, Fla. (AP) — Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis said Thursday that the immigration detention center known as "Alligator Alcatraz" always was meant to be temporary.

His comments came on the same day that The New York Times reported state and federal officials were in early talks about shutting down the facility in the Florida Everglades that DeSantis said has processed and deported 22,000 detainees since it opened last summer.

"At some point, we will, of course, break it down. That was always the goal," the Republican governor said at a news conference in Lakeland.

If the Department of Homeland Security feels it has the resources to house detainees elsewhere, the facility will wind down, DeSantis said.

DHS officials have not said they want the facility to close, though the idea has been discussed since the department got a new secretary, Markwayne Mullin, in late March, and "you take a fresh look at these things," the governor added.

Detainees at the facility have described poor physical conditions and difficulty accessing lawyers.

DHS on Thursday denied that it was urging Florida to cease operations at the facility.

"Florida continues to be a valuable partner in advancing President Trump's immigration agenda, and DHS

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appreciates their support," the department said in a statement. "DHS continuously evaluates detention needs and requirements to ensure they meet the latest operational requirements."

Florida has spent more than \$1 million a day to run the facility, and DeSantis has said he expects reimbursement from the federal government. The state has not yet received \$608 million it has requested.

Detainees are segregated based on criminal history and whether they are considered a flight risk, according to a handbook made public as part of a lawsuit over whether detainees have proper access to attorneys. It says that during regular head counts, detainees aren't allowed to move or talk. If they do, they can be punished, along with everyone in their dorm, by being locked in their housing unit.

Epstein cellmate says he found a suicide note. Justice Department says it's seeing it for first time

By ED WHITE Associated Press

A note that Jeffrey Epstein's former cellmate claims to have found after the financier's first suspected jail suicide attempt in 2019 has been made public — not because of the Justice Department's release of records related to the sex offender, but as part of an unrelated case.

The government's explanation: It never had the note.

"The note has not yet been authenticated, and this is the first time DOJ is seeing it as well," the department said Thursday when asked why it wasn't part of the voluminous Epstein files.

Nicholas Tartaglione said he discovered the handwritten note in a book after the disgraced financier was found in their cell at a Manhattan federal jail with a strip of bedsheet around his neck. Epstein was subsequently moved to a different cell, where a few weeks later, he was found dead, alone, in a suicide.

Tartaglione, a former police officer then facing murder charges, said he gave the note to his lawyers to protect himself against any claim that he might have harmed Epstein while they were in custody together. Epstein was awaiting trial on sex trafficking charges at the time.

Since 2021, the note had been in a vault in federal court in New York. It somehow became part of proceedings between Tartaglione and his lawyers over their representation in his murder case. Anything related to that dispute was sealed out of the public's eye by the judge because it involved attorney-client privilege.

Tartaglione, a former suburban New York officer turned drug dealer, was convicted in April 2023 in the strangulation death of one man and the execution-style murders of three other people. He said he discovered the note in a book he was reading in his jail cell.

The New York Times petitioned U.S. District Judge Kenneth Karas to release the note, noting that Tartaglione, now serving a life sentence, has talked publicly about it. The judge agreed to the request Wednesday, adding that Epstein's privacy interests in the note had been "vastly reduced" due to his death.

"They investigated me for month — found nothing!!!" said the short note, which is hard to decipher in some places and has not been authenticated. "It is a treat to be able to choose" the "time to say good-bye," the note continues. "Watcha want me to do — Bust out cryin!!

"NO FUN. NOT WORTH IT!!" the note concludes.

According to jail records, Epstein had friction marks and skin irritation on his neck from the suspected July 23, 2019, suicide attempt. Jail officers said he was breathing heavily but responsive. Epstein told a guard Tartaglione had attacked him, but later recanted.

Jail officials subsequently placed Epstein on suicide watch for 31 hours before downgrading him to psychiatric observation, which was his status when he killed himself on Aug. 10, 2019.

The Justice Department did not object to releasing the note. Deputy U.S. Attorney Sean Buckley told the judge the public was interested in the circumstances surrounding Epstein's death.

Buckley also said that while two Justice Department lawyers were included in the proceedings between Tartaglione and his attorneys in 2021, they were barred by the judge from disclosing anything from those hearings to protect his attorney-client privilege. So if they did see the note, they weren't allowed to tell anyone about it.

Health officials track dozens who left hantavirus-stricken ship after first fatality

By MOLLY QUELL, SUMAN NAISHADHAM, ISABEL DEBRE and GERALD IMRAY Associated Press
MADRID (AP) — Health authorities across four continents Thursday were tracking down and monitoring passengers who disembarked a hantavirus-stricken cruise ship before its deadly outbreak was detected, and trying to trace others who may have come into contact with them since then.

In Argentina, a team of investigators has yet to leave for the southern town where they suspect the outbreak originated, officials from the country's Health Ministry told The Associated Press on Thursday. The Argentine investigators suspect a Dutch couple may have contracted the virus while on a bird-watching trip before they boarded the cruise ship.

On April 24, nearly two weeks after the first passenger had died on board, more than two dozen people from at least 12 different countries left the ship without contact tracing, the ship's operator and Dutch officials said Thursday.

Three passengers have died in the outbreak — a Dutch couple and a German national — and several others are sick. Symptoms usually show between one and eight weeks after exposure.

None of the remaining passengers or crew on the ship are currently symptomatic, the Netherlands-based Oceanwide Expeditions cruise ship company said Thursday.

The World Health Organization says the risk to the wider public is low. Hantavirus is usually spread by the inhalation of contaminated rodent droppings and isn't easily transmitted between people.

"We believe this will be a limited outbreak if the public health measures are implemented and solidarity is shown across all countries," said Dr. Abdirahman Mahamud, the WHO's alert and response director on Thursday.

1st hantavirus case on board was confirmed May 2

Three people, including the ship's doctor, were evacuated Wednesday while the ship was near the West African island country of Cape Verde and taken to specialized hospitals in Europe for treatment.

The body of the Dutch man who was the first to die on board on April 11 was taken off the ship on the remote South Atlantic island of St. Helena on April 24, when his wife also disembarked. She then flew to South Africa a day later and died there.

The ship's operator said Thursday that a total of 30 passengers — including the deceased Dutch man and his wife — left the vessel at St. Helena. The Dutch Foreign Ministry has put the figure at about 40. The company had not previously said publicly that dozens more people left the ship on April 24. The stop was the scheduled end of the cruise for some passengers.

It wasn't until May 2 that health authorities first confirmed hantavirus in a ship passenger, the WHO says. That was in a British man evacuated from the ship to South Africa three days after the St. Helena stop. He was tested in South Africa and is in intensive care there.

Passengers who disembarked April 24 are being monitored

It emerged Wednesday that a man tested positive for hantavirus in Switzerland after he disembarked at St. Helena, though his precise movements in between aren't clear.

On Thursday, Singaporean health authorities said they were monitoring two men who got off the ship at St. Helena, flew to South Africa and then home. The two men, who arrived in Singapore at different times, were being isolated and tested, officials said.

Authorities in St. Helena, the volcanic British territory in the South Atlantic where passengers disembarked, said they were monitoring a small number of people who were considered "higher risk contacts." Those contacts were being told to isolate for 45 days, the St. Helena government said.

South Africa is tracing contacts from an April 25 flight

The Dutch health ministry said Thursday that a flight attendant on a plane briefly boarded by an infected cruise passenger in South Africa was showing symptoms of hantavirus and would be tested in an isolation ward at an Amsterdam hospital. The cruise passenger, the Dutch woman whose husband died on the

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ship, was too ill to take the international flight to Europe and was taken off the plane in Johannesburg, where she died.

If the Dutch flight attendant tests positive, she could be the first known person not on the MV Hondius to become infected in the outbreak.

The vessel is now sailing to Spain's Canary Islands, where it is expected to arrive Saturday or Sunday, with more than 140 passengers and crew members still on board.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said Thursday that he had been in regular touch with the ship's captain, and that morale improved once it began moving again.

Authorities in South Africa are also trying to trace contacts of any passengers who previously got off the ship. They have focused mainly on an April 25 flight from St. Helena to Johannesburg, the day after passengers disembarked there.

A French citizen with "benign symptoms" is in isolation and undergoing medical tests, after being identified as a contact case linked to the ship passenger who flew April 25 from St. Helena to Johannesburg and was confirmed to have hantavirus, the French Health Ministry said in a statement Thursday.

The Dutch woman from the cruise ship who later died in South Africa was on that St. Helena-Johannesburg flight, officials have said. It's not known how many other cruise passengers were among the 88 people on it, but flights from St. Helena are rare. Flights to South Africa are normally once a week.

The body of the third fatality, a German woman, is also still on the ship after she died on May 2.

Unlike other hantaviruses, Andes virus may spread between people

Tests have confirmed that at least five people who were on the ship were infected with a hantavirus found in South America, called the Andes virus. The only hantavirus thought to spread human-to-human, it can cause a severe and often fatal lung disease called hantavirus pulmonary syndrome.

The ship departed from Argentina and investigations into the outbreak's source are focusing there.

The Dutch couple who presented the first two cases had traveled through Argentina, Chile and Uruguay before boarding the ship, the WHO said. They visited sites where the species of rat known to carry Andes virus was present.

Argentina's Health Ministry has zeroed in on the town of Ushuaia in their investigation, but they've yet to dispatch the team, according to a written statement given to AP. Scientists from the state-funded Malbrán Institute planned to travel to Ushuaia "in the coming days," the statement said.

Once in Ushuaia, a 3.5-hour flight from Argentina's capital, Buenos Aires, experts will analyze rodents at the trash heap there to see if they carry the Andes virus, officials said.

The WHO is working with health authorities in Argentina to understand the couple's movements and has arranged to ship 2,500 diagnostic kits from Argentina to laboratories in five countries.

Argentina's health ministry said there were 28 deaths from hantavirus last year, up from an average mortality rate of 15 in the five years before that. Nearly a third of cases last year were fatal, it said.

US isn't looking at imminent military action in Cuba despite Trump threats, AP sources say

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The United States is not looking at imminent military action against Havana despite President Donald Trump's repeated threats that "Cuba is next" and that American warships deployed in the Middle East for the Iran conflict could return by way of the island, U.S. officials say.

The officials involved in preliminary discussions with Cuban authorities also told The Associated Press that they are not optimistic the communist government will accept an offer for tens of millions of dollars in humanitarian aid, two years of free Starlink internet access for all Cubans, agricultural assistance and infrastructure support.

But they say Cuba has not yet outright refused the offer, which comes with conditions that the government has long resisted, even after the Trump administration imposed new sanctions Thursday on Havana. The largest of those sanctions is against GAESA, or Grupo de Administración Empresarial S.A., a business

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conglomerate operated by the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces.

The officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the private talks, say there is still time for the government to accept the offer. They cautioned, though, that Trump could change his mind at any time and that military options are still on the table.

The Treasury and State departments announced the sanctions after Trump signed an executive order last week expanding the administration's authority to impose penalties on Cuba.

Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez described the measures as "collective punishment" and denounced the U.S. government's "genocidal intent against Cuba."

"These actions rely on the assumption that the United States can impose its will on the world while threatening foreign citizens and businesses with illegitimate coercion," Rodríguez wrote on X.

Trump has suggested possible action against Cuba

Shortly after signing the order Friday, Trump gave a speech mentioning that "Cuba's got problems" and suggesting that a military show of force may be in the offing.

He said one of the U.S. aircraft carriers on its way back from the Middle East could "come in, stop about 100 yards offshore, and they'll say: 'Thank you very much. We give up.'"

One official involved in the discussions said the new sanctions authority was intended, however, to make clear to the Cubans that the Trump administration's immediate goal is "not regime change, but changing the regime's failed policies."

Secretary of State Marco Rubio, the son of Cuban immigrants who has long taken a hard line against Cuba's leadership, has said repeatedly that the country's government has failed. He said this week that Cuba's economic model doesn't work and those in power "can't fix it."

"And the reason that they can't fix it is not just because they're communist. That's bad enough," he told reporters Tuesday at the White House. "But they're incompetent communists. The only thing worse than a communist is an incompetent one."

Rubio is visiting Rome and Vatican City, meeting Pope Leo XIV on Thursday in part to discuss Cuba, where the Catholic Church has significant influence.

US officials don't know if Cuba will accept conditions but say dialogue is open

One U.S. official said it is an open question as to whether Cuba's leadership is willing to meet U.S. conditions, which include the release of political prisoners, an end to political and religious repression, and an opening to American private sector investment.

At the same time, the official said the door has not closed to dialogue that could help both countries given Cuba's proximity to the U.S. The United States sees a national security threat in what the official called increasing influence on the island by China and Russia, including intelligence and logistics cooperation.

Cuban officials are adamant, though, that Cuba's internal governance is not up for negotiation.

"Negotiations on issues like regime change or removing the president are out of the question," Cuban Ambassador to the United Nations Ernesto Soberón Guzmán told reporters last week. "No internal affairs of Cuba are on the table."

Guzmán also told The Associated Press last month that Havana will not abide by any American "ultimatums" to release political prisoners and that Cuba's leaders are "preparing for all scenarios" if Trump makes good on threats to intervene.

The White House didn't immediately respond to a request for comment about military action in Cuba.

AP reveals State Department officials who led delegation to Havana

Contacts between the Trump administration and Cuba have increased, including a meeting earlier this year in the Caribbean nation of St. Kitts and Nevis between Rubio and Raúl Guillermo Rodríguez Castro, who is believed to carry significant influence in Havana. He is the grandson of former Cuban leader Raúl Castro.

More recently, two senior State Department officials — Jeremy Lewin, who is in charge of all U.S. foreign assistance, and Michael Kozak, the top U.S. diplomat for Latin America — led a delegation to Havana on April 10 and met with the grandson, according to one U.S. official familiar with the meetings.

The top State Department participants had not been previously reported. It was the first U.S. government flight to land in Cuba other than at the U.S. Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay since 2016, during former

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President Barack Obama's period of rapprochement.

That meeting was "professional and cordial" but did not produce definitive results, leaving the U.S. delegation skeptical that the Cuban leadership is willing to consider even modest reforms that could ameliorate deteriorating humanitarian conditions, that official said.

U.S. officials have often rejected Cuban complaints that the American embargo on the island and, more recently, the Trump administration's energy blockade are responsible for the hardships.

But Cuba's crises have deepened following the energy blockade, imposed after the U.S. in January removed Nicolás Maduro as leader of Venezuela, which was Cuba's main source of energy.

Cuban officials have denounced the U.S. rejection of their complaints.

"Traveling 4,500 miles to meet with the Pope, supposedly to request his 'good offices' in delivering U.S. humanitarian assistance to the Cuban people through the Church, while at the same time claiming that the blockade does not exist, is a blatant insult to human intelligence," Guzmán said Thursday in a statement.

Ex-deputy found guilty of reckless homicide in shooting of Black man entering grandmother's home

By PATRICK AFTOORA-ORSAGOS Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — A former sheriff's deputy was found guilty of reckless homicide at trial Thursday for shooting a Black man who was bringing sandwiches to his grandmother's house.

The killing of Casey Goodson Jr. by Jason Meade in December 2020 had provoked outrage in Ohio.

Trial jurors said they couldn't agree on the more serious charge of murder, prompting the judge to declare a mistrial on that count.

Meade, who is white, said his shooting of Goodson — five times in the back and once in the side — was justified because he saw the 23-year-old holding a gun and turning toward him in the doorway of the house in Columbus. But no one else testified they saw Goodson holding the gun he was licensed to carry, and no cameras recorded the shooting.

This was Meade's second murder trial after the first one ended in a mistrial two years ago. He is now the second white law enforcement officer to be convicted in the killing of a Black man in the state since the 2020 killing of George Floyd in Minnesota sparked national protests.

Tamala Payne, Goodson's mother, said the guilty verdict gives her family closure and peace.

"I know now Casey can rest. You know, we've been fighting for five and a half years, and Casey sees his family fighting. He knows the stress. He knows the pain. He knows the heartache," she said. "And now, not only can we try to find peace and finally start truly grieving, my baby can rest."

Meade had testified in the first trial that he pursued Goodson after the man waved a gun at him as they passed each other in their vehicles. According to his family and prosecutors, Goodson was holding a bag of Subway sandwiches in one hand and his keys in the other, and was listening to music through earbuds when he was killed.

Meade did not take the stand at his second trial.

Prosecutors also said the evidence suggests the gun wasn't in his hands, but in a flimsy holder under his belt. They added it was found under his body, its safety mechanism still engaged, as Goodson laid mortally wounded on the kitchen floor of his grandmother's house.

Meade, now 47, retired from the Franklin County Sheriff's Department in 2021. He's also a Baptist pastor. His attorney cited Meade's oral and written accounts of what happened, and said the shooting was justified.

Ohio law defines murder as the purposeful causing of a death, while the lesser charge of reckless murder means the defendant acted recklessly in causing a death. The former is punishable by up to life in prison, while the latter carries a maximum prison sentence of five years.

Judge David Young set sentencing for July 16.

Prosecutors said they were pleased with the guilty verdict on the reckless homicide charge and haven't decided yet whether to pursue a third trial on the murder charge — something Payne said she would like to see happen.

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Defense attorneys Mark Collins and Kaitlyn Stephens did not address the media afterward.

Following the verdict, Brian Steel, president and chief executive of the Fraternal Order of Police Capital City Lodge #9, said he respects the jury but was “disappointed” with the decision. He said he hopes the prosecutor’s office does not seek a retrial on the murder charge.

“This was long six years drawn out. This is the second trial. I hope they’re for the sake of not only the Meade family, the Goodson family and the community, I hope we don’t try to do a third trial on this murder charge,” Steel said.

Christopher Corne was driving nearby that day and testified for the prosecution at both trials. He said Goodson seemed to be dancing and singing in his truck shortly before the shooting. He also testified during the first trial that he did not see a gun in Goodson’s hand.

Columbus police Officer Samuel Rippey testified at the second trial that while he was administering emergency treatment to Goodson, he saw the gun, with an extended magazine, lying on the floor.

Goodson’s death provoked public outrage in Ohio as the killings of Black people by white officers increased demands for police reform following the killing of Floyd by a white police officer in Minneapolis.

Banners were hung from highway overpasses in Columbus, carrying messages such as “Justice for Casey Goodson Jr.” and “Convict Murderer Meade.” The judge ordered the banners taken down during the trial.

Previous Ohio prosecutions in such cases led to only one conviction — that of Columbus police officer Adam Coy, who was indicted on charges including murder in the 2020 killing of Andre Hill.

Tennessee enacts new US House map carving up majority-Black district in Memphis

By TRAVIS LOLLER, KIM CHANDLER, JEFFREY COLLINS and DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Amid raucous protests Thursday, Republicans in Tennessee enacted a new U.S. House map that carves up a majority-Black district in Memphis, reshaping it to the GOP’s advantage as part of President Donald Trump’s strategy to hold on to a slim majority in the November midterm elections.

The final Senate vote unfolded as demonstrators chanted loudly in the galleries and hallways. Democratic state Sen. Charlane Oliver stood on her desk in the Senate chamber, holding a banner denouncing the redistricting as a “Jim Crow” effort, then clapping and dancing. Other Democratic senators linked arms in the front of the chamber. Republican leadership quickly adjourned the special session, sending the new map on to Republican Gov. Bill Lee, who promptly signed it into law.

Protesters in the galleries also had disrupted the Republican-led House as it voted for the new map — yelling, chanting and blowing air horns. In the hallways, other shouting protesters were held back by Tennessee state troopers.

Not long after the new map became law, the NAACP Tennessee State Conference sued in state court asserting that the mid-decade redistricting is illegal.

Tennessee is the first state to pass new congressional districts since a U.S. Supreme Court ruling last week significantly weakened federal Voting Rights Act protections for minorities. But more Southern states could follow. Republicans in Louisiana, Alabama and South Carolina also have taken steps toward redistricting.

The Supreme Court ruled that Louisiana relied too heavily on race when creating a second Black-majority House district as it attempted to comply with federal law. The high court’s decision altered a decades-old understanding of the law, giving Republicans grounds to try to eliminate majority-Black districts that have elected Democrats.

Louisiana has postponed its congressional primary to give state lawmakers time to craft a new House map. Legislation awaiting a final vote Friday in Alabama also would upend the state’s congressional primaries if courts allow changes to its U.S. House districts. In South Carolina, meanwhile, Republican state House members released a proposed new congressional map designed to give them a clean sweep of the seats.

The states are the latest to join an already fierce national redistricting battle. Tennessee is the ninth state to redraw its congressional districts since Trump prodded Texas Republicans to do so last year. From that spate of redistricting, Republicans think they could gain as many as 14 seats while Democrats think they

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could gain up to 10. But some competitive races mean the parties may not get everything they sought in the November elections.

Tennessee Republicans act despite protests

As a first step to adopting new House districts, Tennessee lawmakers gave final approval Thursday to legislation that repealed a state law prohibiting mid-decade redistricting. Another new law will reopen candidate qualifying until May 15 to allow time for new people to enter the U.S. House primaries and existing candidates to switch districts or drop out.

The new House map breaks up Tennessee's lone Democratic-held district, centered on the majority-Black city of Memphis, creating a ripple effect of alterations to districts throughout the western and central parts of the state. The geographically compact 9th District that includes Memphis — currently represented by Steve Cohen, who is white — will now stretch a couple hundred miles eastward before reaching north toward the Nashville suburbs.

Unlike in Louisiana — where lawmakers had crafted a second majority-Black district to try to comply with the Voting Rights Act — Memphis has long been the base of its own congressional district.

Republican House Speaker Cameron Sexton said the new districts were drawn based on population and politics, not racial data.

But Democrats dismissed such assertions.

"These maps are racist tools of white supremacy at the behest of the most powerful white supremacist in the United States of America, Donald J. Trump," said state Rep. Justin Pearson, a Black Democrat from Memphis who is running for the U.S. House.

Republican state Sen. John Stevens defended the new districts he sponsored by noting that Democrats in Illinois, Massachusetts and other states also had drawn congressional districts to their advantage.

"This bill represents Tennessee's attempt to maximize our partisan advantage," he said.

It does so at the expense of both Memphis residents and democracy, said Sen. London Lamar, a Democrat from Memphis.

"You cannot take a majority Black city, fracture its voting power and then tell us race has nothing to do with it," she said.

Democrats noted that the state Supreme Court in April 2022 rejected a challenge to the current congressional map, finding it was too close to the election to make changes. This year, there's even less time before the Aug. 6 primary, raising the potential of confusion for both candidates and voters, Democrats said.

A plan for a new primary advances in Alabama

Audience members watching an Alabama legislative committee Thursday erupted in shouts of "shame" after Republican lawmakers advanced legislation to authorize special primaries if the state can put a new congressional map in place for the November midterms.

Alabama has asked federal judges to lift an order requiring the state to have a second district where Black voters are the majority or close to it. That district gave rise to the election of Rep. Shomari Figures, a Black Democrat, in 2024.

Republicans instead want to put in place a map lawmakers drew in 2023 — which was rejected by a federal court — that could allow them to reclaim Figures' district. Black residents currently make up about 48% of the district's voting-age population. That would drop to about 39% under the 2023 map. Republicans hope the federal courts will see the case differently in the wake of the Supreme Court's Louisiana decision.

If a court grants Alabama's request, the legislation under consideration would ignore the May 19 primary results for congressional seats and direct the governor to schedule a new primary under the revised districts. The House passed the legislation on a party-line vote Wednesday. A final Senate vote is expected Friday.

Addressing a Senate committee on Thursday, Figures said his concern isn't for himself but for the people who fought for decades "to have a voice in what government looks like."

A proposed new House map is unveiled in South Carolina

A proposed new U.S. House map was distributed Thursday on the South Carolina House floor, where members huddled around desks to review it.

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The proposal would take Democratic U.S. Rep. Jim Clyburn out of the 6th District he has represented since 1992. His district currently is made up of nearly 50% Black voters and provided a greater than 60% vote for Democrat Kamala Harris in 2024 presidential election. The proposal would split it into four different districts.

The proposed map also would split the Democratic stronghold of Columbia and its redder suburbs into four different districts.

The South Carolina House on Wednesday approved a resolution giving lawmakers permission to return after the May 14 end of their regular work to continue consideration of a redistricting plan. But that also would require a two-thirds vote of the Senate.

The state's primary elections are June 9.

US stocks fall from their records as oil prices yo-yo

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. stocks fell from their records Thursday after oil prices yo-yoed as Wall Street waits to see whether its hopes for a deal to end the Iran war are warranted or just wishful.

The price for a barrel of Brent crude oil settled at \$100.06, down 1.2%, and continued its decline from more than \$115 early this week. But it swung sharply before getting there, as Iran said it was reviewing the latest U.S. proposals on ending their war.

The hope is that an end to the war will reopen the Strait of Hormuz and allow oil tankers trapped in the Persian Gulf to deliver crude again to customers. Oil and gasoline are still much more expensive than they were before the war began because of the strait's closure.

Brent's price briefly fell near \$96 per barrel Thursday after a spokesperson for Pakistan's Foreign Ministry said, "We expect an agreement sooner rather than later." Pakistan has been mediating talks between the United States and Iran. But Brent later erased much of that drop and briefly topped \$102, which in turn sent stocks lower on Wall Street.

The S&P 500 fell 0.4% from its all-time high set the day before. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 313 points, or 0.6%, and the Nasdaq composite slipped 0.1% from its own record.

Wall Street saw even sharper swings earlier in the war, when hopes rallied for a reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, only to get quickly dashed. That could happen again. And Iran has created a government agency to vet and tax vessels seeking passage through the strait, a shipping data company reported Thursday, a move that could add to costs for fuel.

Despite all the uncertainties about the war, a powerful parade of U.S. companies reporting even bigger profits for the start of the year than analysts expected has helped support the U.S. stock market. Stock prices tend to follow the path of corporate profits over the long term.

Datadog leaped 31.3% to help lead the U.S. market after the monitoring and security platform for cloud applications topped analysts' expectations for profit in the latest quarter.

Albemarle rose 3% after the lithium products and specialty chemicals company likewise delivered better-than-expected results. Taser maker Axon Enterprise rallied 10.6% after raising its forecast for revenue this year in part because of big growth for its counter-drone products.

On the losing end of Wall Street was Whirlpool, which tumbled 11.9% after reporting much weaker results than analysts expected. It's instituting the largest price increases in a decade for its major appliances in North America, while accelerating cuts to its costs, as it contends with weaker confidence among U.S. consumers.

Shake Shack dropped 28.3% after its results for the latest quarter fell well below analysts' expectations.

McDonald's stock held steadier and slipped 0.1% after its revenue for the latest quarter edged past analysts' expectations. CEO Chris Kempczinski said high gasoline prices and consumer anxiety over the Iran war could dent its sales this spring.

All told, the S&P 500 fell 28.01 points to 7,337.11. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 313.62 to 49,596.97, and the Nasdaq composite slipped 32.75 to 25,806.20.

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In the bond market, Treasury yields rose after oil prices pared their drops. The yield on the 10-year Treasury climbed to 4.38% from 4.36% late Wednesday.

Higher yields can raise rates for mortgages and other kinds of loans going to U.S. households and businesses, which in turn can slow the economy. Higher yields also tend to push downward on prices for stocks and other kinds of investments.

The 10-year Treasury yield was at just 3.97% before the war.

Several reports on the U.S. economy came in mixed. One said more U.S. workers applied for unemployment benefits last week, but the increase was not as bad as economists expected. Another report suggested that productivity for U.S. workers improved by only half of what economists expected for the latest quarter.

In stock markets abroad, indexes fell in Europe following a stronger finish in Asia. Stocks dropped 1.5% in London and 1.2% in Paris.

Japan's Nikkei 225 roared 5.6% higher as trading in Tokyo resumed following a holiday and caught up with big gains for Asian markets from earlier in the week. It has soared nearly 71% in the last 12 months on strength for tech stocks benefiting from the boom in artificial intelligence.

"I think it's a kind of bubble because buying activity concentrated on leading AI, artificial intelligence stock and semiconductor-related stocks. It's a situation where only semiconductor stocks are being bought," said Takashi Hiroki, chief strategist at MONEX.

Man who sprayed vinegar at Rep. Ilhan Omar during town hall pleads guilty to assault

By TIM SULLIVAN Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — A man who sprayed vinegar at Democratic U.S. Rep. Ilhan Omar at a town hall meeting in Minneapolis pleaded guilty to assault Thursday in federal court after reaching a deal with prosecutors.

Anthony Kazmierczak, 55, is awaiting sentencing.

Kazmierczak, dressed in bright orange jail clothing, gave only a fragmentary explanation Thursday of the Jan. 27 assault, which came as the city was already on edge after the fatal shootings of two people by federal agents during a White House crackdown that brought thousands of immigration officers to Minnesota.

After being asked what he remembered of the assault, he told U.S. District Judge Joan N. Ericksen: "It's fuzzy."

Kazmierczak, who was in the audience during Omar's January town hall, leaped up when the representative called for the ouster of then-Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem. He sprayed liquid from a syringe as court documents say he shouted that Noem would not resign and that Omar was "splitting Minnesota apart."

Security officers tackled Kazmierczak, who told them the liquid was vinegar.

"I didn't want anybody to think she was in danger," he said Thursday.

Omar, who was not injured, continued with the town hall after the arrest.

Authorities later determined he'd sprayed her with a mixture of water and apple cider vinegar. He was charged with assaulting a U.S. officer.

Court documents say Kazmierczak, a critic of Omar who has made online posts supportive of President Donald Trump, told a close associate several years ago that "somebody should kill" her.

Omar, a refugee from Somalia, has long been a target of Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric. After she was elected seven years ago, Trump said she should "go back" to her home country. He has described her as "garbage" and said she should be investigated.

Trump has also accused Omar of staging the attack, telling ABC News, "She probably had herself sprayed, knowing her."

On Thursday, Kazmierczak told Erickson that he was being treated for Parkinson's disease, and that he'd

been diagnosed with ADHD or attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, and a form of post-traumatic stress. After his arrest, his then-attorney said that he did not have access to the medications he needed for Parkinson's and other serious conditions.

Minnesota court records show that Kazmierczak, who was convicted of felony auto theft in 1989, has been arrested multiple times for driving under the influence and has had numerous traffic citations. There are also indications he has had significant financial problems, including two bankruptcy filings.

In social media posts, Kazmierczak had criticized former President Joe Biden and referred to Democrats as "angry and liars." Trump wants the U.S. to be "stronger and more prosperous," he wrote.

Threats against members of Congress have increased in recent years, peaking in 2021 following the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol by a mob of Trump supporters before dipping slightly, only to climb again, according to the most recent figures from the U.S. Capitol Police.

Rapper Kodak Black arrested in Florida on felony MDMA trafficking charge and pleads not guilty

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — Rapper Kodak Black was arrested this week on a drug trafficking charge in central Florida in his latest run-in with law enforcement.

The rapper, whose real name is Bill Kapri, was booked into the Orange County Jail on Wednesday on a felony charge of trafficking MDMA, the synthetic drug also known as ecstasy or molly.

Kapri, 28, entered a written plea of not guilty and asked for a jury trial on Thursday. He also waived appearing in person at a future arraignment hearing in state court. His bond was set at \$75,000.

Kapri's arrest followed a police encounter in Orlando in November when officers were called to a neighborhood in Orlando by residents who reported hearing gunshots. Officers encountered a bunch of people hanging out around parked luxury sports utility vehicles, including Kapri, according to a police report.

An officer noticed a white substance on a \$100 bill inside a Lamborghini SUV, which smelled of cannabis, giving the officer probable cause to search the vehicle. During the search, the officer found a pink bag containing a plastic bag of MDMA, \$37,000 and numerous documents with Kapri's name on them, the police report said.

The pink bag matched a bag seen in a photo of Kapri that the rapper had posted to his Instagram account. The bag also contained a distinct lighter that also was in the photo, investigators said.

According to the police report, everyone at the scene denied owning the bag, including Kapri, who nevertheless said the money belonged to his business and asked for it back.

Ambrosia Healy and Kevin Young, who represent Kapri at Universal Music Group, didn't respond to an email seeking comment.

Kapri has faced previous legal issues.

In 2023, police in Plantation, Florida arrested Kapri after finding him asleep at the wheel with white powder around his mouth, officials said. Although authorities said the powder initially tested positive for cocaine, a lab test later revealed it was oxycodone, for which Kapri obtained a prescription.

The arrest was a violation of his probation from an unrelated case, which led to him being locked up in Miami for two months.

Kapri was also arrested in 2022 on charges of trafficking in oxycodone and possession of a controlled substance without a prescription. He was freed on bond with regular drug testing as a condition of his release. Kapri was ordered into drug rehab for 30 days in 2023 after missing a drug test and then testing positive for fentanyl several days later, according to court records.

In January 2021, then-President Donald Trump commuted a three-year federal prison sentence the rapper had for falsifying documents used to buy weapons. Kapri had served about half his sentence.

As Kodak Black, Kapri has sold more than 30 million singles, with massive hits such as "Super Gremlin," which reached No. 3 on the Billboard Hot 100 in 2022.

Trump says EU has until July 4 to approve last year's trade deal or it will face higher tariffs

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said in a Thursday social media post that goods from the European Union would face higher tariff rates if the 27-member bloc fails to approve last year's trade framework by July 4.

The announcement appeared to be a deadline extension after the president said last Friday that EU autos would face a higher 25% tariff starting this week. Trump made the updated announcement after what he described as a "great call" with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

Still, the U.S. president was displeased that the European Parliament had yet to finalize the trade arrangement reached last year, which was further complicated in February by the U.S. Supreme Court ruling that Trump lacked the legal authority to declare an economic emergency to impose the initial tariffs used to pressure the EU into talks.

"A promise was made that the EU would deliver their side of the Deal and, as per Agreement, cut their Tariffs to ZERO!" Trump posted. "I agreed to give her until our Country's 250th Birthday or, unfortunately, their Tariffs would immediately jump to much higher levels."

It was unclear from the post whether Trump was implying that the tariff rates would jump on all EU goods or the increase would only apply to autos.

His latest statement indicates he might be backing away from his earlier threat on EU autos by giving the European Parliament several more weeks to approve the agreement.

Under the original terms of the framework, the U.S. would charge a 15% tax on most goods imported from the EU.

But since the Supreme Court ruling, the administration has levied a 10% tariff while investigating trade imbalances and national security issues, aiming to put in new tariffs to make up for lost revenues.

US will start revoking passports for thousands of parents who owe child support, AP learns

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. State Department will begin revoking the U.S. passports of thousands of parents who owe a significant amount of unpaid child support.

The department told The Associated Press on Thursday that the revocations would begin Friday and be focused on those who owe \$100,000 or more. That would apply to about 2,700 American passport holders, according to figures supplied to the State Department by the Department of Health and Human Services.

The revocation program, plans for which were first reported by the AP in February, soon will be greatly expanded to cover parents who owe more than \$2,500 in unpaid child support — the threshold set by a little-enforced 1996 law, the State Department said.

It was not clear on Thursday how many passport holders owe more than \$2,500 because HHS is still collecting data from state agencies that track the figures, but it could encompass many more thousands of people, officials said.

Until this week, only those who applied to renew their passports were subject to the penalty. Under the new policy, HHS will inform the State Department of all past-due payments of more than \$2,500 and parents in that group with passports will have their documents revoked, the department said.

"We are expanding a commonsense practice that has been proven effective at getting those who owe child support to pay their debt," Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs Mora Namdar said. "Once these parents resolve their debts, they can once again enjoy the privilege of a U.S. passport."

Since the AP reported the expansion of the program on Feb. 10, the department said it had "seen data

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that hundreds of parents took action and resolved their arrears with state authorities since news broke that the State Department would start proactively revoking passports."

"While we can't confirm the causation in all of those cases, we are taking this action precisely to impel these parents to do the right thing by their children and by U.S. law," the department said.

Even before the policy was expanded, the department said the program had been a "powerful tool" to get parents to pay what they owed. It said that since it began in earnest in 1998, states had collected some \$657 million in arrears, including more than \$156 million in over 24,000 individual lump-sum payments over the past five years.

Those whose passports are revoked under the program will be notified that they will not be able to use their documents for travel and will have to apply for a new passport once their arrears are confirmed as paid.

A passport holder who is abroad at the time of revocation will need to visit a U.S. embassy or consulate to obtain an emergency travel document that allows them to return to the United States.

Russia says Ukraine launched a major drone attack after Moscow shunned ceasefire offer

By The Associated Press undefined

Russian air defenses shot down 347 Ukrainian drones overnight, Russia's Defense Ministry said Thursday, in what appeared to be a major attack after Moscow spurned Kyiv's ceasefire earlier in the week and tension mounted over safety at Russia's upcoming Victory Day celebrations.

Incoming drones were destroyed in over 20 Russian regions, including Moscow, according to the Defense Ministry, in Ukraine's second-biggest aerial attack since Russia's all-out invasion more than four years ago. The largest was in March when it launched 389 drones.

Dozens more Ukrainian drones were launched during daylight hours Thursday, the ministry said, including some heading again toward Moscow. Nearly 100 flights in and out of the Russian capital's three main airports — Sheremetyevo, Domodedovo and Vnukovo — were delayed or canceled by midday, the Moskva news agency reported.

The attacks came ahead of Russia's most important secular holiday on May 9, Victory Day, which marks the anniversary of the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II. Russian authorities have declared a unilateral ceasefire in Ukraine for Friday and Saturday.

Ukraine had responded with its own suspension of hostilities from midnight Tuesday. But Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said while Ukraine had been ready to "ensure complete silence," Moscow disregarded the goodwill gesture and launched fresh attacks.

"They want Ukraine's permission to hold their parade — so they can safely take to the square for an hour once a year, and then go back to killing our people and waging war," Zelenskyy said in his regular evening video address Thursday.

The Ukrainian leader said Thursday on X that Russia's attacks have been ceaseless, with drones, missiles, artillery shelling and glide bombs hitting civilian areas of Ukraine, including the power grid and rail network.

In the northeastern city of Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest, a drone strike wounded nine people, including three children, local officials said.

Tension has grown as Russia's Victory Day celebrations approach and U.S.-led peace efforts gain no traction. Rustem Umerov, the head of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, was in the United States on Thursday and preparing to meet with Trump administration representatives, according to Zelenskyy.

All mobile internet access and text messaging services will be shut down in the Russian capital on May 9, state media reported Thursday, citing the country's Ministry of Digital Development, Communications and Mass Media.

A traditional parade in Moscow won't feature the usual tanks, missiles and other military equipment for the first time in nearly two decades.

The Russian Defense Ministry cited the "current operational situation" as a reason for excluding military

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equipment.

Russian authorities say they are concerned about possible Ukrainian attacks, as Kyiv has expanded its long-range drone and missile capabilities.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Thursday that additional security measures were being taken due to the "rather complex operational situation."

The measures being taken "are necessary to ensure the safety of citizens, which is an absolute priority," Peskov told reporters.

Among the foreign dignitaries expected to attend the Victory Day ceremonies on Saturday are Malaysia's King Sultan Ibrahim Iskandar, Laos President Thongloun Sisoulith, and Belarus' authoritarian leader Alexander Lukashenko. Slovakia's Prime Minister Robert Fico was to meet with Putin and lay flowers at the tomb of the unknown soldier but stay away from the parade.

Zelenskyy said some countries who planned to send representatives to Moscow for May 9 had contacted Ukraine about their plans to visit.

"An odd desire at a time like this. We do not recommend it," Zelenskyy said late Thursday.

Russia repeated its recent warnings to Ukraine that it would take decisive action — including a potential mass strike on Kyiv — if Ukrainian attacks disrupt the occasion.

"We have strengthened our focus on the possibility of retaliatory measures," presidential aide Yuri Ushakov told journalists Thursday.

Russia's Foreign Ministry advised foreign embassies and international organizations located in Kyiv to evacuate their offices in case such a strike did take place.

Ukraine's air defense shot down 92 of the 102 drones Russia launched overnight, the military said.

Russia maintains a significant advantage in drone numbers, regularly deploying hundreds in a single attack.

Clarence Thomas becomes the second longest-serving Supreme Court justice in American history

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The first baby boomer on the Supreme Court hit a milestone on Thursday, becoming the second-longest serving justice in history at a time when his influence has never seemed greater.

Once an outlier on the nation's highest court, Justice Clarence Thomas has become a towering figure in the conservative legal movement over the last decade as he helped secure landmark rulings on abortion, voting and Second Amendment rights.

The only justice with a longer tenure is liberal William O. Douglas. Thomas would overtake Douglas in 2028 if he remains on the court, and there is no sign he plans to retire anytime soon.

"I think he's more energized and excited now than when I first met him," said John Yoo, a law professor at the University of California, Berkeley, who served in Republican President George W. Bush's administration after his time as a Thomas clerk three decades ago.

Thomas was confirmed in 1991 after contentious hearings that included sexual harassment allegations. More recently, his acceptance of luxury trips has raised a storm of ethics questions. He's nevertheless gone from near-silence at oral arguments to asking the first questions and penning a landmark ruling expanding Second Amendment rights.

Following the nomination of three conservative justices by Republican President Donald Trump, Thomas is now the most senior member of a supermajority that's also overturned abortion as a constitutional right, ended affirmative action in college admissions and sharply limited the Voting Rights Act.

"The court has radically moved in his direction over the course of his time on the court," said Stanford University law professor Pamela Karlan. Thomas' seniority means he can decide who writes an opinion if he's part of a majority that doesn't include Chief Justice John Roberts, a factor that can nudge other votes behind closed doors, Karlan said.

Off the bench, Thomas' sphere of influence also includes his large, close-knit network of former clerks,

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who have served in the Trump administration and are increasingly filling out the ranks of federal judges.

"That is an important legacy that he will leave," said Sarah Konsky, director of the Supreme Court and Appellate Clinic at the University of Chicago Law School. "Even as justices' own time on the court winds down, significant influence lives on through their clerks."

That's not to say Thomas' time on the court is up. In a recent speech, Thomas tied the nation's highest ideals to a conservative vision of limited government — and launched a broadside on progressivism seen by critics as unfair and inappropriate. In the room at the University of Texas, though, it earned a standing ovation.

Thomas, who became the second Black member of the court, now has a tenure that tops 34 years, putting him ahead of Justice Stephen J. Field, who was nominated by President Abraham Lincoln before the end of the Civil War and served as the only 10th justice until 1897.

For Thomas, 77, it's a long way from the hearings at which his nomination by Republican President George H.W. Bush was nearly derailed by allegations that he had sexually harassed Anita Hill, a charge he forcefully denied.

Thomas has more recently come under scrutiny for lavish, undisclosed trips from a GOP megadonor and the conservative political activism of his wife, who backed false claims that the 2020 election was stolen from Trump. The justice has said he wasn't required to disclose the trips he took with friends and ignored calls to recuse himself from cases related to the election.

On the court, though, recent years have also brought perhaps the most significant work of his career, especially a 2022 opinion he wrote that found people generally have the right to carry a gun in public. The justice did not respond to a request for comment on his tenure.

His own jurisprudence has changed little over the years, said Scott Gerber, author of "First Principles: The Jurisprudence of Clarence Thomas." Even as the majority moves his way, he's continued to write dissents that get noticed.

"He's incredibly consistent," Gerber said. Once known for solo dissents, "now he writes majority opinions."

Russia is ramping up its attempts to kill opponents in Europe, intelligence officials say

By EMMA BURROWS and JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

When Vladimir Osechkin wants to take his children to school or go to the supermarket, he calls the police. The Russian activist has lived under protection since 2022 because French officials believe Russia is trying to kill him.

In April 2025, a crew of Russian men staked out Osechkin's home and the surrounding area in southwestern France for several hours, taking videos and photos in suspected groundwork for an assassination, according to court documents seen by The Associated Press that are not public. Several years earlier, Osechkin said, a red dot — which he thought was a laser sight for a gun — appeared on his wall.

Elsewhere in Europe, Lithuanian officials disrupted a plot last year to kill a Lithuanian supporter of Ukraine and another against a Russian activist. Officials in Germany have similarly broken up two plots: one to target the head of a German weapons company supplying Ukraine, the other against a Ukrainian military official. Polish authorities arrested a man in 2024 in what they said was a plot to assassinate Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. And that same year, a Russian helicopter pilot who defected was killed in Spain — with Russian operatives the prime suspects.

While Russian officials have long been accused of silencing the country's enemies abroad, three Western intelligence officials from different countries told AP that a campaign of targeted killings has ramped up since President Vladimir Putin's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

The officials said Russia's security services are now more brazen in their choice of targets, going after Russian activists and foreign supporters of Ukraine, in addition to the usual suspects like military defectors. All three officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive information.

"This campaign is not by accident or chance," said one of them, a senior European intelligence official.

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"There is political authorization."

The intelligence officials, a former senior British counterterrorism official and prosecutors in Lithuania see the campaign as connected to Russia's broader efforts to undermine European countries that support Ukraine, including 191 acts of sabotage, arson and other disruption linked to Russia by Western officials that the AP has mapped across Europe since the beginning of the war.

Many accused in that campaign are people who were recruited as cheap proxies for Russian intelligence operatives. Moscow is now using that model to target its perceived enemies abroad, according to the French court documents, officials and information from the Lithuanian prosecutor.

Putin's spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told AP he didn't see "any need" to comment. Russian officials have previously denied that Moscow is behind attempts to kill its opponents abroad.

The AP spoke to three of the people targeted: Osechkin; Lithuanian activist Valdas Bartkevičius; and Ruslan Gabbasov, who advocates for independence for the Russian region of Bashkortostan.

A trip to the seaside

Three of the four men detained by French police in the plot to kill Osechkin traveled to the beach resort of Biarritz, where Osechkin lives, in April 2025, court documents show. They surveilled his house "with a view to assassinating him and subsequently intimidating all political opponents of the Russian authorities living in France," the documents said.

All four were born in Russia's Dagestan region. One has multiple criminal convictions while another said he had been arrested by Russia's domestic security service and fled the country to avoid being sent to Ukraine.

Osechkin founded a rights group for prisoners years ago and runs a project that exposes abuses in Russia's prison system, but he said the threats against him escalated after he began investigating alleged Russian abuses in Ukraine and helping Russian military defectors flee.

He moved to France in 2015 and was put under police protection seven years later when French officials received information that his life was in danger.

"If it weren't for them, I probably would have been killed," he said.

Targets say Moscow wins if they hide

Across the continent in Lithuania, Gabbasov, the activist from Bashkortostan, discovered an Apple AirTag tracker hidden on his car in February 2025. Police told him to leave the device and followed the people following him, he said.

A few weeks later, Gabbasov said he was attending celebrations marking Lithuania's independence from the Soviet Union with his wife and 5-year-old son when officers called and told him not to return home.

The next day, he said officers told him: "Yesterday, a killer was detained near your house; he was waiting for you with a gun. ... He was ready to wait for you all night."

Lithuanian authorities, he said, offered him the chance to completely "disappear" — change his name, move and stop his work.

He turned them down, saying many people from his mainly Muslim home region near Kazakhstan see him as a leader in the campaign for independence. The region is important to the Kremlin, Gabbasov said, because of its gold reserves and because large numbers of its men have been sent to fight in Ukraine.

"I can't betray them all by simply disappearing, especially out of fear," Gabbasov said, adding that would play into Moscow's hands.

"What difference does it make to them?" Gabbasov asked, referring to Russia's security services. "They could kill me ... or I could hide from everyone and stop engaging in political activity. That's exactly what they want."

A plot to put a bomb in a mailbox

The authorities in Lithuania made the same offer to Bartkevičius, after he said they discovered a plot to kill him with a bomb planted in his mailbox in March 2025.

But disappearing also wasn't an option for the activist who raises money for Ukraine and who gained notoriety for his anti-Russian acts, including urinating on a Russian war memorial.

That, he said, would be "social death."

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Lithuanian prosecutors charged 13 people from at least seven countries with involvement in the two plots — among at least 20 people authorities have detained, charged or identified as involved in such plots in Europe over the past year.

The people involved in the Lithuanian cases were directly ordered by Russian military intelligence, prosecutors said, and some had connections to Russian organized crime and could be linked to other arson and espionage plots elsewhere in Europe.

Moscow's switch to relying on such proxies can be traced to a previous attempted assassination, Cmdr. Dominic Murphy told AP before he retired as head of the counterterrorism squad at Britain's Metropolitan Police.

In 2018, former Russian spy Sergei Skripal was poisoned with a nerve agent in Salisbury, England — an attack the U.K. government accused Moscow of carrying out with military intelligence officers.

In response, Britain and other Western nations kicked out hundreds of Russian diplomats — and spies — making it harder for Russian officers to operate in Europe, Murphy, a lead investigator, said.

The fact that most of the plots made public by Western officials since 2022 have been foiled could indicate that it's harder for Moscow to carry them out with proxies, as opposed to its own officers, one of the Western intelligence officials said.

Still, the attempted killings may serve additional purposes, they said, including scaring the Kremlin's opponents into silence and wasting European law enforcement resources.

Pointing to the case of Maxim Kuzminov — the helicopter pilot who defected and was threatened with death by masked men in military fatigues on Russian state television — the official said it's clear Russia's security services can kill someone in Europe if they really want to.

For that reason, the European intelligence official said, targets will never be safe.

"Even if you thwart an operation once, you still need to be ready in case they strike again."

Man arrested on suspicion of weapon possession after report former Prince Andrew was threatened

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — A man has been arrested on suspicion of possessing an offensive weapon after reports that the former Prince Andrew was threatened by a masked man while walking dogs near his home.

Norfolk Constabulary said that the arrest came Wednesday evening after a man was reported "behaving in an intimidating manner" near the home of Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor in eastern England.

"Officers attended, and the man was arrested on suspicion of a public order offense and possession of an offensive weapon," the force said Thursday.

The suspect is being held for questioning at a nearby police station. The term offensive weapons covers knives, truncheons and other items used to cause injury. Police didn't specify what type of weapon was involved.

The Daily Telegraph newspaper reported that a man wearing a ski mask ran toward the former royal while shouting abuse. It said the incident occurred near the Sandringham Estate while the former prince was out walking his dogs, and that Andrew and his protection officer got in their car and sped away.

Mountbatten-Windsor, the younger brother of King Charles III, moved to the king's private Sandringham Estate, about 100 miles (160 kilometers) north of London, after he was evicted from his longtime home near Windsor Castle following revelations about his friendship with Jeffrey Epstein.

Andrew, 66, now lives at Marsh Farm, a property on the Sandringham Estate, after leaving Royal Lodge last year.

He was stripped of all his honors and titles and banished from public view by the royal family after years of scandal over his money woes and links to questionable characters, including Epstein.

One of Epstein's accusers, Virginia Giuffre, alleged that she was forced to have sex with the then-prince three times starting when she was 17. He denied it, but eventually settled the case for an undisclosed sum and acknowledged Giuffre's suffering as a victim of sex trafficking. Giuffre died by suicide in April

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2025, aged 41.

In February, he became the first senior British royal in almost 400 years to be arrested when he was held for hours by British police on suspicion of misconduct in public office in a case related to his links to Epstein. It was an extraordinary move in a country where authorities once sought to shield the royal family from embarrassment.

Police previously said they were "assessing" reports that Mountbatten-Windsor sent trade information to Epstein, a wealthy investor and convicted sex offender, in 2010, when the former prince was the United Kingdom's special envoy for international trade.

Correspondence between the two men was released by the U.S. Justice Department along with millions of pages of documents from the American investigation into Epstein.

FDA's new playbook: Lots of media announcements but not much rulemaking

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — In one of his first major announcements as health secretary, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. called a news conference to unveil a plan to "phase out" synthetic food dyes.

Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Marty Makary opened the event by saying his agency was "removing all petroleum-based food dyes" from U.S. foods. But the specifics did not become clear until the final minutes, when Kennedy revealed that the government had "an understanding" with foodmakers to voluntarily stop using the chemicals. A "national standard and timeline" for completing the process would soon follow, according to an FDA statement.

More than a year later, the FDA has not introduced any of the detailed, scientific regulatory documents needed to establish a safety issue with the half-dozen widely used dyes. Instead, the FDA maintains an online list of manufacturers that have pledged to phase out the chemicals.

The administration's handling of food dyes reflects its approach to a number of health priorities. Instead of using the time-consuming process of federal rulemaking, which can stretch across multiple administrations, officials working under Republican President Donald Trump have found a quicker approach: Announce sweeping changes first and deal with the regulations later.

"It speaks volumes that the administration has yet to produce a document articulating the scientific basis for the voluntary request," said Susan Mayne, a Yale University public health expert and former director of the FDA's food program. Meanwhile, the FDA's website continues to carry the government's longtime conclusion that "the totality of scientific evidence" does not show a link between synthetic dyes and health problems.

"If FDA has changed its position, then FDA should document why and pursue a ban," Mayne said.

A spokesperson for Kennedy said the administration has used "multiple approaches" to quickly make more progress on food dyes "than at any point in the past."

"FDA engaged industry early in this effort to encourage timely changes while continuing its scientific and regulatory work," said Emily Hilliard of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. "The agency maintains its role in evaluating safety and will continue to use its regulatory authorities, guidance, and review processes as appropriate."

The lack of initiative in drafting new regulations is particularly striking at the FDA. Under federal law, the agency is supposed to refrain from making major policy announcements in news releases, speeches or other informal settings.

But a string of changes from Makary and his deputies have appeared first in articles in subscription-only medical journal articles, television interviews or online posts, including new restrictions on COVID-19 vaccines and other therapies.

Traditionally, those changes would be published first in the Federal Register, giving consumers, experts, and companies a chance to comment and suggest revisions to FDA proposals.

FDA has faced little pushback from industry

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Almost as surprising as the agency's shift away from rulemaking is the fact that the powerful companies FDA regulates have put up little resistance.

The FDA has faced hundreds of lawsuits over the decades — from drugmakers, pharmacies, tobacco companies and others — that accused the agency of failing to follow the legally required steps for new regulations and guidelines.

But drugmakers and other multibillion-dollar companies are sitting on the sidelines, at least for now.

Industry observers point to the administration's unusual willingness to pressure drugmakers, including on drug pricing concessions sought by Trump.

"Does the government have the ability to basically bully companies?" asked Dan Troy, the FDA's former chief counsel. "Yes, and I think we're seeing that."

One of the biggest FDA changes came last May, when Makary and then-vaccine chief Dr. Vinay Prasad published a medical journal article announcing that the FDA would no longer routinely approve COVID-19 shots for healthy adults under age 65 and children without underlying health problems. To win approval for that group, vaccine manufacturers would need to conduct large studies that many experts say may not be feasible in today's post-pandemic environment.

As with other vaccine decisions, Makary and Prasad bypassed the agency's outside experts, who had traditionally been consulted on major decisions involving the shots. Makary says FDA advisory panels are often biased and take too much time and money to convene.

"We had all of this experience looking at the safety of how these vaccines work, and then these two cowboys come and say: 'We're going to make this policy,'" said Dr. Kathryn Edwards, who previously led the FDA's vaccine panel.

Edwards and other experts say the lack of pushback from vaccine manufacturers may reflect the tremendous power the FDA holds over them.

"Ultimately, you need the FDA to license your product," said Edwards, a retired vaccine scientist at Vanderbilt University. "If you're going to try and buck the FDA -- especially in this environment — the likelihood of your product getting a positive review is going to be pretty low."

Earlier this year, the FDA briefly refused to consider a new mRNA flu shot from Moderna. The agency reversed its decision after pushback from the company and the White House.

Recent FDA changes may have little staying power

There may be other reasons why normally litigious companies are not challenging the agency.

Some FDA initiatives have the potential to benefit companies, including a program that awards ultrafast reviews to drugs favored by the Trump administration.

Even seemingly burdensome changes may have little staying power because the agency is not going through the process to enshrine them in federal rules or guidelines. That includes stringent new standards to win approval for CAR-T therapies that were previously approved for various forms of cancer, based on early results.

"Anything that this administration does that they don't embody in law can easily be undone by a future administration," Troy said.

Still, with more than two years remaining under Trump, there are signs at least some companies may be willing to raise objections.

The FDA last year began releasing rejection letters for drugs it declined to approve. Previously, that information was considered confidential and the property of drugmakers.

Last month, an unnamed drugmaker filed a formal petition challenging the practice, noting the FDA had provided "only a two-sentence explanation addressing its purported legal authority" to release the letters.

The petition does not carry the force of a lawsuit, but it invokes the same language as numerous legal challenges to the agency, calling the FDA's action "arbitrary and capricious."

Vatican and State Department stress solid ties after Rubio's fence-mending visit over Trump attacks

By NICOLE WINFIELD and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — The Vatican raised the “need to work tirelessly in favor of peace” in talks Thursday with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who came to Rome on a fence-mending visit after President Donald Trump's criticisms of Pope Leo XIV over the Iran war.

Both the Vatican and the U.S. State Department stressed that Rubio's meetings with Leo and the Vatican's top diplomat underscored strong bilateral ties. Those relations, though, have been strained over Trump's repeated broadsides about Leo's calls for peace and dialogue to end the U.S.-Israeli war.

Rubio, a practicing Catholic, has often been called on to tone down or explain Trump's harsh rhetoric. He had an audience first with Leo, which was complicated at the last minute by Trump's latest criticism of the Chicago-born pope. During a 2½-hour visit, Rubio then met with the Vatican secretary of state, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, who on the eve of his visit had strongly defended Leo and criticized Trump's attacks.

“Attacking him like that or criticizing what he does seems a bit strange to me, to say the least,” Parolin said Wednesday.

After the meetings, the U.S. State Department said that Rubio and Parolin discussed “ongoing humanitarian efforts in the Western Hemisphere and efforts to achieve a durable peace in the Middle East. The discussion reflected the enduring partnership between the United States and the Holy See in advancing religious freedom.”

In a separate statement about the audience with Leo, U.S. State Department spokesperson Tommy Pigott said that the two discussed the situation in the Middle East and the Western Hemisphere. “The meeting underscored the strong relationship between the United States and the Holy See and their shared commitment to promoting peace and human dignity,” he said.

The Vatican, for its part, said that during Rubio's meetings with both Leo and Parolin, “the shared commitment to fostering good bilateral relations between the Holy See and the United States of America was reaffirmed.”

It said the two sides exchanged views on the current events “with particular attention to countries marked by war, political tensions, and difficult humanitarian situations, as well as on the need to work tirelessly in favor of peace.”

Rubio also has meetings Friday with Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni and Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani. Those meetings might not be much easier for Washington's top diplomat, given both have strongly defended Leo against Trump's attacks and have criticized the Iran war as illegal — drawing the president's ire.

A mission to smooth ties

The tensions began when Trump lashed out at Leo on social media last month, saying the pope was soft on crime and terrorism for comments about the administration's immigration policies and deportations as well as the Iran war. Leo then said that God doesn't listen to the prayers of those who wage war.

Later, Trump posted a social media image appearing to liken himself to Jesus Christ, which was deleted after a backlash. He has refused to apologize to Leo and has sought to explain away the post by saying that he thought the image was a representation of him as a doctor.

Rubio said that Trump's recent criticisms of Leo were rooted in his opposition to Iran potentially obtaining a nuclear weapon, which he said could be used against millions of Catholics and other Christians.

Leo has never said Iran should obtain nuclear weapons and that the Catholic Church “for years has spoken out against all nuclear weapons, so there is no doubt there.”

“The mission of the church is to preach the Gospel, to preach peace. If someone wants to criticize me for announcing the Gospel, let him do it with the truth,” Leo said late Tuesday, after Trump again accused him of being “OK” with Iran having a nuclear weapon.

By Thursday, tensions seemed to have eased.

Rubio gave Leo a small crystal football paperweight. He acknowledged Leo's known allegiance to the Chicago White Sox, saying “you're a baseball guy,” but noted that the football had the seal of the State Department on it.

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"What to get someone who has everything?" Rubio joked as he gave Leo the paperweight.

Leo, for his part, gave Rubio a pen apparently made of olive wood — "olive being of course the plant of peace," Leo said — with his coat of arms on it and a picture book of Vatican artworks.

Trump also has criticized Meloni and other NATO allies for a lack of support for the Iran war, recently announcing plans to withdraw thousands of American troops from Germany in the coming months.

Vatican seen as willing to have dialogue

Giampiero Gramaglia, former head of the ANSA news agency and its onetime Washington correspondent, said that he didn't expect much to come out of Rubio's visit for Italian or Vatican relations. He, and other Italian commentators, believe Rubio instead was looking to smooth over relations with the pope for his own political ambitions, as well as the upcoming midterm U.S. congressional elections and 2028 presidential race.

"I doubt Rubio has the role of conciliator for Trump," he told Italy's Foreign Press Association. "I have the perception that Rubio's mission is more about himself" and his political ambitions as a prominent Catholic Republican.

The Rev. Antonio Spadaro, undersecretary in the Vatican's culture office, said that Rubio's mission wasn't to "convert" the pope to Trump's side. Rather, Washington "has come to acknowledge — implicitly but legibly — that (Leo's) voice carries weight in the world that cannot simply be dismissed."

"The situation created by President Trump's remarks required a high-level, direct intervention, conducted in the proper language of diplomacy: a semantic corrective to a narrative of frontal conflict with the church," he wrote in an essay this week.

Cuba is also on the agenda

Rubio said that topics other than the Iran war were on the agenda for the Vatican visit, including Cuba. The Holy See is particularly concerned about the Trump administration's threats of potential military action there following its January ouster of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

Trump has said frequently that Cuba could be "next," and even suggested that once the Iran war is over, naval assets deployed in the Middle East could return to the United States by way of Cuba.

Rubio is the son of Cuban immigrants and a longtime Cuba hawk.

"We gave Cuba \$6 million of humanitarian aid, but obviously they won't let us distribute it," Rubio said. "We distributed it through the church. We'd like to do more."

A note a former cellmate says he found after Epstein's suspected suicide attempt is released

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A note Jeffrey Epstein's former cellmate claimed he found after the millionaire sex offender's first suspected jail suicide attempt was made public Wednesday, years after being sealed and locked in a courthouse vault as part of an unrelated legal dispute.

U.S. District Judge Kenneth Karas in White Plains, New York, ordered the release of the note after The New York Times asked him last week to unseal it and other documents in a case involving the former cellmate, Nicholas Tartaglione. Federal prosecutors did not oppose the request.

Few people had known about the note until Tartaglione, a former police officer serving a life sentence for killing four people, mentioned it last year on writer Jessica Reed Kraus' podcast.

Tartaglione claimed he discovered the note in a book after Epstein was found on the floor of their cell at a Manhattan federal jail on July 23, 2019, with a strip of bedsheet around the financier's neck. That was about three weeks before Epstein was found dead in his cell in what authorities concluded was a suicide.

"They investigated me for month -- found nothing!!!" said the short note, which is hard to decipher in some places. "It is a treat to be able to choose" the "time to say goodbye," the note continues. "Watcha want me to do -- Bust out cryin!!"

"NO FUN," the note concludes, with those words underlined. "NOT WORTH IT!!"

It is unclear who wrote the note Tartaglione claimed to have found. It wasn't mentioned in the lengthy

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government reports examining the circumstances of Epstein's death, nor did it surface in the Justice Department's recent release of files on the late financier.

In a written ruling, Karas said he weighed the privacy interests of third parties, including Epstein, before ruling to release the note. He said existing case law suggests that privacy interests of a deceased person, such as Epstein, "are vastly reduced and disclosure of the deceased's information is unlikely to 'work a concrete harm.'"

According to jail records, Epstein had friction marks and skin irritation on his neck from the suspected July 23 attempt. Jail officers said he was breathing heavily but responsive. One officer reported at the time that Epstein said he believed Tartaglione had tried to kill him, according to a memo included in the Justice Department's files.

Jail officials placed Epstein on suicide watch for 31 hours after the incident before downgrading him to psychiatric observation — his status when he killed himself. According to jail records, he denied trying to harm himself, telling a jail psychologist that suicide was against his Jewish religion and that he was a "coward" who didn't like pain.

A chronology included in the files states that Tartaglione told his lawyer about the note four days after the suspected July 23 attempt. The note was later submitted as evidence in Tartaglione's criminal case and was placed under seal amid a dispute over his legal representation.

Both men were interviewed by jail personnel on July 31, 2019, according to jail records.

Epstein said he had never had any issues with Tartaglione, wasn't threatened by him and didn't "want to make up something that isn't there." Tartaglione said he didn't have any issues being Epstein's cellmate, though he said they kept their conversations to a minimum. On July 23, he said, he thought Epstein was having a heart attack because his eyes were open and he appeared to be snoring.

Epstein and Tartaglione shared a cell for about two weeks, beginning soon after Epstein's July 6, 2019, arrest and ending with the suspected suicide attempt. Both were awaiting trials — Epstein on sex trafficking charges and Tartaglione on charges that in 2016 he killed four men, including a man he tortured and strangled over stolen drug money.

Tartaglione, who had been an officer in the Hudson River Valley village of Briarcliff Manor, was convicted in 2023. He is currently incarcerated at a federal penitentiary in California and has petitioned President Donald Trump for a pardon.

Epstein was without a cellmate when he was found dead at the Metropolitan Correctional Center in Manhattan, on Aug. 10, 2019. Authorities have pointed to a series of missteps by jail personnel — including browsing the internet and sleeping when they should've been checking on Epstein — for allowing him to take his own life.

Officials said they found a handwritten note in Epstein's cell at the time of his death, but that it didn't appear to be a suicide note. Rather, they said, it appeared to be a list of grievances about conditions at the jail, including about food, showers and the presence of bugs.

Today in History: May 8

Allies celebrate Nazi surrender in World War II

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Friday, May 8, the 128th day of 2026. There are 237 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On May 8, 1945, President Harry S. Truman announced in a radio address that Nazi Germany's forces had surrendered, stating that "the flags of freedom fly all over Europe" on V-E (Victory in Europe) Day.

Also on this date:

In 1541, Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto reached the Mississippi River, the first recorded European to do so.

In 1846, U.S. forces led by Gen. Zachary Taylor defeated Mexican forces near modern-day Brownsville, Texas, in the first major battle of the Mexican-American War.

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In 1886, the first serving of Coca-Cola, which contained cocaine, was sold at a pharmacy in Atlanta, Georgia. (The drink became fully cocaine-free in 1929.)

In 1973, members of the American Indian Movement and the Oglala Lakota tribe, who had occupied the South Dakota hamlet of Wounded Knee for 10 weeks, surrendered to federal authorities.

In 1978, David R. Berkowitz pleaded guilty in a Brooklyn courtroom to murder, attempted murder and assault in connection with the "Son of Sam" shootings that claimed six lives and terrified New Yorkers. (Berkowitz was sentenced to six consecutive life prison terms.)

In 1984, the Soviet Union announced it would boycott the upcoming Summer Olympic Games in Los Angeles.

In 1996, South Africa took a major step from apartheid to democracy by adopting a constitution that guaranteed equal rights for Blacks and whites.

In 2020, U.S. unemployment surged to 14.7%, a level last seen when the country was in the throes of the Great Depression; the government reported that more than 20 million Americans had lost their jobs in April amid the economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic.

In 2025, a papal conclave chose Robert Prevost as the first U.S.-born pope, making the 69-year-old cardinal the 267th pontiff of the Catholic Church after the death of Pope Francis on April 21 of that year.

Today's Birthdays: Biologist/TV presenter David Attenborough is 100. Poet Gary Snyder is 96. Singer-songwriter Toni Tennille is 86. Pianist Keith Jarrett is 81. Singer Philip Bailey (Earth, Wind and Fire) is 75. Rock musician Chris Frantz (Talking Heads) is 75. Rock musician Alex Van Halen is 73. Football Hall of Fame coach Bill Cowher is 69. Football Hall of Famer Ronnie Lott is 67. Filmmaker Michel Gondry is 63. Actor Melissa Gilbert is 62. Singer Enrique Iglesias is 51. Musician Joe Bonamassa is 49. Actor Domhnall Gleeson is 43. Actor Nikki Roumel is 26. Race car driver Oliver Bearman is 21.